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COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER—A. Blake

POSTMASTER—J. Arnold

TRANSPORT MANAGER—R. H. Hyde

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE THIRD SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 25 JUNE 1987]

THIRTY-EIGHTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 166**

FIFTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1989-90

House of Commons

Monday 29 January 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BRITISH RAILWAYS BILL *(By Order)*

Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered tomorrow.

Mr. Devlin: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order for me, as a Back-Bench Member of Parliament and member of the Franco-British parliamentary group, to ask whether you would welcome the French Members of Parliament who are gracing us with their presence in the Gallery today?

Mr. Speaker: We never refer to those who are present in the Gallery or elsewhere.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENERGY

Energy Efficiency Office

1. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement about the forward budget of the Energy Efficiency Office.

The Minister of State, Department of Energy (Mr. Peter Morrison): The budget of the Energy Efficiency Office for the current year is £15 million. Its budget for future years will be substantially increased by funding for the proposed new insulation scheme for low-income households.

Mr. Campbell: How can we be confident about that assertion, given that the office's budget has been cut from its 1986-86 level of £24·5 million to £15 million for the current year? Did not the Government give evidence to the United Nations that we can save up to 60 per cent. of our fuel bill over the next 15 years by more effective methods of energy conservation? Should not we be looking for more investment and more commitment from the Government to energy efficiency, which would have substantial effects on the environment?

Mr. Morrison: Perhaps the hon. and learned Gentleman is overestimating the figure at 60 per cent.—it is about 20 per cent. The fact that £40,000 million is still being spent shows that considerable savings can be made. The hon. and learned Gentleman will recall that a significant amount of money was spent on advertising. I hope that he will agree that the fact that energy efficiency is at the top of the list of priorities of many businesses and domestic households shows that that money was well spent and need not be spent to the same extent again.

Mr. Moss: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that spending on energy efficiency has increased dramatically since 1979? Does he accept that an industrywide voluntary code on energy efficiency labelling of appliances would be warmly welcomed by Conservative Members?

Mr. Morrison: I agree with my hon. Friend. Compared with 1979, about £500 million is being saved on energy costs, which by any stretch of the imagination is a significant sum. My hon. Friend may know that the Department is conducting a study on domestic electrical appliances, which we shall publish as soon as possible. I agree with my hon. Friend that there are definite savings to be made.

North Sea (Investment)

2. **Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was capital investment in the North sea in 1989 and 1988.

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. John Wakeham): Capital investment in the United Kingdom continental shelf oil and gas projects was £2·1 billion in 1988, and my estimate for 1989 is £2·5 billion. Recent forecasts by the National Economic Development Office suggest that capital investment could reach £3·7 billion in 1990.

Miss Widdecombe: What effect have the changes in petroleum revenue tax and their relative tonnages had in respect of the southern basin?

Mr. Wakeham: The Government modified the offshore taxation regime to maintain the right environment for investment. I cannot give my hon. Friend exact figures, but it is generally accepted that the North sea has one of the most favourable taxation regimes in the world. All the evidence shows that North sea activity is booming.

Dr. Reid: I thank the Minister for giving us the capital investment figures for the North sea. Can he tell us what proportion of that investment goes to British firms and, in particular, what proportion of North sea oil steel purchases goes to the Clydesdale tube works—the only British Steel tube works? There is a grave suspicion that, despite all the efforts of the work force and management at the Clydesdale works, foreign tube producers are increasingly penetrating the North sea market. Can the right hon. Gentleman say what proportion is accounted for by British tube works?

Mr. Wakeham: The North sea is a great success story for British suppliers, who have a large proportion—about 80 per cent.—of the business, which is obtained by fair competition. There has rightly been an increase in imported steel tubes—mainly because British Steel was not in a position to supply.

Mr. Hannam: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that increasing investment in the North sea is now producing forecasts of self-sufficiency in oil for another 10 years? Is not that a tribute both to the effectiveness of the Government's policy and to the enterprise of the oil industry?

Mr. Wakeham: That is absolutely right. The surplus on trade in 1989 was a little bit down on the figure for 1988, but in the coming years the balance is expected to increase significantly to about £2 billion a year, the high investment in the North sea will ensure a healthy balance well into the 1990s.

Mr. Doran: We welcome the increase in expenditure that the Secretary of State has explained to us, but quite a large proportion of that expenditure goes on safety. The Secretary of State will be aware that hardly a week goes by without another safety problem arising in the North sea. I gather that only this morning the Shell Eider platform required partial evacuation because of a gas leak. When will the Secretary of State consider seriously the safety system in the North sea? Investment in technology is not enough, and there is clearly a problem with the multiplicity of agencies, including the Department, responsible for safety in the North sea.

Mr. Wakeham: I do not accept much of what the hon. Gentleman said. He is right that there was trouble this morning at the platform that he mentioned, but everyone was safely evacuated and there was no damage in that respect. We continually stress the paramount importance that the Government attach to the safety of offshore workers and repeat that safety standards will not be compromised for any reason. We constantly seek ways to improve the safety of all offshore workers and do not hesitate to introduce any new changes that we think necessary.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Did the figures that my right hon. Friend gave include figures for onshore workings? Will he confirm that there are valuable deposits available both onshore and in the English Channel and that the development at Wytch Farm is to be welcomed, in view of the enormous increase in the resources that have been found there?

Mr. Wakeham: The figures that I cited were for offshore workings, but my hon. Friend is right to point to the significance of onshore developments.

Energy Efficiency

3. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what further proposals he has to promote the more efficient use of energy.

6. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what recent initiatives he has announced to encourage greater energy efficiency.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Powers for the introduction of a new scheme of grants towards the cost of insulation measures in low-income households are contained in the Social Security Bill, which received its Second Reading on 22 January.

Mr. McAvoy: I thank the Minister for that answer. I am well aware of the proposals in the Social Security Bill. Does the Minister accept that those puny measures do no more than to take us back to 1988 in terms of energy efficiency promotion? It is all very well giving us fine words, but does the hon. Gentleman accept that it is about time that his Department produced a time scale, even if it is only for the measures in the Social Security Bill?

Mr. Morrison: The hon. Gentleman is being a little less than generous. No doubt he will know that some 700,000 households have benefited from insulation projects over the past few years, and it is intended that many more thousands should benefit from the Social Security Bill.

Sir Trevor Skeet: Will the Minister bear it in mind that although there are 23 million vehicles on the roads, the internal combustion engine is only 27 per cent. efficient, and that our conventional power stations are only about 37 per cent. efficient? Will he have a look at that matter and see whether the efficiency of the stations and the vehicles could be improved?

Mr. Morrison: I learn something new from my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, North (Sir T. Skeet) every day. I was not aware of that fact about the internal

combustion engine. My hon. Friend is a great expert on all matters connected with power stations. We listen carefully to him and shall pay particular attention to his comments on this question.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have also made a mistake. I should have called the hon. Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran).

Mr. Cran: Does my right hon. Friend agree, in the light of the statement last week by the chairman-designate of British Petroleum to the effect that the consumption of oil was likely to increase and therefore the price to follow it, that the message is clear for industrial and other users that we must cut our present £40 billion a year energy bill?

Mr. Morrison: I agree with my hon. Friend. I am delighted that the electricity and gas industries, BP through BP Energy and Shell through Emstar, and contract energy management are directing what will be the private sector to the same end that the Government are aiming for through the Energy Efficiency Office.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Does the Minister accept that while the increase in the insulation grant, for which many of us have been calling for some years, is welcome, the scale of energy expenditure in the United Kingdom is vast —amounting to £40 billion, as the hon. Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) said—and that our ability to meet the targets, which even the Government claim are achievable, seems to be virtually non-existent? What will the Minister's Department do, in conjunction with other agencies outside the House, to ensure that the savings are achieved?

Mr. Morrison: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware of the figures. While over the past 10 years GDP has increased by 20 per cent., energy consumption has held level. That is a good set of figures and in that respect we are the best in the Common Market. Because of the large figure of £40 billion spend, to which the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) and my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) referred, and the 20 per cent. potential savings, we shall continue to promote in every way possible what is in the interests of all householders and every business.

Mr. Benn: Will the Secretary of State tell the House whether his Department was consulted before Mr. Bernard Ingham was offered a university appointment sponsored by British Nuclear Fuels plc? Is it right that a Government press officer should accept that post, particularly in view of Mr. Bernard Ingham's long reputation for opposing journalists who have been critical of the nuclear industry?

Mr. Morrison: With respect to the right hon. Gentleman, I do not think that that is a matter for me. I know nothing about that.

Mr. Steen: Will my right hon. Friend congratulate South Western electricity board on its efficient use of its time and skill over the weekend in restoring electricity to many of the villages and towns throughout the south-west? Is he aware that many elderly people in my constituency, particularly along the coastline of Devon, are still without electric light, heating and telephone communications? Will my right hon. Friend consider bringing in private contractors in the electricity industry to help the electricity board to speed up the rate at which it can reconnect people who still have no electricity supply?

Mr. Morrison: I join my hon. Friend in congratulating the South Western electricity board, as I am sure that all hon. Members would, on its tremendous efforts to restore electricity supplies.

On my hon. Friend's point about whether the electricity board's efforts can be augmented, I am sure that all the possibilities are being considered to ensure that electricity can be restored as soon as possible. Obviously, that will take time in the more distant communities. I am advised that it may take even until Thursday or Friday in some cases, but everything will be done to reconnect supplies as soon as possible.

Mr. Dobson: The Minister has told us about his airy-fairy plans for energy efficiency in the future, but he should consider what is happening now. With regard to the community insulation programme, draughtproofing jobs completed last year fell by 30,000 and loft insulations fell by about two thirds. In London and the south-east alone, the number of operatives involved has fallen from 1,100 to 150. Surely the Minister should be doing something now.

Mr. Morrison: I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would notice—certainly his hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) has noticed—that we are doing something, and that was mentioned on Second Reading of the Social Security Bill——

Mr. Dobson: That is just talk in the House. Do something.

Mr. Morrison: Of course, we are. If the hon. Gentleman were to look carefully at the reasons behind the figures that he gave, he would realise that the number of long-term unemployed has fallen substantially. That means that there are fewer people to do the job under the old programme. That is why we are introducing a new programme that will help tens of thousands of low-income households.

British Gas (Disconnections)

4. **Mr. Andy Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many customers of British Gas were disconnected for debt during the last financial year.

9. **Mr. Lester:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many customers of British Gas were disconnected for debt during the last financial year.

Mr. Peter Morrison: This is a matter for British Gas. However, I am delighted that the number of British Gas customers disconnected for debt is now lower than at any time since records were first kept in 1977.

Mr. Stewart: I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's reply as it shows beyond doubt that privatised British Gas is superior in all respects to that which went before it in the days of nationalisation. That reply also refutes the Labour party's allegation that British Gas puts profits before consumers.

Mr. Morrison: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I know that it is unpleasant for Opposition Members to

admit that the privatised British Gas is a great success. The number of disconnections, calculated on a yearly basis, to September last year was some 23,200, which is about half the number disconnected in the year before British Gas was privatised. The fall in the number of disconnections, let alone the comparative price of gas, demonstrates that British Gas is a success story.

Mr. Charles Wardle: What steps has my right hon. Friend taken to ensure that pensioners are reminded of the new British Gas code of practice and to explain to them that since privatisation, gas standing charges have increased by less than the increase in the cost of living?

Mr. Morrison: My hon. Friend will be aware that British Gas has consulted all 17 million of its customers and that it is making them aware of the services that it offers—that number includes, of course, pensioners. In the past five years standing charges have fallen in real terms by some 33 per cent. and, since privatisation, they have fallen by about 18 per cent. That is a good record.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I welcome the Minister's figures, but are there are any further plans to ensure that the particularly vulnerable, pensioners and the mentally ill, have an opportunity to register that vulnerability or to get someone to register it on their behalf, or will the industry provide a mechanism whereby vulnerable customers can be identified? In that way, they could be protected against accidental disconnection as a result of their inability to deal with reminders or any paperwork. Such things happen. The new arrangements could result in a further reduction in the disconnection rate for good reason.

Mr. Morrison: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman welcomes the figures and I know that in the past two and a half years that I have answered questions on this subject, he has been concerned with it. The figures demonstrate that British Gas is concerned to ensure that such small, select groups are properly catered for and looked after. I regret to say that, every now and then, one or two people may slip through the net, but every effort is being made by British Gas.

Mr. Viggers: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the last thing that British Gas wants to do is to cut off a consumer and, therefore, a customer? Sensitive arrangements are now in hand, however, and Southern Gas ensures that there is a minimum period of 77 days from the date of the first bill to the disconnection. Those arrangements also include counselling, when British Gas seeks to discuss the situation with the customer. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the message that should go from the House is that anyone in difficulty with his gas bill should please get in touch with his gas board?

Mr. Morrison: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The staff at the gas showrooms and offices that I have visited are most sympathetic towards their customers and are at pains to try to point out the procedures that are available to them.

British Coal

5. **Mr. O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairman of British Coal; and what was discussed.

Mr. Wakeham: I meet the chairman of British Coal regularly to discuss all aspects of the coal industry.

Mr. O'Brien: Did the chairman of British Coal raise with the Secretary of State the significant problem of waste disposal in the Selby coalfield? I remind the Secretary of State that when the public inquiry into the development of the Selby coalfield was held in 1976, it was stated that there would be no waste to be disposed of there, but now there are over 1·25 million tonnes of waste per year, all of which has to be disposed of in my constituency. As the possibility that there would be waste disposal problems was denied at that public inquiry, will the Secretary of State prevail upon the chairman of British Coal to institute a public inquiry into those waste disposal problems, because of the significant effects that they have on my constituency, including the filling in of two miles of the river Calder, which cannot be regarded as acceptable in any language? When the Secretary of State next discusses British Coal matters with the chairman, will he raise the question of an inquiry into the waste disposal problems at the Selby coalfield?

Mr. Wakeham: I am not sure whether an inquiry would be helpful, but I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern about a matter involving his constituency. The waste disposal arrangements at Selby are a matter for British Coal, but I shall draw the chairman's attention to the points that the hon. Gentleman has made.

Dr. Michael Clark: When my right hon. Friend met the chairman of British Coal, did he discuss with him the speech that the chairman made at the Institution of Mining Engineers on 24 January, in which he said that colliery managers are now more free to manage and that miners and trade union officials are more open minded, more flexible and more realistic than they were 10 years ago? Is not that good news for the coal industry and does not it show the progress that has been made in the industry during the lifetime of this Government?

Mr. Wakeham: I was present when Sir Robert Haslam made those encouraging remarks at that dinner. Indeed, I made some encouraging remarks myself about the future of British Coal if it takes the opportunities that are available to it to continue the productivity gains that it has already made. Its productivity gains of 75 per cent. on the pre-strike levels are a good example of what can be done, but I am afraid that more will have to be done in the future.

Dr. Kim Howells: When the Secretary of State met the chairman of British Coal, did he discuss with him the recent appointment of Coopers and Lybrand, the accountants, as the body to administer the so-called "fossil fuel levy" which I believe the Minister should more accurately term the "nuclear levy", as it is designed to subsidise the nuclear sector? Will the Secretary of State give the House some details about that levy, such as the amount and the way in which it will be levied upon the customers of the electricity industry?

Mr. Wakeham: I did not discuss that matter with Sir Robert Haslam, but the details of the levy will be announced shortly. I know that the cross-Channel link and the electricity that comes from France are of particular interest to the hon. Gentleman, and I am happy to give him some details about that. As he knows electricity is

traded in both directions and as it is an interruptible supply it will not qualify for the non-fossil fuel obligation, and therefore will not receive the "nuclear levy".

Coal Privatisation

7. **Mr. Gow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what plans he has to introduce a Bill to give to miners the opportunity to become owners of the coal mining industry.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Tony Baldry): Employee participation will be looked at closely in the context of privatisation proposals for coal which we hope to bring forward in the next Parliament.

Mr. Gow: Is my hon. Friend aware that he has the congratulations and best wishes of the House on his first appearance on the Front Bench at Question Time? Is he aware that 85 per cent. of those who work for the water industry bought shares when that industry was privatised? Does he realise that the longer he postpones the privatisation of coal the longer he denies to those who work in the coal industry the opportunity that was rightly given to those who work in the water industry to become worker-shareholders?

Mr. Baldry: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments and I commend to the House the excellent speech that he made on 19 January. It is worthy of re-reading by every hon. Member. In it, he clearly set out the merits of the Government's programme of privatisation and its undoubted benefits for consumers, customers, taxpayers and, most particularly, employees.

Mr. Lofthouse: Does the Minister appreciate that many thousands of men in the mining industry will be unable to buy British Coal shares because under Government policy, once the contracts between British Coal and the electricity supply industry become operative, 30,000 miners will lose their jobs? What interest will they have in privatisation?

Mr. Baldry: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's premise, but I can tell him that the coal industry, perhaps more than any other, depends on the fullhearted co-operation and enthusiasm of its work force to be successful. Unlike the Opposition, we believe that employees should have every opportunity to buy shares in their own industries and we see no reason why the coal industry should be treated any differently.

Mrs. Gorman: Does my hon. Friend agree that when we have returned the coal industry to a shareholding democracy through the market there will be little need for a Department of Energy any more? Will he assure us that we shall not retain that massive Government Department for the nefarious promotion of the efficient use of energy and will he agree with the previous Secretary of State that he looks forward to locking up the doors and throwing the keys into the Thames?

Mr. Baldry: Having only just arrived at the Department, I should not be forecasting its demise.

Coal Imports

8. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he next expects to meet the chairman of British Coal to discuss coal imports; and if he will make a statement.

15. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement about the level of coal imports.

Mr. Wakeham: I meet the chairman of British Coal regularly to discuss all aspects of the coal industry, including coal imports.

Coal imports for the period January to November 1989 were 11·2 million tonnes. We do not produce estimates for future years.

Mr. Skinner: How can the Minister justify that massive increase in imported coal—to more than 11 million tonnes in less than a year—when we already have a balance of payments deficit of more than £20 billion? Is it not economic lunacy to add to that bill? Does he realise that that figure is equivalent to more than 10 pits and more than 11,000 jobs of miners who, having been thrown out of work, would have to be picked up by the taxpayer, who would have to pay their dole and welfare benefits? What is the point of it all?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman may make his point; he has made it a number of times before. He referred to a massive increase in coal imports, but the figure that I quoted was 11,188,000 tonnes, which, as the hon. Gentleman knows, was less than the figure for 1988. The figure was for 11 months, not for 12. We cannot speak of those figures, therefore, as a "massive increase".

Of course, no Government have ever restricted the import of coal and we do not believe that restricting competition is in the best interests of the coal industry and of the long-term security of jobs, which rely on its being a competitive industry.

Mr. Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the world price of coal is somewhat lower than the price charged by the coal industry to the electricity boards? Does he therefore agree that coal imports are in the interests of the consumer, that they will lead to lower electricity bills for pensioners and that they will help to safeguard jobs in manufacturing industry?

Mr. Wakeham: I believe that overwhelmingly the main source of coal supplies for United Kingdom generating industry for a long time to come will be British Coal. But my hon. Friend makes an important point. The House may be interested to know that United Kingdom coal imports in 1988 cost an average £35·67 a tonne, compared with British Coal's price of £41·16 a tonne. So there is not a staggering difference, as some people make out, but there is a significant difference and British Coal must continue to improve its productivity.

Mr. Eadie: As the Secretary of State is aware both that it has been clearly established that if the Associated British Ports (No. 2) Bill passes through the House there will be an increase in coal imports and that the chairman of British Coal has said that he is against that Bill, is it not lunacy to proceed with it, especially when the Government and the nation are being confronted with our horrific balance of payments deficit, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) referred, and more miners will be made redundant as a consequence? Is that a sensible energy policy?

Mr. Wakeham: It is not an amazing surprise that the chairman of British Coal should not be wildly enthusiastic about any Bill that he perceives will increase competition.

Nevertheless, we believe that competition is right. The hon. Gentleman's time scale is wrong. Even if the port is built as intended and all the necessary arrangements are made, it will be a good many years before much extra coal is imported through it. Moreover, British Coal has other competitors in the market, such as oil and gas. There is no need to build additional ports to bring in those facilities. That is why it is essential that British Coal continues making substantial improvements in future. That is its long-term security.

Mr. Paice: Does my right hon. Friend agree that another major competitor is nuclear generation and that if coal prices were increased, which is the Labour party policy, that would change the balance in the figures more closely in favour of nuclear generation which, incidentally, many Conservative Members would welcome?

Mr. Wakeham: I am a strong supporter of nuclear energy. It has a part to play in the diversity of supply which we want. My hon. Friend is right that the significant difference between the nuclear industry and the others is that the nuclear industry must pay the full costs of disposing of its waste, and we know of the difficulties that that produces. That is not necessarily so of fossil fuel generation.

Mr. Barron: What will happen to coal imports this year? It is all very well to quote the figures for 1989, but the Secretary of State is well aware, as I am, that the two new generating companies established by the Bill to privatise the electricity supply industry have so far contracted to import 6 million tonnes of coal to generate electricity——

Mr. Paice: Not enough.

Mr. Barron: The hon. Gentleman shouts, "Not enough" and perhaps he can explain that.

Until now British Coal has lost 5 million tonnes. It signed a contract for 70 million tonnes this year, but it does not know which electricity generators will need the coal. We do not know what our base load generation will be. As a consequence, there is low morale in the British coal industry from top to bottom. The Secretary of State does not know where the coal flows will come from, from pits to generating stations, and we do not know what the industry's future will be until we hear answers to these questions.

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman makes many remarks. If he had listened to the original answer he would have heard that we do not produce estimates for future years. He should understand that coal must be imported if we are to use a great deal of United Kingdom coal which has a high sulphur content. It is necessary for the mix. I should have thought that in a balanced prospectus of the position, he would say something about the fact that this is the first time that British Coal has had a long-term contract to supply the British generating industry. I should have thought that that was a good thing.

Combined Heat and Power

10. **Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what current action the Government are taking to promote the use of combined heat and power.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My Department is actively promoting combined heat and power through the best practice programme. We are also discussing some joint promotional activities with the Combined Heat and Power Association.

Mr. Key: To what extent is the private sector involved in combined heat and power schemes? Can my hon. Friend tell me—if he cannot do so today, perhaps he will write to me—whether the energy technology support unit is involved in work with straw burning, in support of farmers who face a ban on straw burning from 1992?

Mr. Morrison: The private sector is quite substantially involved in combined heat and power schemes. There are 120 such schemes in industry and 300 in buildings. I hope that such involvement will continue to expand. I shall write to my hon. Friend giving him precise details about the energy technology support unit. It is the sort of area in which it is becoming involved, and in which it has an important role to play.

Mr. Allen: Is the Minister aware that one of the most coal-efficient, energy-efficient proposed plants is the Bilsthorpe plant in central Nottinghamshire? Is he further aware that, despite the efforts of the Member of the European Parliament, the county council and its chairman of finance, Mr. Paddy Tipping, to obtain planning permission for the plant, *The Independent on Sunday* yesterday said that Mr. Edwards, the commercial director of British Coal, intends to shelve that plant? Will the Minister reassure the miners in central Nottinghamshire, many of whom travel from my constituency, that that plant will go ahead?

Mr. Morrison: My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart), whose constituency includes the site of the proposed plant, will no doubt bring these matters to my attention, and my right hon. Friend and I shall consider them.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Lenient Sentences

57. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement about the use of his power to appeal against the leniency of sentences.

The Attorney-General (Sir Patrick Mayhew): Since 1 February 1989, when this power took effect, I have applied for leave to refer the sentencing in nine cases to the Court of Appeal. I have withdrawn two cases in the light of further information. Leave has been granted in the remaining seven cases and sentences have been increased in six of the cases. I have referred one case to the Court of Appeal in Northern Ireland; the sentence in that case was also increased.

Mr. Marshall: I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on his use of that power, which has led to more sensible sentences, and, even more important, a more rigorous climate of sentencing in the courts. Is he aware that many believe that stronger sentences are the most effective way to deal with the problem of crime?

The Attorney-General: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. Very occasionally—and I emphasise that it is very occasionally—a sentence is passed by the courts that is manifestly unduly lenient. When that happens, the

effect on public confidence is entirely disproportionately damaging. The new power that Parliament has provided, and which I exercise with great care, is valuable.

Taken-over Cases

58. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Attorney-General how many private prosecutions, in number and percentage figures have been *(a)* taken over by the Director of Public Prosecutions and *(b)* thereafter discontinued, in each of the years 1985 to 1989, inclusive.

The Attorney-General: Between 1987 and 1989, 10 private prosecutions out of at least 28 taken over by the Crown prosecution service were discontinued. It is not possible to obtain information about cases before that date or to express the numbers as a percentage of all private prosecutions, except at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Hughes: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman reflect on whether cases where the Director of Public Prosecutions took over a prosecution and then sustained it might have been cases where the original prosecuting authority should have continued to prosecute—and often cases which were considered for public prosecution in the first place? Can he also assure the House that when matters come directly to the DPP or indirectly through another prosecuting agency, in those cases that involve transport safety or safety at work corporate manslaughter is always one of the options now considered by the DPP?

The Attorney-General: We always consider every possible course consistent with the interests of justice. On the hon. Gentleman's first point, the director usually takes over a case when he considers it to be in the interests of justice to do so. Normally he will do so for that reason only. But where a prosecution has been brought by, for example, a body with prosecuting power, that body will normally pursue the prosecution. Only in a case where, for example, it is necessary to combine prosecutions that the director himself has brought with cases that have been brought by a prosecuting authority will the director take over and continue the prosecution.

Shops Act 1950

59. **Mr. Stanbrook:** To ask the Attorney-General what information he has on the number of prosecutions under the Shops Act 1950 since the ruling by the European Court of Justice last November.

The Attorney-General: As my hon. Friend is aware, prosecutions under the Shops Act 1950 are brought by local authorities, and I have no information on the number of prosecutions brought since last November.

Mr. Stanbrook: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that there is widespread evasion of the Sunday trading law by big multiple retailers and that certain local authorities find it impossible to cope, even though the position has recently been clarified by the European Court? How can we justify preaching the rule of law to the meek when we fail to enforce it against the mighty? When will my right hon. and learned Friend take action against wrongdoers?

The Attorney-General: It is the duty of local authorities, by virtue of section 71 of the Shops Act, to enforce the provisions of that Act in their areas. I have yet to hear from a local authority that finds it impossible to do so. Local authorities have powers of prosecution. In addition, the Local Government Act 1972 empowers them to claim injunctions to prevent flouting of the law, including the Shops Act, in their areas when they think that such action would be in the interests of the inhabitants. I think that, generally, a local authority is in the best position to judge that matter in respect of its own area. Indeed, that has been recognised in the framing of the legislation. Anyone who has a direct and individual concern has the means, in law, to bring an authority to account by seeking judicial review or by seeking my consent to relator action. Therefore I do not think that it would be appropriate for me to take an initiative, either nationally or locally, at this juncture.

Mr. Ray Powell: Having listened to the Attorney-General's explanation, may I ask him to read the Prime Minister's reply last Thursday, as recorded in column 1050 of the *Official Report*, when she referred to upholding a law once it had been passed by Parliament? It is high time that the Shops Act 1950 was given some special attention by the Attorney-General and was implemented fully in respect of those who blatantly refuse to abide by it.

The Attorney-General: The hon. Gentleman has not given due weight to the fact that section 71 of the Shops Act conferred upon local authorities a duty to enforce the law in their areas. I commend to the hon. Gentleman what I said in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook).

Mr. Raison: Does not my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the Shops Act is so perverse that evasion and defiance of it are inevitable? Does he agree that the only rational course is to go back to the legislation that was brought forward, admittedly unsuccessfully, in the last Parliament? Does not he agree that total reform is the only way out of this mess?

The Attorney-General: Tempting though it is to acept that invitation, it would be wrong for me to answer a question relating to a matter that is the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Fraser: Does not the Attorney-General think that there is something wrong when the law is enforced unpredictably between one local authority area and another, sometimes in a quite contrary fashion? Would not it be helpful if the Attorney-General were to publish some guidelines on prosecutions; in order to eliminate unnecessary small cases and to give the same kind of guidance to local authorities as has been given to police authorities in relation to other offences?

The Attorney-General: I do not think that it is necessary for me to give guidance to local authorities when the two statutory provisions that apply to them in this context are clear. For example, it is a matter for them, when they are deciding to seek or not to seek an injunction, to consider whether to do so would be in the interests of the inhabitants of their area. That is the language of the section.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it would give credence to the Church of England's campaign against sensible reform of the Shops Act 1950 if cathedral shops stopped opening on Sundays in defiance of that legislation?

The Attorney-General: I note my hon. Friend's remarks, which will no doubt be heeded in high places.

Privatisation

61. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Attorney-General, pursuant to his answer of 8 January, *Official Report*, column *701*, what consideration he has now given to the position of Coopers and Lybrand regarding those who have been commissioned to write a report for the Government on the privatisation of the Property Services Agency-Crown Suppliers becoming involved in a potential management buy-out.

The Attorney-General: I have inquired into this matter. None of the information available to me indicates any improper or unlawful conduct by any of those involved, as I believe the hon. Member has very fairly indicated upstairs that he now accepts.

Mr. Dalyell: Without going into the case of Mr. Etherington, to whom Mr. Brendan Gough, chairman of Coopers and Lybrand, wrote a long and courteous letter, does not the right hon. and learned Gentleman think that he ought to examine the principle of those who have been asked to produce objective reports that are paid for by the taxpayer—as Coopers and Lybrand are—being involved in management buy-outs? Is not that sailing a little close to the wind?

The Attorney-General: The hon. Gentleman made that point upstairs. Every case that is brought to the attention of the Law Officers is examined on its merits and in the light of the surrounding circumstances.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Nepal (Family Planning)

71. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will arrange to visit Nepal to discuss further funding of family planning through the International Planned Parenthood Federation.

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): I have no current plans to visit Nepal, but I am always very ready to consider viable proposals for family planning and in the related area of mother and child health.

Mr. Steen: Is my right hon. Friend aware that great economic pressure has been put on Nepal as a consequence of the closure of its borders with India? Will she indicate to both Indian and Nepalese Governments the importance that the British Government attach to opening those borders, to allow free trade between those two countries? In view of the pressure on the Nepalese Government, will she consider making a one-off grant direct to the Nepalese family planning association, so that its important work can continue even though the Nepalese Government may reduce its grant to that association to make pressing economic savings?

Mrs. Chalker: We are hopeful that there will be a settlement soon between India and Nepal. We have given support during the trade dispute, and we expect to increase aid in the current year by almost £3 million over the last year. That will help to accommodate new projects and the additional costs of development projects. I am glad to tell the House that last week the Nepalese Government agreed to a primary health care programme that will assist women and families in urgent need of family planning advice. We need to give sumultaneous attention to mother and child health, which we are doing in a number of ways.

Food Production

72. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much is being spent in the current year on food-growing schemes in Ethiopia, the Sudan, Bangladesh and other Third world countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: We accord high priority to food production, both in our bilateral support and in our contributions to multilateral programmes. Current year expenditure from our bilateral programme on food-growing schemes is some £1·8 million in Bangladesh, £2·9 million in Sudan and £0·7 million in Ethiopia.

Mr. Greenway: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the direct food aid being given to Bangladesh, Sudan and Ethiopia. Does she agree that until those countries are assisted in growing their own food, they will be unable to feed their populations in the long term? Will she use her imminent visit to Bangladesh to impress on that country's Government the urgent need for Bangladesh to grow its own food—with help, when it is needed?

Mrs. Chalker: The most important thing of all for those three countries, but particularly for Ethiopia and Sudan, is that they should enjoy peace. Without it, there is no chance of achieving the right policy environment, to ensure that farmers have the inputs that they require to produce food on time. Those farmers should also get the right prices for their produce. We must ensure that farmers are able to grow produce in all those countries, but that cannot be done at a time of civil war. I shall be talking to the Bangladesh Government about a number of food-growing programmes, including fish farming, to help supply the people of that country with the necessary vitamins.

Mrs. Clwyd: Given the Minister's emphasis on peace—with which we would all agree—does she accept that if they followed the lead of the United States in cutting defence spending her Government would be able to be far more generous to the Third world? In the light of the conflicting views that we are told exist in the Cabinet, will she tell us exactly where she stands on the issue? Is she in favour of defence cuts that would enable the Third world to obtain more money from the Government?

Mrs. Chalker: I am certainly in favour of helping the developing world; I am also in favour of multilateral disarmament. I am not, however, in favour of putting the country's defences at risk. No Government could have been more active than ours in seeking to persuade the Ethiopian Government to establish a peace and get food to the starving people who need it so badly.

Sir Bernard Braine: All hon. Members on both sides of the House will endorse my right hon. Friend's statement that it is not much use talking about agricultural development in an area where bitter civil war still rages. Is she aware that recent reports show an increasing flow of

Ethiopian refugees into the southern Sudan, and that the situation is critical? What efforts are being made to ensure that relief food reaches Port Sudan and Khartoum in time to save lives?

Mrs. Chalker: I assure my right hon. Friend that we are doing all that we can to get food to the various areas that need it. Furthermore, now that we have successfully persuaded the Ethiopian Government that they should allow the food through the joint relief programme to those in need, I hope that the rebels will also agree to do so. I am pleased to tell my right hon. Friend that I shall be announcing a further £2·6 million of food aid for Ethiopia, and a further £1 million of emergency relief.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I welcome the news that the Minister is going to Bangladesh next week. While she is there, will she take the opportunity to consider two issues? First, will she look at the apparent imbalance in the geographical distribution of aid? Some districts seem to receive less support than others. Secondly, will she consider the back-up mechanisms that might be available to Bangladesh through aid from Britain, allowing training and educational opportunities to Bangladeshi school-leavers so that they can help the agriculture industry and develop new technologies in the future? It is not just a matter of agriculture; it is also a matter of education.

Mrs. Chalker: The hon. Gentleman is right. Let me point out, however, that our aid to Bangladesh last year, at £56·8 million, was the highest ever. We have been giving awards for training in the United Kingdom, and about 300 new awards are currently being provided each year. We are also trying to help with natural resources, energy, communications, health and education, particularly education and health projects for women. It is a very full programme that I shall be discussing next week.

Nepal

73. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what non-financial assistance has been given to Nepal during the last 12 months.

Mrs. Chalker: We provided over £7 million in non-financial assistance to Nepal in 1988-89, the last full financial year for which figures are available. This covered training awards in Britain, and technical co-operation which included assistance with forestry, agriculture, education, water and sanitation and roads.

Dr. Clark: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, owing to the trade and transit dispute between Nepal and India, there is a considerable shortage of fuel for cooking and heating? Is she aware that, without petroleum products, there is a great danger of an acceleration in the deforestation which is already a cause of concern? What can we do to help to ensure that Nepal receives more petroleum products in the short term?

Mrs. Chalker: We discussed with the Nepalese Government an airlift of fuel, but together we concluded that their stocks of fuel are adequate for the time being. We are watching the position. As for Nepal's environmental needs, we share its concern over the deforestation of the hills. That is why we are providing £2·9 million to accelerate research that will lead to the introduction of new species of trees to assist the area. A further £3·9 million is to be made available for the improvement and management of community forest areas.

Bangladesh

76. **Mr. Kirkhope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Minister for Overseas Development's forthcoming visit to Bangladesh.

79. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, further to the reply given on 8 January, *Official Report*, column *552*, what subjects will be discussed during the Minister for Overseas Development's forthcoming visit to Bangladesh.

Mrs. Chalker: I shall pay my first visit to Bangladesh from 6 to 9 February and will have general discussions on our aid programme with a number of Bangladesh Government Ministers. I expect to discuss the follow-up to the successful flood control conference which Her Majesty's Government hosted in London last month. I look forward to visiting some of our current aid projects.

Mr. Kirkhope: Will my right hon. Friend say a little more about the progress that has been made with flood control projects in Bangladesh, and in particular what role the United Kingdom is playing in those projects?

Mrs. Chalker: The British Government were one of the first to respond to the worst floods in living memory in Bangladesh in August 1988. We provided £8 million in emergency relief and a further £17 million for rehabilitation. We have now embarked on establishing a longer-term flood control strategy. That began at last month's international conference in London. I am glad to say that all the projects have had donor pledges. There will be a full programme of flood prevention measures.

Mr. Paice: Will my right hon. Friend talk to the Bangladeshis about the role of the non-governmental organisations? Will she also consider providing help to Bangladesh for reforestation to create the soil stability that is needed to prevent flood damage and improve food production?

Mrs. Chalker: To my knowledge, we are supporting CARE, Save the Children Fund, Action Aid, Oxfam and especially a local Bangladeshi non-governmental organisation. I shall consider further possible roles for non-governmental organisations through our joint funding scheme. We are already considering the possibility of providing help for reforestation. We have carried out a study in the Sundarbans area on the coast. That is essential if we are to prevent cyclones from causing damage inland.

Hillsborough Stadium Disaster (Taylor Report)

3.32 pm

Mr. Speaker: Statement, Mr. Secretary Waddington.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: What can it be? We have not yet heard the statement.

Mr. Allen: As usual, the statement was not made available until now. That makes the contribution of any hon. Member not as informed as it might otherwise be. With your authority, will you reconsider this practice on future occasions?

Mr. Speaker: Whether copies of statements are made available to Back Benchers—I have a personal view about that—is a matter for the Government, not for me.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Waddington): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the final report of Lord Justice Taylor's inquiry into the tragedy at the Hillsborough stadium on 15 April 1989. Some months have passed since that terrible event, but not long enough, I know, to dull the pain suffered by the bereaved, and I wish to place on record my sympathy for them and for those who sustained injury.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: What can it be? The Home Secretary has only just started to make his statement.

Mr. Heffer: Some of us who are deeply concerned about the matter have not got the report. If we are to ask intelligent questions, the report ought to be in our hands. All I have is the interim report, not the final report. The interim report was issued in August of last year. We have not got the final report. If we are to discuss the matter properly, may we have the final report before we discuss it?

Mr. Speaker: That is a matter which I am afraid I cannot answer. Whether a report is made available at the time a statement is made is a matter for the Home Secretary and for the Government. It is not a matter for me, but I understand that a report—I believe it is an interim report—is available in the Vote Office now. *[Interruption.]* Order. I correct myself. I have not been able to go there. It seems that the full report is available.

Mr. Waddington: That is correct, Mr. Speaker.

I am most grateful to Lord Justice Taylor for the report, which sets out clearly why we have had so many major tragedies at football grounds over the years and why we have had disorder and hooliganism.

As the House familiarises itself with the report, it will become clear that it is addressed as much to the football industry as it is to the Government. Lord Justice Taylor explains how, in his interim report, he concentrated on overcrowding because that was the cause of the Hillsborough disaster, but now he goes on to talk of a game whose image of which has been much tarnished and of a blight over the game due to old grounds, poor facilities, hooliganism, excessive drinking and poor leadership.

Lord Justice Taylor does not spare those who run the industry. He says, indeed, that the provision they make for their customers is often not merely basic but squalid; that squalid conditions can have an impact on safety; and that, in his view, they also lead to lower standards of behaviour.

Lord Justice Taylor says that the Football Association and Football League have not seen it as any part of their duty to offer guidance to clubs on safety matters, and he questions whether the directors of many clubs are genuinely interested in the welfare of their supporters or their good behaviour. Players, too, are criticised, with Lord Justice Taylor pointing out that incitement from the pitch or bad behaviour by players, which is not confined to soccer, has a major influence on the crowd.

I acknowledge that some clubs have made an effort to improve standards, but Lord Justice Taylor's clear conclusion was that the majority had not and that the game has a future only if the directors and the players can change their priorities and give a leadership which is plainly lacking at present.

He agrees with the Government that there must be a move towards all-seater stadiums, and points out that section 11 of the Football Spectators Act 1989 specifically provides the machinery for that. The change will improve safety and behaviour, and we intend to bring it about.

Lord Justice Taylor makes clear that the bulk of the finances for ground improvements will have to be raised by the clubs themselves. He says that there are ways of raising the money if the clubs' management is enterprising and resourceful, and he points to the opportunities presented by sponsorship. He also points to the revenue that flows to the football authorities from television rights and says that the football authorities should ensure that this valuable source of revenue is directed towards improving stadiums. He canvasses the possibility of a levy on transfer fees which he says have reached a level which many regard as grotesque.

There is a whole series of detailed recommendations set out in chapters 3, 4 and 5 on matters relating to spectator safety, such as gates and gangways. Indeed, of the 76 recommendations, 43 in substance appear in the interim report. The Government accept these proposals, some of which can be implemented immediately; some will need further work. For convenience, I have placed in the Vote Office a schedule setting out the Government's response to each.

Hon. Members will recall that section 13 of the Football Spectators Act provides for the Football Licensing Authority to supervise the safety responsibilities of local authorities in respect of designated football grounds. We intend to implement that provision. Lord Justice Taylor welcomes the establishment of the Football Licensing Authority but would like us to go further and extend its remit to cover other than football grounds. This would require primary legislation, and we will have to consider whether it is justified.

Part III of the report contains a number of proposals relating to crowd control and hooliganism. It acknowledges the crucial role of the police in crowd control. Lord Justice Taylor rightly reminds us that, without the work of the police, many sporting events would be chaotic and could not be permitted to take place. About 5,000 police officers are engaged on football duties

each Saturday during the season, largely at the expense of the taxpayer and the ratepayer. He pays tribute to them for their service, and I want to add my thanks to the police for the way that they carry out the difficult, thankless, and often unthanked, tasks that are thrust upon them.

The report recognises the advances made in the last couple of years in the effectiveness of the policing of football, particularly inside grounds, and to the major impact of closed circuit television on the hooligan problem. It also mentions other measures taken by the Government, such as the restriction on the sale of alcohol and the power given to the courts to make orders excluding convicted hooligans from grounds.

Lord Justice Taylor also recognises the great potential value of the police national football intelligence unit in dealing with football-related crime and with hooligans travelling to matches abroad.

As I have said, Lord Justice Taylor takes the view that better facilities and better treatment of fans will bring better behaviour. Beyond that, the report recommends the creation of three new specific offences to apply at designated sports grounds—throwing a missile; chanting obscene or racialist abuse; and going on to the pitch without reasonable excuse. It also asks for consideration to be given to extending the courts' powers to impose attendance centre orders and for the use of electronic tagging in the case of offenders convicted of football-related offences. The specific new offences suggested seem, to some extent, to duplicate offences which are already available in the Public Order Act 1986, but I shall look carefully and quickly at all these suggestions.

I now come to the proposed football membership scheme. Lord Justice Taylor examined the invitation to tender for a scheme which was issued by the consultants employed by the football authorities. He came to the conclusion that he could not support a scheme of that kind, because he could not believe that the technology would work well enough to avoid the danger of congestion and disorder. He was also concerned about the call on police resources. Instead, he proposes the measures to which I have referred.

In the light of this advice, the Government have decided not to proceed with the establishment of a football membership authority, but part I of the Act will remain on the statute book. Work will continue to see how the shortcomings identified by Lord Justice Taylor could be overcome in case we have to return to the matter again, should the problem of hooliganism not be defeated by the alternative strategy proposed in the report.

Let no one imagine that this means that there will be any let-up in the fight against hooliganism. Those who, unlike the Government, have for so long shrugged off their responsibilities will now have to face up to them.

The Government intend to proceed as quickly as possible to the establishment of a football licensing authority and, subject to consultation, section 11 of the Football Spectators Act will be used to direct the Football Licensing Authority to require all-seater stadiums—with standing being reduced by stages and entirely eliminated in first and second division grounds by August 1994 and in all Football League grounds by 1999.

The necessary steps will be taken to ensure improved arrangements for crowd control and better training for police and stewards. There will be urgent consideration of the case for new offences and for new powers to deal with those excluded from grounds by the courts. The clubs will be compelled to get rid of the terraces. But Lord Justice Taylor indicates how much more they can do to create a better atmosphere by improving the now often squalid conditions to which they subject their supporters—squalid conditions that can encourage squalid behaviour.

Those clubs that have not faced up to their responsibility now have a final opportunity to do so; and if they do not now act, the public will not forgive them.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): First, let me take this opportunity to express once again our sympathy for all those whose relatives and friends were killed or injured in the tragedy into which Lord Justice Taylor inquired. Secondly, I offer the Opposition's thanks to Lord Justice Taylor for his thoughtful and thorough report. If sensibly applied, it can provide the basis for much-needed improvements throughout our football grounds.

Will the Home Secretary confirm that the report is explicit in describing the proposed football identity card scheme first as likely to increase—not reduce—hooliganism inside and outside grounds; secondly, as probably not technically feasible; and, thirdly, as more likely to increase the risk of death and injury than to reduce it?

Is the Home Secretary aware that, whatever language he may use today to save the Prime Minister's face and preserve her reputation for inflexibility——

Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hattersley: Whatever language the Home Secretary may use today, the identity card scheme is dead as a result of the report. Once again, the Government have wasted time and money creating the illusion of activity. Most of what the Taylor report recommends could have been implemented by agreement two years ago had the Government chosen to make progress instead of trying to make headlines.

I assure the Home Secretary that no regular football supporter doubts the need to improve the conditions in most of our grounds—to improve safety and to improve facilities. We therefore offer our support for a number of the specific proposals recommended by Lord Justice Taylor, particularly those that would ensure that law-abiding supporters, who make up the vast majority of football spectators, are treated like civilised human beings.

Is the Home Secretary aware that we support the more vigorous use of exclusion orders to prohibit known hooligans from attending football matches? We urge the right hon. and learned Gentleman to extend attendance orders to all those excluded from football grounds, to ensure that they are kept under supervision on match days.

Equally, we support the proposal that it should be a specific offence to throw a missile, and that racist chanting should be made illegal. We welcome the action proposed against ticket touts and we shall examine whatever proposal the Government bring forward to prohibit spectators from running on to pitches. But will the Home Secretary agree that, as the report makes absolutely clear, it is important to distinguish between pitch invasions intended to breach the peace and actions motivated by simple enthusiasm—what Lord Justice Taylor describes as "joie de vivre"?

We certainly support the idea of seats replacing terraces, but is the Home Secretary aware that the

[Mr. Hattersley]

proposal to prohibit standing at football grounds by law has yet to be justified either on grounds of safety or on grounds of convenience? Many law-abiding supporters prefer to stand, and it is perfectly possible for standing accommodation to be provided in a way that endangers neither safety nor law and order. Should not the Government be discussing with the football authorities the provision of a seat for every supporter who wants one and the creation of safe standing areas for those who do not?

I want to ask the Home Secretary a specific question on which we pressed him to no avail during the months of the Committee stage of the Football Spectators Bill. If he persists in making football grounds all-seater stadiums by law, is it his intention to make it illegal for a spectator to stand in a seated area? *[Interruption.]* The incredulity of the Home Secretary and his supporters confirms that they have been to only one football match in the past 40 years —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. These are very serious matters.

Mr. Hattersley: Will the Home Secretary confirm that paragraphs 112 and 114 of the report do not endorse the Prime Minister's view that the £70 million spent recently on transfer fees is available for ground improvements? If the Prime Minister is so opposed to the present level of transfer fees, why does the Chancellor make them tax-deductible when there are no capital allowances for improvements to buildings and physical facilities at football grounds?

I urge the Home Secretary to take a realistic view about the financing of football. In this country, the arts are assisted inadequately and our national game is not helped at all. Will the Home Secretary now convene a meeting between the pools promoters, the football authorities and the Government at which the whole issue of football finance can be discussed? Eight years ago, the Government increased the pools betting duty by 2·5 per cent. Were that decision to be reversed, the pools promoters would pass the entire saving on to football. Will the Government at least consider the possibility of helping the game in that way?

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, will the Home Secretary understand that attempts to solve the problems of football by conflict and confrontation have now clearly failed? We need some co-operation. I hope that the Government will provide it.

Mr. Waddington: The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) correctly stated Lord Justice Taylor's criticism of the scheme which he considered, as outlined in the invitation to tender drawn up by the consultants employed by the football authorities.

The right hon. Gentleman says that the Government wasted time and trouble on the Bill. At least the Government showed themselves prepared to address the problems. Opposition Members have never even recognised the problems. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) had the stupidity to say on Second Reading of the Football Spectators Bill:

"I do not believe there is any such thing as football hooliganism."—[*Official Report*, 27 June 1989; Vol. 155, c. 916.]

That is the kind of arrant nonsense that we have heard from Opposition Members. While we were at least trying to do something about football hooliganism, the Opposition were not prepared to do anything.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook calls for better conditions in grounds, and then immediately says that he does not agree with all-seater stadiums, which are the obvious way of bringing about better conditions in grounds. He also referred to specific offences. I have already said that I will consider urgently whether they should be introduced. However, I should point out that, again unlike Opposition Members, the Government have already been prepared to address themselves to those problems, and we created new offences in the Public Order Act 1986.

Having said at the outset how much he welcomed Lord Justice Taylor's report, the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook then said that he rejected its fundamental conclusions, because the whole strategy that Lord Justice Taylor says should be implemented instead of the introduction of the football membership scheme is the introduction of all-seater stadiums. Once again, the Opposition are not prepared to face up to their responsibilities. They are prepared to do precisely nothing. They will not have the membership scheme, nor will they accept the Taylor report. We wait anxiously to hear what they propose to do about the problem and whether they still agree with their right hon. Friend the Member for Small Heath that there is no problem and there is no football hooliganism.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook then trivialised the entire debate by his stupid remark about people standing in a stand where there are seats. On such an occasion as this he should not demean himself by making such thoroughly irresponsible and stupid remarks.

As to the money available for ground improvements, I remind the right hon. Gentleman that a number of important matters are raised in Lord Justice Taylor's report. He refers to the fact that there is such a thing as the Football Trust, which is funded by the pools companies from the spot-the-ball competition—£9 million per annum goes into the game from that. Since 1958, £120 million has been given to British football in that way. The Taylor report goes on to point out the income that goes into the game from the Football Promoters Association as a result of its use of the fixture list—£14 million a year goes to the Football League from that source.

Lord Justice Taylor suggested that there could be a levy on transfer fees. He also pointed out the considerable sums of money that go to the football authorities and the game as a result of television rights—last year £7 million went to the Football Association and £11 million went to the Football League as a result of those rights.

After the damning report by Lord Justice Taylor, in which he asks the football authorities to address themselves to their responsibilities, it would be irresponsible if right hon. and hon. Opposition Members were to allow a message to go out to the football authorities to the effect that, once again, they can shirk their responsibilities because the Opposition, if the British people were ever to return them to power, would take all the responsibility off their shoulders and force the bill on to the taxpayer.

Mr. Steve Norris (Epping Forest): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that my hon. Friends and I join him in paying tribute to the 5,000 police officers who turn out

every Saturday, in all weathers, inside and outside grounds, to deal with the problem of football crowds? In view of the recommendation to use a great many more better trained stewards, employed directly by the clubs, does my right hon. and learned Friend think that the time is right for the burden of the cost of such policing to be charged direct to the clubs?

Mr. Waddington: Lord Justice Taylor has said that realistic charges should be made for policing within grounds and he hopes that, in that way, the clubs will recognise that they should devote more effort to the training of stewards. Therefore, in time, those clubs would need to use fewer police officers in their grounds. An intolerable burden is placed on the entire community as a result of the way in which the game is conducted now. A tiny proportion of the cost of policing is paid for by the clubs; the vast amount of the cost is paid by the community. I therefore wholly applaud Lord Justice Taylor's recommendation that stewards should be trained so that fewer police officers are required at grounds.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): On behalf of the city of Sheffield and myself, I want to reiterate the condolences already expressed this afternoon from our city about what happened on 15 April 1989. I welcome the abandonment of the identity card scheme, and I welcome the penalties spelled out in the Taylor report.

Does the Home Secretary accept that it is prevention and not punishment that we are seeking and that investing in multi-purpose, continuous-use stadiums offers a sense of responsibility and the possibility of benefit to us all, and that therefore such investment should be seen as a responsibility of Government?

Does the Home Secretary accept that, while football has a substantial and major responsibility for putting its own house in order and therefore for investing in the sport, clubs such as Sheffield Wednesday which have invested in their grounds and not in large transfer fees need the Government to join in partnership with them in trying to ensure that we have grounds fit for the future, similar to those that Lord Justice Taylor saw in Europe and adopted as a model?

Does the Home Secretary accept the necessity of improving access, comfort, facilities, and entertainment in grounds? Does he further accept that it was penning, fencing and inadequate access that led to the tragedy at Hillsborough, not a lack of seating? Therefore, does he not agree that investing for the 21st century is the responsibility not only of the football clubs, but of the Government if we are to find a satisfactory and lasting answer for the future?

Mr. Waddington: Obviously, I agree with the hon. Gentleman that prevention is more important than punishment. However, I cannot accept that providing stadiums is the Government's responsibility. Like any other commercial enterprise, a football club owes a duty of care to those it invites on to its premises. It is absurd to argue that, when such a commercial enterprise fails in its duty to provide for the safety of its customers, the public should step in and pay the bill. When the hotel industry had to meet a prodigious bill to provide the new fire precautions that were demanded by the House, nobody said that the whole bill for that had to be paid by the taxpayer. Everybody said that that was the responsibility of the hotel industry.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): Will my right hon. Friend totally reject the double standards and hypocrisy shown by the Opposition, who have screamed for the Taylor report to be implemented, but are now squealing because they do not agree with some of its recommendations? Does my right hon. Friend agree that implementing the report will mean substantial costs to football in terms of all-seater stadiums, that it will mean an unavoidable drop in attendances and, regrettably—this is the part of the report that I find most distasteful—that it will mean the dropping of the one measure that gave some hope that we might at last combat hooliganism in this country?

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport for having had the guts to start the scheme in the first place and for beginning to take some action after 20 years of argument, so will my right hon. Friends now have the guts to implement the other parts of the Taylor report that they like and to continue with the football membership scheme, which is the only method of identifying hooligans in and around football grounds?

Mr. Waddington: My hon. Friend will remember that, during our debates in the House, we said that hon. Members would be able to come back to this matter after the enactment of the legislation and to reconsider it in the light of the recommendations made by Lord Justice Taylor. We have honoured our undertaking to the House by coming along today and saying that, in the light of Lord Justice Taylor's report, we do not consider it right now to proceed with the appointment of the Football Membership Authority. I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members will agree that that is the correct course to take. However, it certainly does not mean that we are shirking our responsibility. I have made it absolutely plain that part I will stay on the statute book. If the alternative strategy does not work, we shall be in a position to return to the matter.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): Is there no sense of contrition on the Government Benches that they have had to abandon the scheme in the light of the criticisms made by Lord Justice Taylor, which precisely mirror the criticisms made by hon. Members of all parties, including those on the Government Back Benches? Is it not the case that the quality of the report and the substance of its recommendations, some of which will require additional primary legislation, emphasise how unwise the Government were to proceed to push the Football Spectators Act 1989 through the House, using a guillotine, after Hillsborough? Is not the proper course for the Government now to use this comprehensive and trenchant report to open a dialogue with the football authorities to address the problems of crowd hooliganism and crowd safety?

Mr. Waddington: I do not know whether the hon. and learned Gentleman is following the line taken by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley); I am sure that he is too responsible for that, so I assume that he is saying, unlike the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook, that he accepts the Taylor report. If I am right in thinking that he accepts it, and that he accepts that we must move to all-seater stadiums, he will be fair enough to acknowledge that it was the Government who proposed all-seater stadiums last summer.

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for his statement, and I welcome Lord Justice Taylor's report. May I speak for the smaller clubs in football? The Football Spectators Bill gave an opportunity for football and the Government to work together, through the Football Membership Authority, to produce much-needed revenue from the identity cards, to enable us to bring our football stadia up to standard.

Football has now dug an even bigger hole for itself by mobilising its troops against the Government's proposals, which has resulted in smaller clubs facing the cost of putting seats into their stadiums, which they clearly cannot afford. Once again, the big clubs, which have brought about the demise of football, have won their argument. They will be able to afford the proposals, but, as sure as day follows night, smaller clubs will go bankrupt. Football has pressed the destruct button by backing this proposal.

Mr. Waddington: I am not sure whether football has backed it or not, but my hon. Friend is quite right. Many of those who fought so long against the idea of a football membership scheme may not be quite so happy today, because the alternative strategy proposed by Lord Justice Taylor will undoubtedly be extremely costly. Hon. Members will see when they read the report that Lord Justice Taylor expects most of the cost to be met by the clubs.

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): As a member of the Standing Committee that scrutinised the Football Spectators Bill, and having heard the Home Secretary today, I despair at his attitude and response to the Taylor report. Surely he should now be advocating the Government setting up a round table conference—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] The Taylor report should be the basis for such a conference and every interested body should be invited to it. The House should then be given a report. Why will not the Government do that?

Mr. Waddington: I see nothing wrong with discussions. One should always keep talking to interested parties, but the point of the Taylor report is not that we should have a round table conference but that the clubs should address themselves to their responsibilities. That is the message that must go out from the House today. The time has long passed when the clubs can just come along and have a cosy chat. The time has come when they must measure up to their responsibilities and duties.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the police will be grateful for the tributes paid to them by Lord Justice Taylor—tributes which have been generously endorsed by my right hon. and learned Friend this afternoon? Is he further aware that the police will welcome paragraph 250 of the report, which deals with the excessive consumption of alcohol; and the interesting proposals for earlier kick-offs on Saturdays, thus providing less time for supporters to kick their heels in bars around the towns in which football stadiums are situated; and the suggestion that consideration should possibly be given to Sunday matches? What is the Government's response to those observations?

Mr. Waddington: I hope that the football authorities will consider carefully Lord Justice Taylor's suggestions about the possibility for earlier kick-offs and Sunday matches. Lord Justice Taylor was apparently urged by some witnesses to suggest that we were wrong to put on the statute book all our restrictions on the consumption and serving of alcohol in the grounds. I am glad to say that that is yet another instance of Lord Justice Taylor making it absolutely plain that the Government were right in their action. Incidentally, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) was hopelessly wrong on Second Reading when he said that it was not a good idea to restrict the sale of alcohol in the grounds.

Mr. Heffer: Does the Secretary of State accept that I wholly agree that we should have all-seater stadiums? I am delighted that both Liverpool and Everton football clubs have accepted that and believe that it is vital. I know that there is some opposition to it, but when the general public understand that they will get a better deal from all-seater stadiums, they will accept it wholly. Hooliganism was not the issue at Hillsborough.

May I draw attention to paragraphs 14 to 21 of the report, which are the most important? I have my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) to thank for giving me a copy of the report. Nobody else did. The Government did not give me a copy. At Hillsborough, 95 people died, many of whom were my constituents. Those people came from Liverpool and the Merseyside area, but also from elsewhere.

I agree that identity cards should be eliminated, but the issue before us should be safety. That is my concern and the concern of my constituents. I want a clear declaration from the Government that Lord Justice Taylor's proposals will be carried out so that our people will never again face the problems that they faced and so that there will be no more deaths at football matches.

Mr. Waddington: I said that the Government accepted the detailed proposals in the report about safety. For the convenience of the House, there is in the Vote Office a schedule which sets out clearly how we propose to proceed. I was interested to hear the hon. Gentleman's statesmanlike, sensible remarks about all-seater stadiums, and I hope that he will have a word with his right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell).

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is to be a debate on the matter this week, so today questions should be asked of the Home Secretary rather than long comments made which might be made more happily in a speech.

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the clear message of the report is that clubs must now be properly managed for the benefit of spectators and that there must be a clear commitment to safety and proper investment by clubs and their managements in upgrading the facilities, as well as confirming the Government's recommendations for all-seater stadiums?

Mr. Waddington: My hon. Friend is right—there must be an improvement in standards. The best way to show our respect for those who died at Hillsborough is to ensure that there is a real improvement in the conditions that people have to endure when they visit football grounds.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that there is no such thing as the football industry, to which he keeps referring? Some 99 per cent. of clubs do not pay dividends, do not make profits and rely

on share and director subsidies and raffle ticket selling by the fans. Why is it that, when there was a public safety angle to the salmonella in eggs problem, the Government quickly subsidised the farmers, even though they have a profitable industry? Why is it that, when a Bill is introduced to privatise the electricity industry, the Government offer massive subsidies to dispose of the nuclear sector when stations are being decommissioned? Of course, they had to back down because private industry would not touch it.

Why does not the right hon. and learned Gentleman follow the example set by the 1966 Labour Government, when my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) gave a massive grant to football for the 1966 World cup? Such grants would tremendously improve football grounds.

Mr. Waddington: When a commercial enterprise invites people on to its premises, it has a duty to ensure that those premises are safe.

Sir Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that some Conservative Members are delighted that the football identity scheme has been put into cold storage? Does he ever watch on television any of the great sporting events in America? If so, has he noticed that those great events are family affairs to which people take their children? Can we not learn something from the American experience? Is not the answer what the Taylor report recommended—all-seater stadiums?

Mr. Waddington: I agree with everything that my hon. Friend has said. I also agree with what Lord Justice Taylor said about there having been a blight on the game. We must improve conditions, and I hope that when that happens it will have an effect on crowd behaviour.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Although we have not had time to read the report, I have no doubt that, based on the interim report, Lord Justice Taylor and his assessors have done an excellent job. If the report's recommendations are acted upon, that will be the key to the future of football.

Is the Home Secretary aware that there will be an interim period before the report's recommendations are carried out? Is he further aware that, despite disorders in previous years—outside, not inside the ground—all in Sheffield were agreed that the club's previous plan was a good one? If it had been carried out, the disaster would not have happened. I have not read the Taylor report, but I ask for an assurance that, in the interim, the plans of each football ground, which have been drawn up in association with local councils, will be reconsidered and put into effect —something that did not happen at Hillsborough.

Mr. Waddington: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. The report says, among other things, that there must be an absolutely clear agreement between the police and the clubs setting out whose responsibility it is to do what. One of the terrible facts about events at Hillsborough is that some people did not seem to know what was their duty and what was the duty of others.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that Lord Justice Taylor has done a signal service to the Government by taking a dispassionate, cool, analytical look at football, by taking evidence from all sources and by listening with great care to supporters, players and all those who wanted to give evidence? As a result, he has produced a report that I accept in every respect. It ill behoves hon. Members, whether on the Conservative or the Labour Benches, to criticise bits of the report that they do not like.

Does not the report also signal the mistake that was made in putting through legislation without consultation and, without careful consideration in Committee? I served on the Football Spectator Bill Committee. Were not all the recommendations in Lord Justice Taylor's report put forward in Committee and rejected by a majority of Members who perhaps were not entirely cognisant of the issue? Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is important that we never again undertake legislation in that way?

Mr. Waddington: I agree with my hon. Friend's reference to the cogency of the report. It is a document that repays careful study. I cannot agree with his strictures on the Football Spectators Act. That Bill was introduced after effort after effort had been made to persuade those responsible for the game to take action themselves. The Government were forced to take action because those responsible would not do so.

Miss Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): Will the Home Secretary explain to the House the role that he envisages for the Minister for Sport in the implementation of the recommendations of the Taylor report? I put that question in view of the fact that the Minister for Sport led us through the disastrous Committee to which I was a party. What does the Home Secretary intend the Minister for Sport to do?

Mr. Waddington: The scheme of the Act involves the setting up of a Football Licensing Authority, which, in turn, will set in train a mechanism that will lead to all-seater stadiums. The Minister for Sport was responsible for putting on the statute book an Act that allows for the setting up of the Football Licensing Authority.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): My right hon. and learned Friend will recognise that this report is just the latest indictment of the directors of football clubs for their complacency in failing to do more about stadiums and conditions for the fans. Directors should now be pressed to accept their responsibilities. The Government's responsibility must be the protection of the millions of people living close to stadiums, or along the routes thereto, who are not the least bit interested in football. Will my right hon. Friend make sure that the report's recommendations about the use of attendance centres, tagging, and so on, are implemented quickly so that the hooligans may be controlled?

Mr. Waddington: I agree with everything that my hon. Friend has said about the responsibility that now rests on the industry. I want to make it absolutely plain that all that I have said this afternoon is contained in the report. It is Lord Justice Taylor who has addressed these matters and has come to the conclusion that those in the industry must show a new responsibility.

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): Does the Home Secretary accept that the report's recommendations on safety and improved facilities, which are long overdue, will be welcomed widely? Does he accept also that the virtual

[Mr. John Cartwright]

rebuilding of grounds that is involved in the provision of covered all-seater stadiums is quite beyond the resources of most third division and fourth division clubs, many of which have been teetering on the edge of bankruptcy for years? The Government provide substantial public help to commercial undertakings in the arts. Why do they refuse to do likewise in order that our national game may be brought up to a decent standard?

Mr. Waddington: If the hon. Gentleman reads the Taylor report, he will be impressed by what Lord Justice Taylor has to say about the opportunities that are open to clubs to attract new revenues and by the money that is available already. One must put this matter in perspective. If the Football Association and the Football League continue, year by year, to obtain from television rights the same amount of money as they obtain now, they will have drawn, by 1999, no less than £162 million from that source alone. Nobody has suggested to me that the total cost of providing an all-seater, covered stadium would be more than £162 million.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): On behalf of hon. Members some of whose constituents died at Hillsborough, and who are in contact with support groups of parents and friends of those victims, I say to my right hon. and learned Friend that the Taylor report, with all its implications, is very welcome. He no doubt realises that those people will share the view that had there been an all-seater stadium at Hillsborough on that dreadful day the accident that led to this report would never have occurred in any circumstances. Will he, in the light of what has been said about transfers—we are all aware that the £1 million footballer is not uncommon—give serious consideration to primary legislation on a levy, so that money from transfers may be put into ground safety to make sure that spectators enjoy their football peacefully and out of danger?

Mr. Waddington: I agree that no more important safety measure could be introduced than all-seater stadiums. I do not think that anyone would doubt that for one moment. I hear what my hon. Friend says about a levy on transfer fees, but it is for the clubs to address that matter. It is no use saying that the money circulates round and round, because when one considers the sale of a player to a continental club and sees new money coming to a club as a result of such a sale, it is not easy to comprehend why that new revenue does not go to improving the ground.

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): The report demonstrates Lord Justice Taylor's understanding of football and football clubs, but that will come as no surprise to those in the north-east, who know that he spent many of his younger days as a spectator at St. James's park, Newcastle. Will the Home Secretary give a firm commitment that, before the Government come forward with any other proposals that may later have to be withdrawn, they will consult more widely with football clubs throughout the country and—particularly in respect of all-seater stadiums—with football supporters' asociations, who have most to gain and most to lose by any decision made in that regard?

Mr. Waddington: Obviously we shall be interested to hear all that the clubs have to say. However, I ought to point out to the hon. Gentleman that the legislation to bring about all-seater stadiums is already on the statute book.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): My right hon. and learned Friend will remember that, not too many years ago, there were signs of disturbance at race meetings throughout the country, but immediately afterwards the racing authorities put their house in order. They did so imaginatively and without asking for Government resources. As a consequence, a growing number of families attend race meetings throughout the country. Is not that a pointer to what should be done by the football authorities?

Mr. Waddington: My hon. Friend makes a good point.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): I assure the Home Secretary there will be widespread support in Liverpool for Lord Justice Taylor's painstaking and workmanlike report. There will be support also for today's announcement by the Government that they will suspend the compulsory identity card scheme, and that some semblance of civilised surroundings will be provided for all football spectators and not just for the very rich.

I want to press the Home Secretary on one matter. He said that even the passage of time would not dull the pain of the bereaved. The right hon. and learned Gentleman knows that many families are still trying to obtain compensation but have been caught up in a protracted and litigious procedure that has not met their needs. The Home Secretary has received representations from myself and from other right hon. and hon. Members, Liverpool Law Society, and families who have been bereaved. What action is he taking to ensure that more expeditious procedures are introduced?

Mr. Waddington: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, but that matter is not for me to consider. Those who have suffered loss, damage or bereavement as a result of someone else's negligence have a right to recover damages in the courts.

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware that the delay in implementing the football membership scheme will throw a greater burden on the police in attempting to contain hooliganism outside grounds on match days. My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware also that at present football clubs make no financial contribution to police activities outside their grounds. Clubs reimburse probably as little as 20 per cent. of total policing costs, the other 80 per cent. falling as a burden on local ratepayers, now community charge payers. Will my right hon. and learned Friend re-examine that aspect as a matter of priority to see whether it would be appropriate to ensure that football clubs contribute to the cost of policing outside their grounds?

Mr. Waddington: The position is even worse than that outlined by my hon. Friend. The Taylor report says that only about one tenth of the total cost of policing London matches is met by the clubs. The right way forward is that recommended by Taylor, which is to make realistic charges for the cost of policing inside football grounds, which will encourage clubs to train stewards and ultimately to have fewer police officers inside.

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): Does the Home Secretary appreciate that getting rid of the terraces is likely

to affect the price of tickets, and is he resigned to football's becoming a rich man's game? Does he realise that many third and fourth division clubs are in a parlous state? My club, Newport County, ceased to exist because of financial difficulties. What ideas has he for direct assistance from public funds for the installation of grandstands at such grounds?

Mr. Waddington: I can only repeat that those who invite people to a sporting occasion as a commercial venture have a duty to ensure that the ground is safe for those people. It is their responsibility, and no other person's.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): As my right hon. and learned Friend has said, the safety of the fan must be paramount, and it was on safety grounds that some Conservative Members felt unable to support the Football Spectators Bill. In the light of today's statement, does he agree that the real benefit of football membership schemes is that they would bring fans and football management closer in the interests of football, and that we should deal with the hooligan by taking tough and swift action against him? Will he assure the House and the country that, if they are to embrace all Lord Justice Taylor's recommendations, the Government will implement the aspects of law and order that deal with hooliganism, such as electronic tagging and the wider use of detention centres?

Mr. Waddington: I assure my hon. Friend that we intend to take tough action against hooligans, and I shall be examining Lord Justice Taylor's precise proposals as a matter of urgency.

Ms. Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): Does the Home Secretary agree that ground safety is the most important aspect? He has said that football clubs must take the cost on board. Will he examine the various grants given by the Football Ground Improvements Trust to all Football League clubs? Having looked at the figures, he will probably agree with Opposition Members that it is the clubs in the third and fourth divisions and some in the second division such as Port Vale that are most in need of Government financial aid so that their grounds can be made safe for all the supporters who use them.

Mr. Waddington: Clubs in the third and fourth divisions will have a longer period over which to move from standing to all-seater stadiums. It is up to the football authorities to consider whether additional aid should be given to those whose revenue is smaller than that of clubs in the first and second divisions.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must have regard for the subsequent business, in which a considerable number of hon. Members wish to participate. I will take three more questions from each side; then we must move on.

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that Lord Justice Taylor's report is a blueprint for action, not words, and that British football's international reputation will depend on the speed with which clubs implement the improvements that it recommends? How will my right hon. and learned Friend control hooligans who might otherwise go abroad and damage that reputation through their appalling behaviour at grounds on the continent and elsewhere?

Mr. Waddington: I did not mention this afternoon—because I think that it is well known to the House—the fact that we are moving swiftly to implement part II of the Football Spectators Act, a measure that I think even the Opposition applaud.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): Does the Home Secretary accept that the half dozen richest clubs in the country can well afford to install all-seater stadiums? What he seems not to understand is that no million-pound footballers play for West Bromwich Albion; that the television cameras will not be following me, or paying a fee, to watch Stockport County play Aldershot next Saturday; and that, for millions of people in this country, watching their home town football team is not a commercial proposition, as he so blithely puts it, but a long-standing commitment inherited from their parents.

How many football games has the Home Secretary been to see this year, and how many has the Prime Minister ever seen? Before the right hon. and learned Gentleman talks nonsense about clubs funding their own all-seater stadiums, will he tell the House how much money the Government take out of football through their pools betting levy?

Mr. Waddington: I do not doubt for one moment that those who go to football grounds do not think that they are going off on a business venture. However, that does not alter the fact that those who run the grounds are operating business ventures. It is for those who operate business ventures to ensure that they operate them properly and safely.

I think that I ought to invite the hon. Gentleman to look at what Lord Justice Taylor says about the pool betting tax. He makes a number of points, and says that the comparison that is often made with racing is not apt. He points out that there is far more scope for money to be taken out of the pools industry, but that that money could come out of the industry in a variety of ways—either more money from spot-the-ball competitions, or through a voluntary levy, or through an increase in the amount that is paid by the football promoters for the fixture list.

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): My right hon. and learned Friend's firm statement will be greatly welcomed in Shrewsbury. The people of Shrewsbury have bitter memories of the effects of a visit by Middlesbrough fans which turned the town upside down.

Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the general public is concerned not just about safety at football grounds but also about safety outside football grounds? Will he remind those who call for more public funds that substantial sums of public money have to be made available to fund the 5,000 police officers who are needed to protect the non-football-watching public from the effects of hooliganism?

Mr. Waddington: It is quite disgraceful that a game should be run in such a way as to make it necessary for 5,000 police officers to be used every Saturday afternoon to keep the crowds in order.

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): All of us want people to be safe and improvements to grounds to be made, but the Home Secretary neither knows nor understands football. I hope that he will follow the example of the Minister for Sport and accept my invitation to Hartlepool United's next home match, when he might

[Mr. Roland Boyes]

gain a greater understanding of the problems that fourth division clubs have to face. Does he not accept that, without both direct and indirect Government aid, a large number of third and fourth division football clubs will not be around in 1999 to build all-seater stadiums?

Mr. Waddington: I am most grateful for the hon. Gentleman's invitation to visit Hartlepool United. I shall consider it carefully and will have a word with him after questions on the statement. I am afraid that I have forgotten the hon. Gentleman's question; I was so overcome by his invitation.

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North): My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware that in recent years, particularly since the Bradford fire, a number of additional safety burdens have been placed on clubs. He may also be aware that one of the problems has been the conflicting requirements of the various safety authorities—the local authorities, the fire brigade and the police. Sometimes they have asked for different things. Can my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the Football Licensing Authority will exercise some supervisory mechanism so that no longer will too many people ask the clubs to perform different safety functions which they just cannot perform? Will the Football Licensing Authority remove that problem, particularly for the smaller clubs, as it has cost them dear?

Mr. Waddington: Lord Justice Taylor certainly confirmed our earlier view that there simply must be a licensing authority to supervise the way in which local authorities exercise their certification procedures. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to stress how necessary it is to have such a body.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry that I have been unable to call all hon. Members who wished to participate. I shall certainly bear their claims in mind when we discuss this matter again.

Mr. Denis Howell (Birmingham, Small Heath): I suppose that it is a great compliment to be grossly misquoted twice by the Home Secretary during questions on one statement. I remind him that, when I said that there is no such thing as football hooliganism, I meant that there is violence and hooliganism in society, of which football hooliganism is one part. The Government committed themselves at the general election to eradicating it, but it is worse now than when they came to office in 1979.

What on earth will the Government do about the World cup this year? Part I of the Act has gone, the Football Membership Authority has gone, the computers have gone and the possibility of feeding names into computers has gone. Unless the Government tell us what action they propose to take, in June this year all the people whom Lord Justice Taylor and the rest of us have spent years discussing will be free to cause havoc in Europe. It is no good the Minister for Sport telling us that it is a matter for the Football Association. I want the Government to take the action that was proposed in part II. [HON. MEMBERS: "They will."] I know, but they will not have any names to feed into the computer. As a result of the chaos that the Government have brought about, what will happen in June is a matter of the greatest concern.

The Home Secretary should understand that some of us believe that all-seater stadiums are desirable and inevitable and wish to have them as soon as we can. However, although we asked the Minister four times in Committee, we still do not know whether 10,000 people at one match I described in Committee, who were allocated seats at Manchester City but refused to be seated, would be committing a criminal offence. Will the Home Secretary explain how we shall deal with that phenomenon?

Finally, does not the Home Secretary understand that, because of the free-market economy to which his Government are committed, transfer fees in Britain are determined by those paid in Europe? It is inconceivable that we could have a levy or a regulation on those fees because, as I understand it, it would be unlawful under European legislation. The Home Secretary's comments on that would be helpful.

Mr. Waddington: The point that Lord Justice Taylor made about transfer fees was that such large expenditure on transfer fees seemed rather grotesque and obscene when so much blatantly needed to be done to improve the premises into which people were invited.

I apologise to the right hon. Gentleman for my earlier strictures, but they were meant in good part to provoke him to respond. I must tell him that I was quoting exactly from his speech on Second Reading, I am afraid that his denials will not stand him in good stead, because his precise words were:

> "I do not believe there is any such thing as football hooliganism"—[*Official Report*, 27 June 1989; Vol. 155, c. 916.]

I am afraid that those words will endure, and I shall not be able to resist the temptation to throw them back at him from time to time.

I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that part II of the Football Spectators Act 1989 will be in operation before June, and that before then there will be negotiations with the Italian Government which will enable a list of corresponding offences to be drawn up, so that convictions for any of those offences in Italy can result in exclusion orders in Britain.

I am surprised that the right hon. Gentleman has persisted with that ridiculous point. If he had studied the matter for one moment, he would realise that it is intended that the safety certificates will be so operated that eventually the terraces will go and the clubs will not be able to invite people to stand on the terraces. Quite clearly, when people go into a seater stand, it will be up to them to decide whether they stand or sit, but I believe that most of them will have the sense to sit.

Question Time

4.44 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. One of the casualties of the practice of taking points of order arising out of questions is the opportunity for Ministers, with the total understanding and good will of the House, correcting themselves on points of fact. It is a bit difficult to raise a point of order one and a quarter hours later. It is within your recollection, Mr. Speaker, that my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) very properly asked the Energy Minister about his former press secretary, the Prime Minister's——

Mr. Speaker: Order. He may have done, but what has it to do with me as a matter of order in the House?

Mr. Dalyell: It has to do precisely with the practice of Ministers correcting themselves on points of fact. I shall not go into the substance of the issue. I simply draw your attention to the fact that, when the Minister of State said that he knew nothing of the matter, very overtly and within the sight of us all, the Secretary of State passed him what was clearly a ministerial note on it. That was understandable, because it would have been quite incredible had Energy Ministers not known about the actions of BNFL in sponsoring a highly paid civil servant.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is clearly a continuation of Question Time. I cannot take points of order arising out of answers. It is not a matter for me; it is a matter for the Government or for the right hon. Gentleman to have it put right.

Mr. Dalyell: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: What can be further to it? It is not a point of order.

Mr. Dalyell: It is a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: No. It is not a point of order which I can answer.

Orders of the Day

Employment Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the reasoned amendment in the name of the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) and his right hon. and hon. Friends.

There is considerable pressure to speak in the debate. Therefore, I ask hon. Members to keep their speeches brief, please. I am not proposing to limit them to 10 minutes today, but if brief speeches are made, most of the hon. Members who wish to participate in the debate will be called.

4.46 pm

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Howard): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

On 29 June 1983, in my maiden speech to this House, I referred to the closed shop as a critical area—critical for the personal freedom of individual workers as well as for the link between strikes and unemployment—in which the legislative support given to the individual was inadequate. On 8 November 1983, in the debate on the Second Reading of the Trade Union Bill, in which the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) also took part, I criticised the Government for not taking action to remedy that injustice.

Although progress has been made, since 1983 it remains the case that what has so far been achieved is not enough. It is therefore a particular privilege for me today to move the Second Reading of this Bill, for it will provide the legislative support which for so long has been missing. It takes the final step in making the closed shop unlawful.

It is a hammer blow for the freedom of the individual to choose for himself whether or not he wishes to become a member of a trade union. It puts paid once and for all to the tyranny of forced association, which has for so long been cherished by the trade unions and the Labour party.

The Bill can be seen as the culmination of the long process of reform which began 10 years ago, when the first Employment Bill of this Government was introduced by my right hon. and noble predecessor, Lord Prior.

Sir David Mitchell (Hampshire, North-West): Before my right hon. and learned Friend leaves that point, members of the Select Plymouth Brethren are concerned that they believe it to be a requirement to employ trade unionists as a result of proposals in the Bill. They find that against their consciences. Will my right hon. and learned Friend consider their point?

Mr. Howard: I shall carefully consider that, but I fear that I cannot hold out too much hope that it will be possible to accommodate the concern expressed by my hon. Friend.

I pay tribute to all my predecessors who have contributed to that process of reform, in particular my immediate predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), who was responsible for the Employment Act 1988 and for the preparation of the Bill.

[Mr. Howard]

There can be no doubt about the transformation which has taken place in British industrial relations in the past decade. In the 1970s, this country lost, on average, 13 million days a year through strikes. Over the past three years, the average has been less than a third of that figure. By 1988, strikes were at their lowest level for over 50 years.

At the same time, we have seen the end of many of the most notorious restrictive practices which held back the growth of our economy in the 1960s and 1970s. As a result, we have seen improvements in productivity which were wholly out of reach in the previous decade. Manufacturing productivity has grown at over 5 per cent. a year since 1980 —far better than the average of 1·5 per cent. in the 1970s. In the 1960s and 1970s, this country was bottom of the international league for productivity growth; since 1980, our record of productivity growth has been better than that of any other major industrialised country.

Nothing did more to drive investment away from this country in the 1970s than our record of strikes, poor productivity and overmanning. Nothing has done more over the past 10 years to convince investors that Britain is the place in which to invest than the reduction in the level of strikes, the improvement in our productivity and the elimination of inefficient and archaic working practices.

That transformation has occurred because this Government, unlike our predecessors, have had the courage to put sensible step-by-step reforms on to the statute book. Without our legislation, flying pickets would still be able to spread disruption far and wide as they did in the winter of discontent, millions more employees would still be working in closed shops imposed on them without the least regard to their wishes, and strikes would still be called by the intimidation of the massed meeting in the company car park, without any recourse to the secret ballot.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): My right hon. and learned Friend mentioned the closed shop, but may I return to the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell)? For obvious reasons of principle, the Brethren welcome the ending of the closed shop, but they argue that, if they are compelled to employ someone who belongs to a union, he will be compelled to serve two masters, which is unacceptable to them on religious grounds. Will my right hon. and learned Friend reconsider the reply that he gave my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West on this important issue?

Mr. Howard: I understand the reasoning behind the concern that has been expressed, but I fear that I can do no more, even for my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), than repeat the assurance that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell). I shall consider the matter, but I am doubtful about the extent to which I shall be able to accommodate it.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Minister, who is a lawyer and a member of a closed shop, explain why what has happened in the past two years has been contrary to what he has just been saying? Trade unionists in bus, rail and tube services, the Post Office, the National Health Service and the BBC and the National and Local Government Officers Association have scored victories against employers to ensure that they do not fall behind inflation. If everything is so rosy, why do the Government continue to hammer ambulance workers, who are trying to get a decent wage increase? If everything is so good, why is everything so bad?

Mr. Howard: It is typical of the hon. Gentleman that he relishes and takes such joy and glee from the number of working days lost. I gave the House the figures for 1988 —the last year for which figures are available. There has been a dramatic reduction in the number of working days lost through industrial action, and I would have hoped that the House would rejoice in that, because it should appreciate that that has led to tremendous improvements in Britain's economic performance and the economic prospects of our fellow countrymen.

Mr. Sydney Bidwell (Ealing, Southall): The Minister appears to want to avoid the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) about the legal profession, which has been raised time and again when the closed shop has been discussed. As a lifelong trade unionist and ex-employee of the Trades Union Congress, I can tell the Minister that we like voluntary trade unionism, but we do not like working with free riders.

Mr. Howard: If the hon. Gentleman likes voluntary trade unionism, I hope that he will not oppose the first three clauses of the Bill on the closed shop.

It is quite wrong to suggest that the law is a closed shop. Lawyers, like doctors, must obtain qualifications before they practise. Does the hon. Member for Bolsover believe that doctors should not be required to obtain qualifications before practising? That is an entirely absurd analogy, as everyone knows, not least the hon. Member for Sedgefield.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): The Minister feels strongly about geting rid of the closed shop and spoke of "tyranny" in that context. Why did not the Department or his predecessor bother to collect complaints on the closed shop? I wrote a letter to his predecessor, to which I received a reply on 16 November, about the number of employees who have complained about the closed shop since 1979. The reply says:

> "Complaints are received each year on the operation of the closed shop but it is not possible to establish accurately how many were made by employees."

Labour Members would be more convinced of the Minister's arguments if he produced some hard evidence of complaints of tyranny.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Lady evidently fails to understand that there is a clear point of principle at the heart of the Bill—that people should not be refused employment because they are or are not members of a trade union. The breach of that clear principle has led to much injustice in the past.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): The Minister says that the principle has led to "much injustice". What injustice? Will he explain that, because I have negotiated closed shop agreements for 100 per cent. trade union membership? We always made provision for people who held religious convictions and did not want to join a trade union, but that is now being outlawed by the Bill.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman has a short memory. I shall remind him in a moment of some of the injustices that have occurred.

The principle underlying all our legislation has been the need to achieve a fair balance of rights between the rights of trade unions and those with legitimate disputes with their employers and the rights of employers and employees who simply want to get on with their business and protect their jobs. We believe that the role of law in industrial relations is to limit abuses of industrial power and to guarantee the democratic rights of trade union members. That is the principle that underlies the Bill.

The first three clauses of the Bill are on the closed shop and discrimination in recruitment on grounds of union membership. Conservative Members have always taken the view that no one should be refused a job because they do not hold a union card. That restriction on employment has no more place in any civilised society than a refusal to give a job to somone on the grounds of their colour or sex.

It is just as indefensible to deny someone a job because he is a union member as it is to deny someone else a job because he is not. The Bill is therefore entirely even-handed in its approach. It makes it unlawful to refuse a job either on grounds of union membership or on grounds of union non-membership. As a result, once the Bill becomes law, discrimination on grounds of trade union membership or non-membership will be every bit as unlawful as sexual or racial discrimination.

Mr. Stan Crowther (Rotherham): Will the Secretary of State explain what right he is giving to trade unionists if he is not giving them the right to have their union negotiate on their behalf? The right hon. and learned Gentleman says that the Bill is even-handed, but it is not even-handed if an employer may merely say to the worker, "Of course you can join a trade union but don't expect me to talk to your trade union about your wages and conditions." What does that achieve?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman must know that negotiating rights are an entirely different matter. We are discussing the important principle that no one should be denied a job because he or she is a member of a trade union. That principle will achieve legislative support for the very first time in this Bill.

The Bill defines refusal of employment widely. It makes it unlawful for an employment agency to refuse any of its services to someone because he or she is or is not a trade union member and it specifically prohibits advertisements that discriminate on grounds of union membership. In each case, the remedy is a right of complaint to an industrial tribunal. If a trade union or any other person or organisation brings pressure on an employer to discriminate against people who are or are not union members, the Bill allows them to be joined to the proceedings and made liable for penalties.

Anyone who doubts the violation of civil liberties involved in the closed shop—here I come to the question asked by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer)—need only recall the thousands of people who were forced into union membership against their will by the last Labour Government's illiberal and indefensible legislation of 1974 and 1976. Hundreds of people were thrown out of their jobs without a penny of compensation as a direct result of that legislation, simply because they refused to join a trade union. As a direct result of that legislation, the United Kingdom was held to be in breach of the European convention on human rights. Yet the hon. Member for Walton asks "What injustices?"

The Bill will put an end once and for all to that legacy of shame. It will strip the closed shop of its last vestiges of legal protection, and not a moment too soon.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): Will the Secretary of State confirm that, although the Bill will make the pre-entry closed shop unenforceable in law, a 100 per cent. voluntary trade union shop will still be legal and acceptable?

Mr. Howard: The terms of the Bill are entirely clear. The Bill will make unlawful the refusal of employment to anyone on the grounds that he is or is not a member of a trade union. There cannot be any doubt about that.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): The Secretary of State has made much play of injustices and the closed shop. What does he have to say to members of the National Union of Journalists in Aberdeen, who went on a legitimate strike and were sacked within 48 hours? Management now say that they will not, in any circumstances, discuss with the union the possibility of negotiations to end the dispute. Management say, "It's over. Too bad that they've got the sack, but that's the end of it." Those trade union members have been sacked simply because they tried to exercise their trade union rights. How does the Secretary of State propose to deal with cases such as that?

Mr. Howard: It has always been lawful—it was lawful under the legislation that the last Labour Government passed—for those who go on strike to be dismissed. That is a step that the employers are entitled to take under the law; that is the answer to the hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Howard: No, I must get on.

Mr. Leighton: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The Secretary of State is not giving way.

Mr. Leighton: I am sure that on reflection——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr. Howard.

Mr. Howard: We are now given to understand——

Mr. Leighton: But the Secretary of State misled the House——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State has made it clear to me and to the House that he is not giving way at this stage. I suggest that the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) should wait a while and put his own points. I am sure that I would want to call him.

Mr. Leighton: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Secretary of State misled the House, no doubt unintentionally, and I am certain that, on reflection, he would prefer to deal with the point now.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Mr. Howard.

Mr. Howard: I am told that I have already given way eight times. I am anxious to deal with the provisions in the

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Bill. The hon. Gentleman will no doubt have an opportunity to make a speech in due course, and I must get on.

We are now given to understand that the Opposition share our determination to get rid of the closed shop. I hope that the hon. Member for Sedgefield will make his party's position clear this afternoon. I hope that he will say, without equivocation, that the Labour party will not oppose the first three clauses of the Bill and, if he does, no one will welcome that volte face more warmly than me.

But I confess that I have a lingering doubt. For one thing, the Labour party's policy review is entirely silent on this subject. It has a long section entitled "The Right to Join a Union" but not a word about the right not to join a union. Perhaps that was an oversight. Perhaps the subject was regarded as so unimportant that it did not justify any pronouncement or even thought on the part of the Opposition.

It was not, it appears, until my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison) intervened to put a question to the hon. Member for Sedgefield during our debate on the social charter on 29 November that the hon. Gentleman addressed the matter at all. My right hon. Friend asked about the implications of the social charter for the closed shop. As the Library brief delicately put it, the hon. Gentleman

"found it difficult to respond to Mr. Raison's intervention".

The most cursory perusal of *Hansard* for 29 November will reveal just how much of an understatement that was.

To do the hon. Member for Sedgefield credit, he lost no time in seeking to put the matter right. Within three weeks, he was writing a letter to his constituents in which he clearly set out his support for ending the closed shop. The House might think that such speed of response would evoke warm enthusiasm on the Labour Benches. Judging by Labour Members' faces this afternoon, that enthusiasm is somewhat lacking.

One of the hon. Gentleman's shadow Cabinet colleagues told *Tribune* that the change of policy was "a gross mistake" and "totally unnecessary", and at the last count, 35 Labour Members had signed early-day motion 282, which says:

"the closed shop . . . is of fundamental importance to the workers and the trades union movement".

The hon. Member for Walton sagely nods in his place. No doubt we shall hear from him later this afternoon. Various trade union leaders have been putting their own gloss on the situation.

I have high hopes of the hon. Member for Sedgefield. I hope that he will make it clear that the Opposition now believe that strikes to enforce a closed shop should remain unlawful. I hope that he will make it clear that he believes that union-labour-only clauses in contracts should remain unlawful. I hope that he will join me in urging all trade union leaders to take immediate steps to dismantle the closed shops that still cover more than 2 million jobs in this country. There is no need to wait until the Bill is passed. They can take action now, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will encourage them to do so when he speaks in a few moments.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): Will my right hon. and learned Friend take documents published by the Labour party with a pinch of salt? The Labour party's 1987 manifesto contained a commitment to publish a code of practice on trade union ballots on industrial action, but only last week the Labour party voted against such a document. The specific words of the manifesto that I have in mind are that the Labour party would act

"by laying down general principles for inclusion in union rule books. These will be based on a right of union members to have secret ballots on decisions relating to strikes".

That is the sort of double-talk that we get from the hon. Member for Sedgefield.

Mr. Howard: I can certainly understand my hon. Friend's scepticism, which is no doubt well-founded, given the Labour party's record. But we must have high hopes of the hon. Member for Sedgefield, and we await with great interest his remarks this afternoon.

I want now to consider secondary action. The Government's position on that issue is quite simple. We do not believe that any business should be threatened with disruption unless there is a direct dispute between the employer and his employees. That is the position that the Bill will achieve. The scope for organising lawful secondary action was limited by the Employment Act 1980.

Mr. Robert Hughes: The Secretary of State seems to have finished his consideration of the first three clauses which deal with employment agencies and using information about trade union membership. Will the Secretary of State deal with organisations such as the Economic League which, for example, employs paid spies to attend anti-apartheid meetings to discover the names of trade union members who are also members of the Anti-Apartheid Movement in order to give false and misleading information to employers? While the Bill states that evidence from agencies like the Economic League might be used at an industrial tribunal, it does not make those organisations illegal. What protection will the Secretary of State provide for people, because those organisations currently get round the law by claiming that they do not keep information on computers?

Mr. Howard: There is no reason to make the activities of those organisations illegal. I understand that the particular organisation to which the hon. Gentleman has referred is prepared to make information on individuals available to people who ask for it. This Bill provides the protection that no one can be denied employment simply for being a trade union member. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would have welcomed that, instead of introducing red herrings into the discussion which are irrelevant to the point at issue.

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): With due respect to the Secretary of State, that is not a red herring. Clause 1(4) specifically makes unlawful the practice of unions holding lists from which they will accept people for jobs. Why should there not be a commensurate provision to allow people to take a case to a tribunal if they are refused a job for being on an employer's blacklist?

Mr. Howard: Those lists have nothing to do with the critical question of membership or non-membership of a trade union. For the purposes of the Bill, the critical criterion is simply whether someone is or is not a trade union member. The hon. Member for Sedgefield is guilty of introducing the same red herring into the discussion as his hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes).

Mr. Blair: With great respect, we deserve an answer to this point. Employers' lists may specifically refer to people because of their union membership. In so far as they do that, will the Secretary of State introduce the same provision as that in clause 1(4) in respect of trade union membership?

Mr. Howard: There is no need to introduce any such provision. The provisions in the Bill will be entirely clear. It will be illegal to refuse someone a job because of trade union membership; that is more than sufficient protection. The premise on which the hon. Gentleman bases his intervention is entirely wrong. The lists to which he refers are not simply lists of union members and his parallel is therefore mistaken.

Mr. Blair: I am afraid that the Secretary of State is wrong. Clause 1(4) deals specifically with lists relating to union members. In other words, clause 1(4) could have been subsumed under the general requirement in clause 1(1), but it is not. Clause 1(4) deliberately refers to the practice of using a list to discriminate against people who are not union members. In so far as employers use lists relating to union membership, why will the Secretary of State not have a similar provision banning them?

Mr. Howard: There is no evidence that lists of trade union members are used in the way in which the hon. Gentleman described. However, there is evidence that lists of trade union members—which are dealt with in the Bill—are kept and used for purposes that would circumvent the provisions in the Bill. There is a clear difference.

Mr. Blair: Let me make the Secretary of State this offer——

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am sorry to interrupt, but some of us want to contribute if we are called. The hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) is guaranteed to be called. Can you protect Back Benchers?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is totally beyond my control if the Secretary of State wants to give way as he is doing at the moment.

Mr. Blair: It is fair of the Secretary of State to give way, and I am grateful to him. Some of us believe that this point is very important.

Let me make the Secretary of State this offer: if we can produce evidence that such lists, in so far as they relate to union membership, exist and are used, will he undertake to legislate about them?

Mr. Howard: I will undertake to consider any evidence that is adduced. No doubt the evidence will be considered when those matters are dealt with at length and in detail in Committee. That is the appropriate way in which to deal with the matter.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Since the whole issue blew up a couple of years ago, I went out of my way to talk to people who work for the Economic League. It would be advisable if Opposition Members did the same. I understand that the league has approached Labour Members in an attempt to explain what the leagues does, but Labour Members have refused to speak to league representatives. I understand that, far from compiling lists of trade unionists, the league simply compiles lists of individuals who set out quite deliberately to create industrial mayhem and disruption in industry.

Mr. Howard *rose*——

Mr. Heffer: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Howard: No, I must press on.

Mr. Leighton: Give way.

Mr. Howard: No. My understanding of the matter is entirely in accordance with that of my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick). However, we can explore those matters at greater length and in detail in Committee.

Mr. Leighton: Will the Secretary of State give way now?

Mr. Howard: No, we must press on.

Mr. Heffer *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I call the Secretary of State.

Mr. Heffer: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am sorry to have to raise this point, but I appear on the Economic League's list twice. Will the Secretary of State tell us how people like me who, over the years, have consistently—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that that is not a point of order for the Chair. A point of order must be something that the Chair can answer, and I cannot respond to the hon. Gentleman's question.

Mr. Howard: I hope that the Committee of Selection will recognise the keen interest of the hon. Member for Walton in these matters, and will invite him to join the Committee. I am sure that his presence would give great pleasure to the hon. Member for Sedgefield.

The scope for organising lawful secondary action was limited by the Employment Act 1980 to employees of customers and suppliers of the employer in dispute. However, in March 1988, we saw just how damaging the threat of secondary action could be to British job prospects.

In that year, Ford had planned to invest £40 million in a new electronics plant at Dundee, creating 1,000 jobs. It had negotiated a single-union deal with the Amalgamated Engineering Union. Other unions, led by the Transport and General Workers Union, complained that the AEU had thereby broken TUC rules. Mr. Ron Todd announced that all components from the new plant would be blacked. So Ford took its plant, its £40 million and its 1,000 jobs to Spain.

Mr. Bill Jordan of the AEU rightly described that form of threatened secondary action as the "unacceptable face of trade unionism".

The Opposition, under their TGWU-sponsored leader uttered not a peep of protest at that wanton loss of jobs. We do not want that to happen again. That is one reason why clause 4 of this Bill will ensure that no union ever again has the protection of the law if it behaves as the TGWU did over Dundee.

The Bill also breaks new ground on tackling the problem of unofficial action. Let us be clear: unofficial action is and always has been a major problem in this

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country. More than 20 years after the Donovan commission drew attention to the damaging effects of unofficial action, it is still the case that some 75 per cent. of strikes are unofficial. That means that they take place without being authorised in accordance with union rules and without being put to the test of a secret ballot. Last year, some 40 per cent. of days lost through strikes were the result of that sort of unofficial, unauthorised, unballoted industrial action.

Furthermore, unofficial action is almost a unique blight on this country's industrial relations. It is far less common in other countries and virtually unknown in some. And What is perhaps particularly relevant to this debate is that it is unlawful in countries such as Germany, the United States, Canada, Sweden and Denmark.

Unofficial action damages jobs and businesses and, as we saw last saw summer, it can disrupt the life of the community as a whole; and it can do all this without the trade union having to accept any legal liability for the consequences of the action or even having to give financial support to its members who are on strike. Unofficial action is a classic case of power without responsibility.

The Bill corrects two anomalies in the law as it affects unofficial action, and in doing so it will, I believe, significantly discourage such action in the future.

In the first place, the Bill corrects the manifest anomaly that unofficial action—even when organised by shop stewards or other union officials—does not have to be put to the test of a secret ballot. The effect of clause 6 is to put strikes organised by shop stewards and other lay officials on the same basis as strikes organised by national or regional officials.

If a union fails to ensure that strikes organised by its shop stewards have majority support in a secret ballot, that union will forfeit immunity, just as it does now in the case of a strike organised by its national officials. If there has been no ballot and the union wishes to keep its immunity, it will need to repudiate the strike as soon as possible. That repudiation will have to be unequivocal.

That means that it will no longer be possible for unions to ignore unofficial strikes or to use them in order to damage employers without risk to union funds—where they are not confident that the majority of their members would support official action in a secret ballot.

The second anomaly that the Bill will correct concerns the law on unfair dismissal. The law in this country has always provided that anyone who goes on strike in breach of his contract of employment is liable to immediate dismissal. That has been the position under successive Governments, but the law on unfair dismissal means that, if he is to avoid any risk of complaints to a tribunal, an employer must dismiss either every single one of his employees who goes on strike or none at all.

In the context of unofficial action, that is an unreasonable constraint on an employer whose business may be seriously damaged by a strike organised by a handful of troublemakers. We believe that in that situation the employer should have the option of dismissing strikers selectively without the risk of being taken to an industrial tribunal

Mr. Leighton: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Howard: I am sorry, but I must press on. I have already given way generously.

Mr. Leighton *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State has made it clear that he will not give way.

Mr. Leighton: The previous Secretary of State was much more courteous.

Mr. Howard: That option will be available only in cases of unofficial action which is not organised by a shop steward or which has been repudiated by the trade union concerned. Furthermore, the Bill provides that, in cases of repudiation, the option of selective dismissal will not be available until a full working day after the union has taken the decision to repudiate. That will give the union time to let its members know that the strike does not have its support, and time for the strikers to return to work.

The provisions of the Bill will ensure that unions take full responsibility for strikes organised by their officials —whether shop stewards or general secretaries. This Bill will ensure that in future strikes organised by shop stewards are either explicitly repudiated or put to the test of a secret ballot. The Bill will ensure that, in future, everyone will know exactly where he stands in cases of unofficial action—not just the union, but its officials, its members and the employers whose business is the target of action. That is why I believe that the Bill marks a positive step forward in enabling employers and unions alike to tackle the problem of unofficial action which has bedevilled industrial relations in this country for far too long.

Mr. Blair: Can the right hon. and learned Gentleman tell us of another country within the European Community that allows the dismissal of people on unofficial strike without recourse to a court or tribunal?

Mr. Howard: There are many EC countries in which all unofficial strikes are unlawful. One must look at the entire legal context before one starts to make comparisons on that point. We can look at this matter in Committee, but the hon. Gentleman is misleading the House if he is suggesting that, for comparative purposes in such matters, one can get a true appreciation of the subject by taking one element in isolation, as he has sought to do, without looking at the general position in its proper context.

Mr. Blair *rose*——

Mr. Howard: No, I shall not give way. The hon. Gentleman will have his opportunity to speak. We shall be able to debate the matter in Committee.

The Bill's provisions on unofficial action are fully in accord with the principles underlying all our previous legislation: that those who exercise industrial power should take responsibility for their actions, that they should be accountable to the people they seek to represent and that they should operate within clear legal limits which protect the community, businesses and jobs.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield and his hon. Friends may oppose the provisions today. I am confident that, in due course, they will become as recognised and as widely accepted a part of our legal framework as have the other reforms which we have introduced in this sphere in the past 10 years.

The remaining clauses amend previous legislation so as to extend the rights and protection the law provides in a number of areas. Clause 5 provides people who work under contracts for services with the same right to a ballot before being called on to take industrial action as people who work under contracts of employment already enjoy. Clause 8 extends the range of issues on which the trade union commissioner can give assistance to trade union members. Clause 10 provides a simplified procedure by which codes of practice may, with the approval of Parliament, be amended in the light of changes in the law.

Clause 11 provides for the merger of the redundancy and national insurance funds. That will simplify their administration, but will not affect the entitlement of employees to redundancy and other payments in any way. Finally, clause 12 will enable all secondary school pupils to benefit from work experience from the beginning of the summer term in their penultimate year at school.

This is the fifth major Bill to reform industrial relations that the Government have introduced since 1979. Each Bill has been opposed by the Labour party, but each Bill in turn has now become an accepted part of the framework of industrial relations in this country. On issue after issue, we have been told by Opposition Members that our legislation was unnecessary and would not work. On issue after issue, they have been proved wrong.

The role of the law in restraining the abuse of trade union powers and in guaranteeing the democratic rights of trade union members is no longer in question. That is why opinion poll after opinion poll has shown that our legislation has the support not only of the overwhelming majority of the British people, but of most trade unionists.

What is the policy of the Labour party on the reforms? The hon. Member for Sedgfield is a master of honeyed words, but the latest authoritative statement on these matters comes not from him, but from his colleague in the shadow Cabinet, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott).

The latest issue of *The Labour and Trade Union Review* contains a long interview with that hon. Gentleman, whose smiling countenance appears on its cover. He deals in some detail with his party's attitudes to these matters. He refers clearly, explicitly and unequivocally to his party's policy towards what he calls the "Tory trade union legislation". He says:

"We shall repeal all of it. There's no little bits you can keep of it. There is nothing you can keep of this legislation".

In fairness to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East, he seems to have the clear support of the leader of his party. In 1986, the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) said that Labour would "undo the lot". In 1988 he said:

"our commitment is to clear it".

Where does the hon. Member for Sedgefield stand? Over the weekend, I wrote to him asking him to repudiate his hon. Friend's statement. I hope that he will do so without equivocation tonight. If he does not, we shall know that the hon. Gentleman's words count for nothing and that he is quite without authority to speak for his party. We shall know that it is to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hulll, East that we should look and listen if we want an authoritative statement of the Labour party's position.

Our position is clear. We believe that the law should protect the trade union member and the worker who does not wish to become a trade union member. We believe that the law should protect the community at large from the abuse of trade union power. We believe the law should protect the creation of jobs. That is the philosophy behind all our trade union legislation since 1979. Those are the principles of this Bill.

The Bill will extend personal liberty against the closed shop, and safeguard jobs and prosperity against the threat of unofficial industrial action. It will protect our freedoms, improve our industrial relations and strengthen our economy. I commend it to the House.

5.30 pm

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): The Secretary of State dealt with the provisions relating to secondary action and to unofficial action with less than total enthusiasm. When he spoke on the radio the other morning, he told us that the Bill would be the Government's last piece of trade union legislation, but he left many of us wondering whether he regretted that it is his first. Having heard his speech, we can now see that he himself acknowledges that there are major problems in the legislation, especially with regard to secondary action and unofficial action. I shall deal with those later, because I must first tell the right hon. and learned Gentleman that the Bill is important as much for its priorities as for what it proposes.

We have the highest inflation rate of all comparable countries and the largest balance of payments deficit of all EEC countries, including Greece and Portugal—a deficit which encompasses new industries as well as old, developing nations as well as developed and capital goods as well as consumer items. Our interest rates are higher in real terms than anywhere else in the western world, and added £3 billion to industry's bill in the past year alone. However, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows, above all we have a deficit in training skills. We have a forecast shortfall of 80,000 to 100,000 computer analysts alone by the mid-1990s. In any one year, half Britain's work force receives no training. We have gaps in our mathematics, languages and basic educational qualifications. Indeed, the head of the Government's Training Agency said recently:

"at every level we are towards the bottom of the training league table."

The previous Secretary of State for Employment said in a statement that I can only assume was not meant to be complimentary that the results of his own "Training in Britain" survey were "mind-boggling". However, instead of the Government introducing a Bill to improve skills, upgrade training, encourage investment and stimulate innovation, we have a Bill that is a leftover from the old agenda of the industrial cold war. The Secretary of State has introduced a Bill designed not to solve the real problems of Britain today, but to deal with the lingering malaise of the present Conservative party——

Mr. Howard: Was it simply an oversight that the hon. Gentleman omitted to mention not only our productivity and growth in earnings, but the item in our economic performance that is most relevant to the Bill, which is jobs and employment? The hon. Gentleman omitted to mention the 2·75 million jobs that have been created in this country since 1983 and the fact that our unemployment rate is now a fraction of the average in the European Community.

Mr. Blair: The right hon. and learned Gentleman's claim of 2·75 million jobs has been comprehensively

[Mr. Blair]

debunked, not least by the report published recently by my hon. Friend the Member for Fife Central, (Mr. McLeish), which has not been challenged in any particular by the Conservative party. I advise the right hon. and learned Gentleman that unemployment is now higher than in 1979, when the Government came to power, and nothing can hide the fact that on inflation, interest rates, our balance of payments, and skills, after 11 years of Tory government this country is now woefully behind.

Despite all that, the first measure that the new Secretary of State for Employment brings before the House as the stamp of the new regime is a Bill about which he has once again given us the ritual incantations about the evils of the trade unions and of the over-regulated workplace. We were told that those were the problems when the Government introduced the Employment Act 1980, we were told that those were the problems when the Government introduced the Trade Union Act 1984, and we were told the same in 1988 and in 1989. Now, 11 years on, when our trade unions are more constrained than unions practically anywhere else in Europe and when our Labour market is less regulated, we are still told that the trade unions and the overregulated workplace are to blame.

It is the right hon. and learned Gentleman's misfortune that the one thing that has changed beyond all doubt is that now, when industry is fighting interest rates of the present level, when our education system is teaching fewer 16 to 19-year-olds than are taught in any comparable country, when out adult work force is now serviced by fewer training managers than there are now anywhere else in the EEC bar Greece and Portugal, the people of this country know that it is not protection in the workplace that is causing Britain's problems, but the fecklessness of Cabinet Ministers in their workplace. They have no one left to blame but themselves.

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Mr. Tim Eggar): When is the hon. Gentleman going to get to the Bill?

Mr. Blair: In a moment.

The Secretary of State set a context for the Bill; let me now set it in its true context. The Confederation of British Industry and the Trades Union Congress are now probably closer on training than they have been for years, and they are united in their anxiety to deal with 1992 and the greatest competitive challenge facing this country. The right hon. and learned Gentleman must be the only Employment Minister in Europe who wants to spend three or four months in Committee, pitting one side of industry against the other.

If all that we could say about the Bill was that it is merely irrelevant, that would be one thing, but it is not merely irrelevant. Much of it is wrong, damaging and unfair.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): Will the hon. Gentleman note that in my constituency we have an excellent training establishment which is run by a trade union—the Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union? Sadly, the rest of the trade unions decided that the EETPU had no right to belong to the TUC, which is a pretty good indication of the sort of trade unions that support the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends.

Mr. Blair: There it is. That is the authentic voice of division. The hon. Gentleman does not realise that the CBI and the TUC are today close about the need for training. I am delighted that the training provisions in Esher are so good. The training provisions everywhere in Britain should be good, yet they are not, as is conceded by the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

In the Bill the Government have laid down two tests about union membership. First, they have said that the provisions should deal with union membership in the same way as race and sex are dealt with. Secondly, they have said that the provisions should be in line with the European social charter. Clause 1 contains two major flaws and I should be grateful if these points could be dealt with when the Minister responds. Conclusive presumptions are made in clause 1 in that if people are refused a job when the job requirement is that the person either is or is not a member of a trade union, that person is conclusively presumed to have been refused a job for that reason.

Clause 1(4) also contains the conclusive presumption of refusal of a job for non-membership of a trade union. As far as I am aware, that system is unknown in both race and sex discrimination laws. The conclusive presumption means that the employer cannot even prove that there may have been another reason for dismissal. That is extremely rare in general law, and it would mean that a person could be refused a job for a wholly extraneous reason that had nothing to do with union membership or non-membership, yet he would still be entitled to claim.

I should be obliged if the Minister who winds up would deal with the following example. Five or 10 people apply for the same job. They could be refused on the basis that they were not on an approved list of union members; all five or 10 could then claim unfair dismissal and be conclusively presumed to have been dismissed for that reason in respect of the same job. That cannot possibly be right, and it is way out of line with race and sex discrimination law.

The Bill is not even-handed in its approach. Most people would consider it entirely reasonable that if the Bill describes a requirement for union membership—that is, for a list of people who are union members—the same provisions should apply to lists of people who may be discriminated against on the ground that they are union members. So there is no reason why the Bill cannot include a provision in very much the same terms as clause 1(4) to put an end to the obnoxious practices of the Economic League and the employers who go in for them. If the Secretary of State is serious about dealing with that problem, he should deal with it now. I take it from what the right hon. and learned Gentleman said earlier that, if we can provide evidence in Committee, he will legislate to this effect.

Mr. Robert Hughes: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way, especially as I have to go and make an urgent phone call while he is dealing with this point.

Will my hon. Friend join me—and, I am sure, the Secretary of State—in welcoming the dismantling of organisations in eastern Europe such as the Securitate? Will he also agree that the employment of private spies by public businesses in this country is obnoxious and to be condemned?

Mr. Blair: My hon. Friend is right. One of the problems about the Economic League and the lists that it uses is that

they are not published, so people do not know that they are on them. Some of the most horrendous cases that have come to public notice have been in respect of people who had no idea that they were blacklisted.

As the Secretary of State knows, it is unlawful to dismiss someone for his union activities. There are higher penalties at law for dismissing a person for that reason, but it is not wrongful to refuse to employ people on the basis of their union activism. Surely that is a gap that this Bill could fill, and it would be in line with an even-handed approach.

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): The hon. Gentleman has mentioned clause 1 only in the context of two technical amendments which he hopes can be resolved in Committee. Will he confirm here whether the Labour party officially accepts the ending of the closed shop and will not in any circumstances seek to reintroduce it?

Mr. Blair: I have already made that absolutely clear.

The two flaws that I have identified are not technical: they are substantial. If they are dealt with, fine. Let us see whether the Minister will deal with them—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] I have just answered it. Perhaps Conservative members should wake up. I have made it clear that if the flaws in clause 1 are dealt with we shall be happy to support it—if not, we shall not. We shall support it if it is even-handed and drafted in accordance with the European social charter. I cannot put it more plainly than that.

I pay tribute to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for having passed so quickly through secondary action and unofficial action this afternoon, and I shall expose why he did so. I imagine that he has done his homework rather carefully now that the Bill is having its Second Reading. The Government proposition is that there is no set of circumstances, no matter how close the connection between one group of employees and another, in which the first group in dispute with its employer is entitled to ask the second for assistance. In other words, apart from a limited right in respect of picketing, all forms of sympathy and secondary action are to be forbidden.

That proposition is so manifestly unfair and unreasonable, for the reasons that I shall adduce, that it is fatal to any pretence of even-handedness in the Bill. What is being forbidden is not merely the right to take sympathy action but the right to ask for it. If one group of employees want another to take sympathy action they can only ask: they will still have to go through balloting procedures, and, given the limitations on the generosity of human nature, there are bound not to be many occasions when such a request for action is granted.

To prevent such requests in all circumstances would be unreasonable and unpractical, but hon. Members need not take my word for that. Lord Prior went through all this in detail—the Secretary of State called him in support of his claims this afternoon—on Second Reading of the Employment Act 1980. Lord Prior was quite definite about this:

"the only other position that we could take would be to say that there will be no immunity for anything other than primary action"—

In other words, the Government's position today.

"I do not believe, for reasons that I shall give, that that is either a practical or reasonable position to take. We have sanctified that there should be no limitations on how far immunities stretch. We are seeking to reach a position which we believe is fair and which recognises the traditional rights of the trade union movement."

The ability to take limited secondary action has thus been in existence for 10 years. Where is the clamour to alter it? Where is the desire on the part of employers, let alone the trade unions? Lord Prior went on to utter words that Conservative Members should take to heart:

"the clause . . . seeks a position which is balanced and reasonable. Simple repeal of the immunities for all secondary action would not be right. I know that some of my hon. Friends would query that remark. I shall . . . tell them why.

I have said on a number of occasions from this Box that, just as it is not reasonable to leave trade unions with more power than they need in the vain hope that they will not misuse it, so also it would be unreasonable to weaken them to the extent that they are unable to defend their members against attack. Finding the right course calls for enormous effort and thought on the part of us all. It will not be achieved by reburnishing our prejudices."—[*Official Report*, 17 April 1980; Vol. 982, c. 1490-98.]

That is what this Bill is all about.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman has made great play of Lord Prior's words in 1980. Will he now deal with the departure of Ford from Dundee in 1988?

Mr. Blair: That was a dispute between two unions; it had nothing to do with secondary action, and it is ludicrous to suggest that it provided a basis for legislation against all secondary action. Even if it was a case of secondary action, the Government are today proposing a ban on all sympathy action. That would mean that National Health Service managers could contract out ambulance work to a private company and the NHS workers could not even ask the private ambulance men to black the work that they were doing in their place.

Will the Secretary of State confirm the following example of how extreme the proposition is? It applies to circumstances in which a company shuts down its premises and moves the work to another company. That other company could even be an associated employer of the first company. Even if the second company were part of the same group of companies and the workers were part of the same trade union, doing the same work that the other employees were doing, the first group of workers would not be able to ask for support from the second for the primary dispute.

I hope that hon. Members realise how extreme the proposition is. An employer will be free to use his contractual or commercial power in any way he chooses directly to undermine and circumvent the industrial action of the union, but the union will have no commensurate right whatever to ask for sympathy action to make the action effective. I cannot understand how that can be explained as reasonable.

Mr. Heffer: Has my hon. Friend considered what happened at Tate and Lyle in Liverpool? The factory had been open for well over 100 years and had had only one dispute in that time, so it did not face any great problems, yet it was moved out of Liverpool and the building left derelict. Families had worked there for generations, but were put out of work. Does my hon. Friend recall what happened at Birds Eye in Kirkby? The factory was moved to another area. Again, there was no industrial dispute. There was no consultation and the anouncement was made on a Friday afternoon. Does my hon. Friend agree that Tory Members should consider that?

Mr. Blair: Surely hon. Members can see what a grotesque position the proposition leaves us in.

Mr. Eggar: Before the hon. Gentleman replies to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), will he reflect on the way in which he announced the Labour party's policy change on the closed shop? Did he consult his hon. Friends and the trade unions? Was the announcement in accord with the provisions of the social charter that he is enunciating now?

Mr. Blair: We have heard it all now—when a Minister has to get up and ask me about the internal democracy of the Labour party. It is touching to see Tory Members displaying their grief. There they were, all togged up in their party best for the party, and they put their hands into the magician's hat, hoping to pull out a nice white, bright, sprightly, lively rabbit, but instead find that they are holding a very dead fox. That is the truth of the matter. When, during a discussion on secondary action, a Minister has to refer to an earlier debate, we know how weak the Government feel their position to be.

Mr. Ian Taylor: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the hon. Gentleman to refer to his hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) as an old dead fox?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I cannot adjudicate on an issue such as that.

Mr. Blair: We can see in the Bill issues which Tory Members do not like to discuss. Unfortunately for them, we will discuss them and discuss them now.

The Minister has consistently said that he wishes Europe and Britain to be the same on issues such as these. Indeed, the Green Paper makes great play of what happens in Europe. In France, sympathy action is allowed where there is a common professional interest between employees. In Italy, it is allowed where there is a "sufficient community of interest" either of an economic or contractual nature. In Denmark, a reasonable and fair interest between employees justifies sympathy action in law. In West Germany, where the position is complicated because of collective bargaining agreements that cover virtually an entire industry, making the position more restrictive, sympathy action is allowed where the employer who is the subject of sympathy action is doing the work of those on strike or where companies are associated. In Belgium, sympathy action is permitted where there is a direct interest, and in Holland it is allowed unless it is manifestly unreasonable. In Spain, it is allowed where those taking part share the same professional interests.

In other words, in every other part of the EEC jurisdiction, sympathy action is permitted, although it is limited; the labour court is given wide discretion when applying those limits; and workers have broader rights in other respects, not least the right not to be dismissed when lawfully on strike. In some jurisdictions, such as West Germany and Italy, an employer, not a union, can be injuncted for his importation of strike-breaking labour into an official dispute. The rights that are given abroad are infinitely more wide-ranging than those in the Bill.

The Government are also moving way out of line with the rest of Europe on unofficial action.

Mr. Howard: Before the hon. Gentleman moves on, I hope that he will tell the House in precisely what circumstances his party would make secondary action lawful.

Mr. Blair: I well understand the Secretary of State's desire to talk about anything other than what is in his Bill——

Mr. Howard: Answer.

Mr. Blair: If the right hon. and learned Gentleman wants to know the Labour party's policy, he can read the policy review. The only question that is relevant to the Bill is whether we support the Government in abolishing secondary action. We do not.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the policy review talks about making secondary action lawful where there is a "genuine interest" and that my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) in a letter to *The Independent* published on 19 October asked for a definition of the phrase "genuine interest". We are still waiting for an answer. Why does the hon. Gentleman not take this opportunity to enlighten us?

Mr. Blair: I shall tell the hon. and learned Gentleman exactly why. We shall debate that in our good time, and we are debating his Bill today.

It is against the background of our being right out of line with Europe on secondary action that we come to unofficial action. In the Bill the Government do not merely seek to extend the procedures whereby a union is liable for unofficial action: they extend them to circumstances involving any official or committee of the union. An official, no matter how low, and any member of any part of any committee of the union will be able to make the union liable to action. That is wholly out of line with the normal agency rules for companies. The union will have to go through arduous procedures to dissociate itself. If a company claims that a union is conniving in unofficial action, it can already take the union to court.

Worst and most obnoxious of all are the provisions that would allow the selective dismissal of people on site without any recourse to an industrial tribunal. The Secretary of State ducked that in his speech and I shall explain why. In particular, I shall explain why he would not give way to me a second time. [HON. MEMBERS: "Only a second time?"] I shall let him intervene in my speech in a moment.

January's *Employment Gazette* carried an official statement about what the Government wish to do in this area. It stated:

> "The Government believes that employers in this country should have the same freedom to respond to unofficial action as employers in West Germany."

That is the test that the Government proposed for this legislation.

At present employees who are on strike officially or unofficially can be dismissed if they are all dismissed and there is no jurisdiction on the part of the tribunal. In other words, an individual has no right to strike, even where a union has immunity, and there is no right of appeal, even to an industrial tribunal. If an employer dismisses employees selectively, as the Government propose he should be able to do, contrary to a common misunderstanding, the dismissal is not automatically unfair; it is simply that the employee then has a right to

have the fairness of that dismissal tested before an industrial tribunal. In other words, he cannot be dismissed without the right of appeal. This is for perfectly understandable reasons: there may be circumstances in which such unofficial action is justified.

The proposal in the Bill is to allow selective dismissal, but without any right for employees to go to an industrial tribunal, no matter what the circumstances of the dismissal are. We are told that the justification for that is the position in West Germany and elsewhere. There is no clear rule about that in other countries. Many, such as France and Italy, allow the right to strike, even where the action is unofficial.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman made West Germany the test—yet in that country, where an employer can dismiss when unofficial action is taken, the works council must first give its consent and, more important, the employee has the right of recourse to a labour court to claim that his dismissal was unjustified in all the circumstances. In other words, the position in West Germany is the same as it is in Britain today and not as the right hon. and learned Gentleman intends it to be. If the proposed changes are made, the law will be quite unfair.

I issue a challenge to the right hon. and learned Gentleman: if we can show that the law in West Germany is as I have stated it to be, and given that the test that he has formulated is that Britain must be equivalent to West Germany, will he agree to include provisions to that effect in the Bill?

Mr. Howard: The justice and the legitimacy of the proposed provisions stand by themselves. I justified them during my speech and I shall justify them further in Committee. There is no question of their requiring justification by reference to what happens in any other country.

Mr. Blair: We now know why the right hon. and learned Gentleman dealt with this issue so quickly during his speech. He says that the provisions are self-standing and are not influenced by what happens in other countries. Why, in his Green Paper "Unofficial Action and the Law", did he specifically cite the practice in other countries as justification for this legislation? There is the right to go to a tribunal in the United States, Canada, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Japan and Australia. The Government claim to rely on the practice in other countries, but Britain will be the only country that does not allow that right.

The *Employment Gazette* is the official newspaper of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's Department. It said:

> "The Government believes that employers in this country should have the same freedom to respond to unofficial action as employers in West Germany."

Why are we not allowed that same freedom, when that was the test which the Government set? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that under the Bill an employer could provoke a walk-out—perhaps by wholly unreasonable behaviour—and sack the trade union officials for reasons wholly extraneous to the unofficial dispute—simply because he does not want trade unionists—yet there will be no right even to claim that a dismissal was unfair?

The Government cannot claim that such a provision is fair or even-handed. It is a typical Government measure. They take an idea—we know that it comes from No. 10 Downing street, as everything else does—push it beyond the bounds of any external validity, carry it to the furthest extreme and end up justifying it no matter what the arguments against it.

This is a shabby, ill-thought-out and bigoted measure. Most of all, it is wrong because it looks back, not forward. We cannot address the challenges of the future through the prejudices of the past. It is the right hon. Gentleman's Government who are reburnishing their prejudices, as Lord Prior put it, in this Bill. A new decade should require a new settlement in industrial relations law, and part of the principles of that settlement should be first, that it is fair and even-handed between employers and unions; secondly, that it contains certain basic individual rights guaranteed by law; thirdly, that it marches in step and moves with the grain of what is happening elsewhere in Europe, especially as we approach 1992; and fourthly, that it should aim for stability in industrial relations, which is the vital prerequisite of the national effort that we require to put this country back on its feet.

If we are serious about the gap between Britain and its competitors—in training and skills, research and development, and technology and innovation—we cannot allow measures that will do nothing to assist the promotion of that stability. The Bill is unfair, it curtails certain individual basic rights, it moves us further out of line with Europe, it will provoke industrial conflict and, frankly, it is a Bill too far. The right hon. and learned Gentleman knows that; it was evident in his speech. The Bill is irrelevant in the issues it concerns. It is dangerous in much of what it proposes and we shall vote against it.

6.5 pm

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): I shall be brief. I do not accept what the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) said. His speech was most notable for its omission of any reference to the vast improvement in industrial relations—for example, the reduction in the number of strikes and in the number of days lost. From my entirely independent point of view, the Bill appears to be a piece of legislation that has been brilliantly conceived and excellently put together. It was, of course, magnificently introduced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State.

My only sorrow is that the conversion of the hon. Member for Sedgefield—and conversion it was—came too late to enable him to become a sponsor of the Bill. However, I was more convinced about his conversion before he began his speech than I was as I listened to it. He rather skated over the closed shop issue. Indeed, it appeared to come as a shock and a surprise to many of his hon. Friends to be told that that was the Labour party's new policy.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State is right in his approach. This Bill will go down in the history books as the Bill that brought to an end the closed shop in Britain—and by any standards that is a significant achievement. It is made doubly significant because it has been accepted by the Opposition. Indeed, the hon. Member for Sedgefield accepted it even before the Bill was published. There is now as broad a consensus as we are ever likely to have in the politics of industrial relations, and it is that the closed shop should be brought to an end. That is a significant political step. In the 1970s, the Labour party spent a great deal of time seeking to legislate to extend and strengthen the closed shop. There is no clearer

[Sir Norman Fowler]

example of the revolution in industrial relations law in Britain than the attitude that the Labour party now takes and the policy that it now holds.

The Bill is significant for human rights. There was never any justification for men and women being forced to join a trade union if that was not their wish. That was the finding of the European Court, and I do not think that anyone would now challenge it. Above all, the Bill is significant for the future of trade unions because it marks a new era for them. It means that they will have to persuade people into membership rather than force them, as was previously the case.

So often, the closed shop has been a recruiting sergeant for the unions. It was not that people necessarily wanted to join a union, but that they knew only too well that that was the price that was put on the job. That price was sometimes paid willingly and sometimes reluctantly. Sometimes people refused to pay it, and they lost their jobs. That was the inexcusable consequence of the closed shop legislation.

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the respectability, validity and credibility of the trade union movement are enhanced when unions operate on the basis of voluntary membership rather than on the basis of coercing people into becoming members?

Sir Norman Fowler: I agree entirely. It is healthy for trade unions and for the trade union movement. Indeed, I think that some good trade unions—not just the electricians union—have already adopted this practice.

When I worked on Fleet street in the 1960s, a reporter from one of the subsidiaries of *The Times* had an offer from another Fleet street newspaper. That offer was withdrawn for no reason other than that the reporter was not a member of the requisite trade union. Today, Fleet street is no longer the centre of the newspaper industry. Thanks to the action of a number of brave people, the situation in that industry has changed out of all recognition. But we should not forget that that was the closed shop in operation: no union card, no job. That is why the closed shop is being abolished.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Is my right hon. Friend aware that Lancashire Publications Ltd., which publishes one of our local newspapers and has for years negotiated with the National Union of Journalists, is now offering a pay rise dependent on there being no trade union activity? Does my right hon. Friend not agree that it is just as important that people should be entitled to belong to trade unions as to ensure that they may refrain from so doing?

Sir Norman Fowler: Yes. Indeed, that is one of the points of this Bill. As my right hon. Friend so rightly said, it provides that right for the first time. For the first time, people have the right to belong to a trade union. They cannot be excluded from membership. Since the early 1960s, I myself have been a member of the union to which my hon. Friend has referred.

Mr. John Evans: Will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that, throughout the length and breadth of Britain, there have been thousands of recorded cases of people being denied employment because they were trade unionists? Under this Bill, the onus is still on the individual to prove conclusively that an employer's reason for not giving him a job is that he is a member of a trade union. Providing that proof is virtually impossible.

Sir Norman Fowler: I believe that, when the hon. Gentleman goes through the Bill in Committee, he will cease to hold that view. This is the normal way of setting out industrial relations legislation. I am sure that everyone will want to do everything in his power to ensure that a person who is a member of a trade union is not excluded from employment by virtue of that membership. That is the purpose of the legislation. The approach is an even-handed one. This Bill brings the closed shop to an end. The post-entry closed shop and the pre-entry closed shop are both now ended. Like my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, I hope that unions and employers up and down the country will not wait until this legislation has gone through all its stages in this House and in another place before starting to dismantle the closed shop arrangements.

I hope also that the change will be noted in the public service. I hope that in this regard the Government, as an employer, will take the lead. I do not know what arrangements exist in organisations such as Her Majesty's Stationery Office. I hope that the Minister of State will tell us—if he knows—the extent of the closed shop in that field. But I hope even more that he will assure this House that any closed shop arrangements in the public service will be brought to an end immediately. That is important. The end of the closed shop is a challenge to sensible trade union leaders in this country.

In future, unions will have to attract members by offering services and by taking up issues such as training and pensions—issues about which their members are concerned. Unions that ignore that message will find their members drifting away and will find recruits hard to come by. Whether there is a future for a trade union will be a matter entirely for that union. In this regard, I certainly have no prejudice—as, perhaps, my union membership indicates. This Bill gives new rights in respect of union membership.

Nor am I at all concerned that the Bill's proposals in respect of unofficial action may have the side effect of strengthening the position of official unions in this country. It is ludicrous that we should have suffered such damage from unofficial strikes. What sets us apart from the rest of Europe and other countries is not the particular procedure but the amount of damage that is done to industry by unofficial disputes. It is ludicrous that it should be easier to take unofficial action than to take official action. Obviously I should prefer a situation in which there was no strike action whatsoever, but it seems to me that where there is strike action it should be taken by unions operating in the context of the law and subject to legal restraints such as the secret ballot.

In my view, the reform of industrial relations law is one of the great successes of this Government's period of office. We have seen a reduction in the number of strikes and a reduction in the number of days lost. We have seen union members—as, recently, at Ford's—not simply following their leaders into strike action. Opinion poll after opinion poll has shown that the public in this country support the reforms in industrial action that this Government has seen through.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield referred to my legacy to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State.

But the hon. Gentleman, too, has come into a legacy—a legacy from the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). It is just possible, of course, that that was not the most welcome gift he received in 1989. I welcome the hon. Gentleman's position on the closed shop, as would anyone with any common sense. However, I say to him in all seriousness that he will have to answer the serious, important and crucial questions that my right hon. and learned Friend has put to him.

The current position of the Opposition is that they would allow secondary action where a genuine striker has had a genuine interest in the dispute. The Opposition would get rid of injunctions and sequestration. It seems to me that that all adds up to a set of proposals that would make striking very much easier. It is very much in the public interest that it should be known where precisely the Labour party stands on these issues. This is not simply a party political issue; it is an issue on which the public will want to have answers.

Above all—here I have some sympathy with one of the points that the hon. Gentleman made—the question now is, what are the real industrial relations issues in the 1990s? There is no doubt that reform of industrial relations law was the issue of the 1980s, but the process may not be at an end, even after the passage of this Bill.

The whole advantage of the step-by-step approach is that abuses can be corrected, but I should be surprised if the reform of the law were to have such dominating importance in our affairs over the next 10 years as it had over the last 10 years. It seems to me that the 1990s are much more likely to be—indeed, should be—about involving the work force more thoroughly than ever before. That is an issue that goes way beyond the issues of worker directors and worker councils. It goes into employee share ownership and profit sharing; it goes into team working, and all the rest.

The 1990s will also be about using the human resources at our disposal; about providing careers, not just jobs, for women; about providing opportunities for ethnic minorities and for unemployed people. But, above all, the 1990s—here I take up exactly the point that the hon. Member for Sedgefield made—will be about making our work force as professional, as skilled, as good, as it conceivably can be.

The 1990s will be about not only initial training but retraining—training through life. Every right hon. and hon. Member must understand and recognise that both are long-standing issues that go back way beyond this Government and the preceding Labour Government. Training has been a problem for the whole of this century.

Our experience of industrial relations shows that it is possible to tackle long-standing problems successfully. Ten years ago, no problem was seen as more intractable than bad industrial relations, which were said to be too difficult an area to tackle. However, our experience over the past 10 years shows that, over a relatively sort period, British industrial relations can be not only changed but transformed.

If our industrial relations had not improved, Britain would not have attracted the kind of inward investment that it has. We would not be enjoying the attractive jobs record that we have. Inward investment also proves—this is an objective test—that other countries recognise the great skills inherent in the British work force. Otherwise, they would not want to base operations in this country.

For the 1990s, we must aim at developing to the full extent the skills of our work force. I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State on his speech, but at the same time I look forward to his efforts in other areas of importance to our nation.

6.21pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): The Bill is completely unnecessary and has no relevance to the real needs of British commerce and industry. It is not as though the Bill addresses great abuses. Once again, the Government are churning our anti-union legislation. Every two years a new Bill is introduced proving that the Government still think of the unions as the enemy within. Whereas other countries throughout the world co-operate in industry, the present British Goverment believe that there is some electoral advantage in attacking unions and in union bashing.

I refer first to the reason why the closed shop has persisted in many areas of British industry. As many impartial observers have noted, there is an inherent imbalance between the bargaining power of an individual worker and that of a large employer. Combination and union and collective bargaining offer a countervailing force that can redress the balance. For that reason, many workers seek 100 per cent. union membership, and it is legitimate for them to do so.

In some sectors of industry, such as printing, 100 per cent. union membership is traditional and can be traced back to the guilds. In other trades, craftsmen are reluctant to work alongside those not having the required qualifications, of which union membership is often the hallmark. The question of safety arises in industries such as mining, where men live and work closely together for long periods in dangerous conditions. They may be reluctant to go down in a cage with someone who is not a union member.

It has never been the ark of the covenant of Labour party policy that everyone must be coerced into union membership, whether or not they like it. Instead, Labour has historically recognised that the closed shop is a traditional element of industrial relations practice in many areas of employment. It has therefore adhered to the voluntary principle that the operation of a closed shop is a matter best left to management and workers—specially when one has been operated flexibly and tolerantly in the past, taking account of people having conscientious objections. The fact that the closed shop has lasted is proof that it meets the needs of both employers and employees.

That was graphically proved to be the case by the Industrial Relations Act 1971, introduced by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), which made closed shops null and void. I was not a Member of Parliament at that time but was still working in industry, as a member of a closed shop. I can assure the House that the 1971 legislation had absolutely no effect. During the Committee proceedings of the Employment Bill in 1980, the then Secretary of State for Employment, now Lord Prior, said, "The fact of the matter is, it did not work" —and I know of not one employer who used its closed shop provisions.

When the present Government came to office in 1979, they tried again. The Employment Act 1980 said that it would be unfair to dismiss anyone having a conscientious objection to union membership. It also required all new

[Mr. Ron Leighton]

closed shops to have the support of 80 per cent. of those balloted. The Employment Act 1982 stipulated that any dismissals would be unfair unless the closed shop had received the support of 85 per cent. of those balloted and eligible.

Almost every ballot was in favour of a closed shop, proving its popularity among those most closely concerned. The Employment Act 1988 made post-entry closed shops unenforceable. The former Secretary of State for Employment, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), will recall that it outlawed all dismissals even where a ballot had been in favour of the closed shop. The Government said that, even if there had been ballots, they did not intend to take any notice of them; immunity would be withdrawn from actions to establish or maintain a closed shop, whether pre-entry or post-entry.

What has been the effect of 10 years of the closed shop being outlawed by the present Government? The astonishing answer is, very little. In February and March 1989, the Department of Employment undertook a survey, which the former Secretary of State may have commissioned, whose results were published in the October 1989 issue of *Employment Gazette*. It revealed 1,300,000 workers in pre-entry closed shops and another 1,300,000 in post-entry closed shops. In other words, 2,600,000 workers remained in what are known to the Government as closed shops—that is, 10 per cent. of male workers, 3 per cent. of full-time women workers, and 1 per cent. of part-time women workers. The *Employment Gazette* article concluded:

"More importantly perhaps, it has shown the closed shop to be more persistent and widespread than had previously been thought."

Passing a law making closed shops null and void does not prevent one from continuing with the agreement of all those concerned.

The closed shop was outlawed—otherwise the former Secretary of State and his colleagues would have been wasting their time for the past 10 years—yet it is still as strong as ever. One reason for that is that many employers support the closed shop because it spares them from splinter groups who would disrupt accepted representational arrangements. It spares them also from fragmented industrial relations and inter-union disputes. The simple truth is that the Tories' long offensive against the closed shop has failed in practice. The closed shop, which is rooted in certain industries, remains—and it has become ingrained because those concerned want it.

Mr. Jannan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Leighton: I must not take too long, but I will give way later if I have time, as the hon. Gentleman is a valuable member of the Select Committee on Employment.

Conservative Members consider that my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) has created a sensation and performed a volte face by conceding the workers' right not to belong to a union. That right, in fact, already exists, but it has not affected the 100 per cent. union membership in areas where such membership is traditional. The social charter—which, incidentally, would not give workers at GCHQ the right to join a trade union—has little to do with the position, which is due to a more significant and fundamental development: the movement away from the idea of immunities towards that of positive rights.

Britain is the only industrialised country in the world with no constitutional right to strike, no right to join a trade union, no right to trade union recognition—and there is no point in joining a union if it is not recognised—no right to collective bargaining and no right to information and consultation. Instead of those simple, basic rights, we have an increasingly unsatisfactory system of immunities. Under our common law, all trade union activity represents an unlawful conspiracy in restraint of trade, but statutes have given us immunities in relation to action taken in contemplation or furtherance of a trade dispute.

Unfortunately, the definition of a trade dispute has become so hedged about and restricted that collective action is now virtually impossible. Any union trying to take such action will almost immediately find itself ensnared by the law. It would be far better to move away from all that, and to devise a clear, comprehensive set of positive rights to enfranchise workers so that their citizenship does not end when they enter the workplace. They should have the right to strike, which should mean the suspension of their contract of employment so that they cannot be sacked if they take strike action. That is the arrangement in virtually every other industrialised country.

The right to join a trade union also embraces the right not to do so, but that need cause us little concern. As we have seen, the right not to join has already existed for 10 years as a result of the Conservative party's efforts, and has had very little effect; we can live with it quite happily and easily. The right to join a union, however, will be of enormous value and will mark an enormous change. We must ensure that amendments are tabled providing such a right, or else exposing the one-sidedness of the Bill.

At present there is no protection against denial of access to employment on grounds of union membership; to gain such protection would constitute an enormous victory for unions and workers. It is very unlikely that anyone has suffered in the past 10 years because of not belonging to a trade union, and I should like the Minister to give us the name and address of anyone who has. We know, however, that thousands have suffered because of belonging to a union: D. C. Thomson in Dundee, along with many other firms, requires employees to sign a document stating that they are not union members.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield has said, we want to deal with the pre-entry discrimination imposed by blacklists from such organisations as the Economic League, which often gives employers information that is biased and untrue. They tell employers not to employ certain people because they are union members, and that must be outlawed. I hope that victims of such pre-entry discrimination will be able to go to a tribunal and obtain heavy damages from such employers.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I noticed the Minister shaking his head when my hon. Friend said that people could be refused jobs on grounds of trade union activity. Have not two attempts been made in the House to make blacklisting unlawful, and did not the Government oppose both?

Mr. Leighton: My hon. Friend has made a good point, and I pay tribute to her work in exposing such blacklists since she has been in the House.

Mr. Janman: I have been listening to the hon. Gentleman with great interest. As my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) has explained, the lists produced by the Economic League catalogue people who are intent on causing disruption once they have gained employment. Why does the hon. Gentleman seem to believe that causing disruption and being a member of a trade union are automatically synonymous?

Mr. Leighton: They are certainly not synonymous. I do not know why Conservative Members are so shy of our looking into the matter to ensure even-handedness. My hon. Friends will table amendments in Committee for that purpose, and, if the Government are not prepared to grant that even-handedness, they will be pilloried and exposed.

Fewer and fewer industries employ a huge number of workers. As far as I know, only one factory in the Greater London area—the Ford motor company—employs 1,000 workers or more. More than 90 per cent. of firms employ 25 or fewer, often in office-based, high-tech services, and it is difficult for unions to exercise industrial muscle in such circumstances. It would be far better to enfranchise those workers with positive rights. That will extend their freedom and such a policy will be very popular, and will aid the unions. We must press our amendments to insert the necessary measures in the Bill, for—as will become clear—the Labour party stands for real rights for workers.

We have already warned that, if official action was made virtually impossible, the result could be an increase in the number of unofficial strikes. Now the Government are trying to legislate to prevent unofficial strikes; most organisations, however, have experienced no unofficial strikes for years. Such disputes are usually spontaneous and of short duration. They are often the result of a deeply felt grievance—over health and safety, for instance—and are generally resolved very quickly. If it were possible to legislate to prevent such action, it would have been done years ago.

The Bill lays down a convoluted, largely impracticable procedure instructing the unions to police and discipline their members. The Government are schizoid in this regard. Previous legislation took away a union's authority to enforce its rules after a strike ballot, but now the Government have performed a U-turn: they want unions to act authoritatively, as policemen. Clauses 6 and 7 are particularly disgraceful, mean, nasty and vicious, for they allow and encourage the targeting of individuals and the victimisation of prominent trade unionists. Lech Walesa, for instance, would be caught immediately by such legislation.

In 1978 Lord Dilhorne ruled that selective sackings amounted to unfair dismissal—and so they do. The Bill changes the law to enable employers to do precisely that. Instead of equity, equality and fair treatment, we see an intent to isolate and victimise prominent trade unionists. That is unfair: it discriminates between individuals, treating some as fish and some as fowl. Some will be singled out vindictively and punitively to have their livelihoods taken away.

An unscrupulous employer could—as Rupert Murdoch did—provoke and engineer a strike or other industrial action and then pick and choose whom to re-employ. That would be a licence for victimisation, with no right of appeal. The word for that is tyranny. That is what is being proposed. The Government would make martyrs of them. They ought to remember the case of the Pentonville Five before they go down that route.

As for unofficial strikes, we all remember the episode that gave birth to the strikes on London Underground. Mr. Roger Straker, the personnel director of London Underground, was interviewed by *Personnel Management* in October 1989. According to Jane Pickard, who reported on what Mr. Straker said in his interesting interview:

"It may sound as if he is indulging in jokey understatement when he confides that the recent tube strikes were triggered by a breakdown in communication, but he is, in fact, making a blunt admission of management failure."

The report continued:

"He acknowledges that part of the problem both then and in the run-up to the dispute was a poor management structure."

According to the report, Mr. Straker said:

"We were caught unawares—and I think the unions were caught unawares."

It was not that the unions were agitators, stirring up people; even the unions were caught unawares. He also said:

"We knew there was some discontent, but had not appreciated the momentum. Looking back on it, the major weakness on the management side was lack of awareness of how strong the feeling was. But I think we have to look at how we avoid that happening again."

The reason for trouble on London Underground was bad management. There was also bad management on British Rail, which caused trouble. However, that was official. British Rail's personnel manager got the sack because of bad management.

It is wrong to move from the particular to the general and to legislate because of management failure in one case. To amend our law so as to allow the unscrupulous employer, anywhere, to victimise an individual worker would be shameful. The Labour party ought to oppose it with the utmost vigour.

6.41 pm

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): I am privileged to be the first on this side of the House to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Fowler). It was his first speech from the Back Benches in 16 years. That is a remarkable track record. It demonstrates my right hon. Friend's contribution to the work of the House, both in government and in opposition. My right hon. Friend continued the style that he set when he was on the Front Bench in the delicacy and sensitivity with which he congratulated my right hon. and learned Friend the new Secretary of State for Employment on introducing his incubus.

My right hon. and learned Friend referred to the difference between the way in which this Government have dealt with employment legislation over the years, on a bit-by-bit basis rather than on the one big chunk basis, as happened in 1970-71. The mistakes that were made then have been well learnt. Consequently, we have a far sounder basis for dealing with industrial relations on a wide front. With my background in manufacturing industry, I welcome the changes and the stability that it has brought to a large sector of manufacturing industry.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): What manufacturing industry?

Mr. Shepherd: Light engineering.

I am mindful of Mr. Speaker's strictures in asking for short speeches. I shall therefore deal with just one narrow but important point that I do not believe is covered by the Bill.

Early last summer, NALGO was in dispute with its employers. It chose to take action in the Hereford constituency in a rather curious way. A firm of large poultry producers, Sun Valley Poultry Limited, is in my constituency. It is obliged by law to employ on its premises poultry meat inspectors who are actually employed by the local authority. In this dispute, NALGO's local organisers decided that the best way to pursue their action was to withdraw the poultry meat inspectors' labour from Sun Valley Poultry Ltd. The firm was therefore unable to discharge its statutory obligations regarding poultry meat inspection. Its operations were subsequently put into jeopardy.

Not unnaturally, the firm took legal advice about obtaining an injunction to stop that action. The answer, I am afraid, was no. It was perfectly clear to me that there was a loophole in the law that enabled a curious, convoluted form of secondary action to be taken which was every bit as damaging as the secondary action that is referred to in the legislation and that has been dealt with by past legislation.

I took up the matter with Ministers in the Department of Employment and was pointed to the case of Barretts and Baird (Wholesale) Limited *v.* IPCS where the employers had succeeded in obtaining an injunction against NALGO officers who were the meat inspectors of the Meat and Livestock Commission. That, however, was on the basis of lightning strikes. In this instances, there was a long distance strike. The advice was that there could have been a different judgment if there had been a long strike rather than lightning strikes.

When the matter was referred to counsel who was expert in employment matters he expressed a

"clear view . . . that it did not make a difference and that cases subsequent to the Barretts case had made the position worse."

Counsel's clear advice to Sun Valley Poultry Ltd. was

"that there was nothing that could be done."

I asked that this point should be taken into account, but when I looked at the Bill I could find no mention of it. It may be that as I am not a lawyer I was unable to spot it in the phraseology of the Bill. I hope that when he winds up the debate my hon. Friend the Minister of State will tell me whether that contingency is taken into account. If it is not, will he undertake to consider the matter between now and the time when amendments to clause 4 can be tabled? If appropriate, I hope that he will consider tabling a new clause to take that point into account.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State reiterated the assertion made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield in his Green Paper of March 1989:

"in general, there is no good reason why employers who are not a party to a dispute should be at risk of having industrial action organised against them."

It cannot be fair that a small group of employees of a different employer should be able to jeopardise the livelihood and activities of the biggest employer in my constituency. That cannot be correct. Therefore, I ask my right hon. and learned Friend to take this opportunity to legislate and not to allow this state of affairs to continue for a moment longer.

6.49 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I beg to move, to leave out from "That" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"this House declines to give a Second Reading to the Employment Bill which, whilst it makes welcome provision to make unlawful the refusal of access to employment on grounds relating to trade union membership, nevertheless fails to make any provision for the improvement of good industrial relations, but rather through its proposed amendments to the law relating to strikes and other unofficial industrial action will only serve to embroil employers and employees in further confrontational legal dispute, to the detriment of industrial harmony."

Towards the end of his speech, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) set out a list of measures that he foresaw as developments in industrial relations in the 1990s. I would not quarrel for a moment with anything in that list. What troubles me about this Bill is that a major part of it remains a Bill for industrial relations in the 1980s. It contains an unnecessary measure of kicking the trade unions when they are already down and do not need any further kicking, and fails to take the opportunity of starting the 1990s with a Bill for the 1990s.

There can be only one justifiable reason for an Employment Bill—to enhance good industrial relations. If the Bill contained some of the measures outlined by the right hon. Gentleman, introduced changes that would encourage significantly employees' share ownership, included provisions for more effective works councils and aimed for increased partnership between workers at whatever level in the company from the shop floor to the board of directors to involve them in the activities of the company, it would almost certainly have our complete support. But unfortunately it fails to do that. It does not even address improving the administration of trade union procedure—for example, simply by ensuring that all strike ballot forms are sent to the homes of trade union members rather than there still being an option for ballots to be sent either to members' homes or to the workplace.

It is important that we accept the need for an effective trade union movement to protect the interests of trade unionists against oppressive, unfair and mean employers. We should aim for a trade union movement which is ever more effective in ensuring that services are provided which members need. In particular, it should provide a service when employees have been injured or if they feel that they have been unfairly dismissed. In that context, the Government and the Labour party—the Labour party was responsible for starting the iniquity—should agree that legal aid should now be extended to industrial tribunals so that workers at all levels can have proper remedies and effective representation available to them if they claim to have been unfairly dismissed.

During part of the Secretary of State's speech, I heard from behind and around me some dinosaur-like noises about the closed shop, The Labour party really has to recognise that the closed shop is part of its dinosaur attitude to trade unionism. By arguing for the maintenance of the closed shop, Labour Members are giving the trade unions dinosaur food, while the climate changes and kills the dinosaurs.

The trade unions do not need a closed shop to be effective. They have other advantages that sell their membership to those who might join them. Like right hon. and hon. Members on all sides of the House, I encourage people to join trade unions if there is any risk of their being

injured at work or unfairly treated by their employers. If they are in doubt and they ask me, I always say, "Join a trade union because it is a good thing to be a member of a union or a professional body which looks after your interests at all levels and at all times, and is prepared to negotiate for you." Trade unions do not need the closed shop. The closed shop is about as relevant today as compelling all adults to attend religious worship on Sunday whether they like it or not. It has no more logic than that.

We welcome the introduction into an Act of Parliament of a new right—the right to choose whether or not to be a member of a trade union. What troubles me as I listen to the reaction of Labour Back Benchers around me as I speak is that, whatever the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) says, he is hotly opposed on his own Back Benches, in his own party and in the trade unions that support some members of the Labour party. The Labour party has no well understood and genuine interest in improving trade union law. Its interest is in protecting trade unions, be they dinosaurs or not, at least as much as protecting the workers. I join the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield in saying that we should move into the 1990s and aim for trade union structures that really protect working people and ensure that they have as much incentive as managers for their workplaces to be profitable and safe.

I hope that I have made it reasonably clear that we support the abolition of the closed shop. I come to what in our view are severe flaws in the Bill—fatal flaws, at this stage at any rate. The Secretary of State should perhaps have declared an interest. I know that he has not practised at the Bar for some years, but he is a distinguished lawyer. He must know that the Bill could well become a minefield of contention and pedantry. Looking at clauses 4 to 8, I envisage lawyers specialising in labour law rubbing their hands in the Temple. I see the solicitors in Chancery lane who instruct them smiling with glee at the contentions that those clauses present. For example, clause 4 aims to tackle secondary action.

What will happen if the Ford Motor Company decides to split each plant into a separate plc and then split each part of each plant into a separate plc? Under the Bill as it stands, secondary action by workers in one plc to assist workers in another plc—although the group interest is clearly inseparable—will be unlawful. That makes no sense, except for the pockets of the lawyers who will go into court and earn fees for trying to sort out the mess that the Government have created for themselves. Therefore, I invite the Minister to consider the way in which legal artifice may be used to make primary action into secondary action. There is a real risk of that.

I now turn to clause 6. In my constituency there is a charming town called Machynlleth, which has a great tradition of railway workers. There used to be a large railway station, but, because of what is happening to British Rail services west of Shrewsbury, that railway station is about to become an art gallery, although I am sure that it will be an excellent art gallery. Perhaps I had better leave British Rail services out of the debate or I shall be ruled out of order. However, I am pleased to say that there are still railway workers in Machynlleth and most of them are still loyal members of the National Union of Railwaymen. Under clause 6, the unpaid, part-time branch secretary of the Machynlleth branch of the NUR will be an official of the union, who will be able to make the NUR liable in court because of his actions.

I am a lawyer, too, and I recall the Solicitor-General, some years before he became Solicitor-General, appearing in a very well known case called Tesco *v.* Nattrass in the House of Lords, in which it was held that the only person who could bind a company was someone who could properly be regarded as the eyes and ears of that company. That remains the law for many purposes. Under clause 6, a union will be bound not by its eyes and ears but by people who are so far removed from its eyes and ears that they are barely part of its limbs.

That provision in clause 6 is part of a legal minefield that is unfair to trade unions, because, with the best will in the world, it will have one of two effects. Either it will introduce a new concept of vicarious liability—if it does, I am surprised that as good a lawyer as the Secretary of State is prepared to countenance it—or it will turn trade unions into centralised, authoritarian and unworkable organisations in which the part-time branch secretary at Machynlleth will have no interest. It is extremely important that that provision is reconsidered, because it is nonsense.

Clause 7 provides for an amendment of the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978 and introduces new section 62A. It says:

> "An employee has no right to complain of unfair dismissal if at the time of dismissal he was taking part in an unofficial strike or other unofficial industrial action . . . Provided that, a strike or other industrial action shall not be regarded as unofficial if none of those taking part in it are members of a trade union."

That, Mr. Deputy Speaker—perhaps as the changeover is taking place I should say Mr. and Madam Deputy Speaker——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Call me Madam.

Mr. Carlile: Certainly, Madam.

That raises serious problems. Why is an unofficial strike not an unofficial strike when no trade unionists are involved? Why does it suddenly become an unlawful unofficial strike when but one trade unionist is involved? There can only be one reason for that—that the Government have decided that trade unionists should be discriminated against merely because they have decided to join a trade union. That is fundamentally wrong and contradicts the right in clause 1, which I applaud, to choose whether to be a member of a trade union.

Mr. Batiste: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Carlile: No, I will not. I have taken up enough time already.

Will the Minister reconsider that discrimination and remove it or justify it if he can?

New section 62A removes the right of an employee to complain to an industrial tribunal that he has been unfairly dismissed for taking part in an unofficial strike. We know what happens in the real world; sometimes unofficial strikes blow up for very good reasons. An employer may unjustifiably decide to lock out part of his work force or discriminate against women employees. The buzz goes round, "We will have an unofficial strike," and a young lad or lass of 17 walks out of the factory with the rest of the work force. Not only youngsters but all workers

[Mr. Carlile]

are susceptible to group pressure. How can the Government justify penalising by possible sacking every worker, whatever their strength of character, age or sex, who takes part in unofficial action? To achieve just and even-handed trade union law, we must give all workers the right of access to a tribunal for it to decide whether their action was reasonable.

Our objection is that the middle and later parts of the Bill remove the possibility of reasonableness being the test of action taken by union officials or workers on the shop floor. The Bill sets rules intended to kick unions, rather than setting standards intended to support working people. We hope that it will be so improved in Committee that we shall be able to support it, but at present that is not possible.

7.5 pm

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): There have been five major employment and trade union Bills since 1979, four of which have been particularly relevant to industrial relations. Opposition Members made long speeches saying that each Bill would worsen the industrial relations environment and our economic performance, but we have experienced the exact opposite. We ignored those siren voices in the past, so my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State should ignore the siren voices once again warning of grave pitfalls.

The purpose of the legislation introduced since 1979 was to make the trade union movement more accountable to, and therefore more reflective of, the views of its membership, and to put the freedom of the individual first rather than to allow the coercion of the closed shop—certainly the post-entry closed shop—to continue. It made the right to go to work a decision of individual conscience. Under the 1988 Act, we rightly outlawed the disciplining of trade union members because they wanted to go to work when there had been a majority ballot in favour of strike action.

The Bills introduced since 1979 have tried to restore the appalling imbalance that we inherited between the rights of the individual and the trade union movement and between the power and might of organised labour against capital. That policy has been extremely successful. Far fewer days are now lost because of strikes than throughout the 1970s, particularly when the Labour party was last in power. Even with the tightening of the labour market, and even with unemployment falling to about the level of the late 1970s, the number of days lost through strikes is smaller than in the 1970s.

The argument often advanced by Opposition Members —that that results not from our legislation but from the fact that we had high unemployment in the early 1980s —is irrelevant. With more people in employment than before, and with unemployment back to the level of the mid to late 1970s, fewer days are lost because of strikes than before the legislation was introduced between 1979 and 1989.

We have also witnessed substantial improvements in productivity—both in the economy as a whole and in manufacturing. One result of the legislation passed over the past 10 years has been that employers have had much greater respect for trade unions because—even if they have been forced into it, in one sense—trade unions have become more responsive to, and have more closely reflected, the needs, aspirations and views of their members. Employers treat trade unions with more respect now that they know that the trade unions' views have more validity. Conversely, trade unions have, on the whole, more respect for employers.

Now that less energy is being dissipated by the trade union leadership in acts of industrial vandalism and destruction, many trade unions and their leadership have put their energy into more constructive matters, and have sought to try to make genuine improvements in the working conditions of their members. In a wider context, the EEPTU, for example has negotiated a very good private health package for its members. We now have responsible trade unions widening their horizons and expanding the role that they play on behalf of their members.

That is what we have achieved so far. We now need to consider why the Bill is a logical extension of those earlier Acts. The hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) said that there were still 1·3 million people in pre-entry closed shops and a further 1·3 million people in post-entry closed shops. The hon. Gentleman was making a case for saying that we should not have waited for the Employment Act 1988 and this Bill to deal with the pre-entry closed shop: we should have dealt with it in our first Employment Act back in 1980.

Let me deal first with secondary action. It is logical to extend the removal of immunity in law to secondary action. In my view, it would be morally reprehensible to allow immunity to remain. Immunity should exist only for those directly involved in a dispute with their own employers, and within the definition of a trade dispute. The rhetoric of the hon. Member for Newham, North-East is all well and good, but he knows full well that the Bill will not prevent legitimate action by a group of workers who have a genuine dispute with their own employer and who have been balloted by their local union leaders concerning the kind of industrial action that they would like to take in the context of their terms and conditions of employment, and—where jobs are threatened, for example—provided that the wording on the ballot paper is specific and accurate in stating what the local shop stewards seek a mandate to do. If all those conditions are met and if there is a majority vote, that action can be taken and the right to strike remains.

Secondary action is an entirely different matter. It is completely wrong that a company in dispute with its own employees can have its goods and services blacked by employees of other companies who have nothing to do with the dispute, and that they and their customers should lose as a result. There is no moral case whatever for immunity to be retained in cases of secondary action. I therefore welcome clause 40, which would end such immunity.

Earlier legislation reduced the number of strike days lost, but still the public have to put up with a great deal of wildcat strike action, particularly in the public sector. Earlier in the debate we heard from the Opposition that the raison d'etre—the catalyst—for the Bill was the tube strike. I think that the tube strike was the last straw that broke the camel's back. It was the most recent horrendous example of action taken by unions in the public sector —as it often is—to disrupt the daily lives of millions of people without any democratic mandate from their membership to do so.

It is worth noting that 75 per cent. of strike action taken in Britain at the moment is unofficial. That means that this is not a small problem or a problem limited to one or two strikes—caused by bad management or whatever—or to one or two parts of the public sector. Even given the huge reduction in strike action over the past 10 years, such action remains all too prevalent.

It is fair to say that many options were discussed by the Government in seeking to solve the problem. One was the removal of the right to strike in essential services. I have always had grave doubts about a de facto removal of the right to strike from anyone in Britain, irrespective of whether they work in an essential service or not. The Government were absolutely right to conclude that they would be foolhardy to take that approach. They have decided upon the right solution. First, they propose to make trade unions far more accountable in law. The unions will have to try to ensure—and prove that they have been doing all that they can to ensure—that they can control the wider elements in their midst, and that people cannot stir up feelings and lead employees out on strike without going through the proper channels.

Secondly, the Government propose to change the law so that a person involved in wildcat action or negative, disruptive action within his company can be dismissed and will lose the right to take the case on appeal to an industrial tribunal. I congratulate the Minister on sticking with those two solutions and not taking a route that could have some significant public spending ramifications because of the inevitable tit-for-tat that would have resulted. I congratulate the Government for introducing the solutions suggested in the Bill.

Under all Governments, employers have been able to sack all or none of those on strike. That was the case when the Labour party was in power. I do not think that that fair balance should now apply to people taking or leading strike action when they have no legal, moral or democratic mandate for doing so.

The third provision on which I propose to comment applies to the pre-entry closed shop. As I said, much of the previous legislation has been about individual rights in the workplace and in society generally. The 1980, 1982 and 1988 Acts dealt with the post-entry closed shop and gave people the right to go to work without fear of discipline or of reprisals being taken against them simply because, as a matter of conscience, they happen to want to do one thing when the majority of their colleagues happen to want to do something else. But the pre-entry closed shop remained untouched, and it is therefore logical and desirable—as the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) has also concluded—to place it on the same legal footing as the post-entry closed shop. That is all that the Bill would do. There is nothing controversial or contentious about that. It is a natural and logical step forward.

Although the Labour party still opposes pre-strike ballots, supports secondary action and mass picketing and opposes trade unions being held financially responsible for the devastation that they often try to cause, it at least now seems to accept that strong unions are based on voluntary membership and not on coercion.

I hope that that conversion is genuine and does not simply stem from directives coming from Brussels. It seems at the moment that the Labour party embraces with both arms anything that comes out of Brussels. It is interesting to speculate whether, in the hypothetical event of there being a Labour Administration after the next general election, they would warmly embrace a Brussels directive forcing them to allow private companies to run trains on a contract basis on the rail network. It would be interesting to see how the Labour party squirmed or reacted in response to directives from Europe which the Labour Government did not like for what they argued were perfectly valid philosophical and practical reasons.

At the moment, let us give the Opposition the benefit of the doubt. Let us assume that they have been suddenly converted and have jettisoned principles which they have held strongly for decades. If that is the case, when will we see the same conversion in respect of the students' closed shop and the National Union of Students?

I welcome the Bill. It is the next logical step and I am sure that it will be taken ably by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State as he guides the Bill through the House.

7.20 pm

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): The hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) gave us the historical background to the Bill. I want to remind him, the House and the country of the historical background to the trade union movement.

At one time, we had the Combination Acts in this country, which denied workers the right to join or belong to a trade union. Many workers organised illegally in an attempt to get rid of the Combination Acts; as a result, they were hanged, imprisoned or transported abroad. Eventually the Combination Acts were destroyed, after a long and bitter struggle.

The hon. Member for Thurrock referred to big unions and big labour in contrast to the employers. That was reminiscent of the language used by employers in the United States immediately after the second world war. The unions in the United States were very weak until the new deal initiated by Roosevelt. He gave workers rights through legislation. We had not had rights like that in this country because we did not believe in legislation to organise trade unions. In the United States, workers in unions like the steel workers unions and the automobile workers unions began to organise and the Congress of Industrial Organisations was born.

The CIO can be considered alongside the old craft unions in this country, of which I was a member. We organised because we were craftsmen. Lawyers, who are also craftsmen, ensure that no one other than a lawyer enters that organisation. When I was an apprentice, the craftsmen—as in the United States—ensured that only craftsmen entered a union.

In the United States the employers eventually had to accept the CIO because there was tremendous organisation among industrial workers. I am only too pleased to provide the hon. Member for Thurrock with a lecture about the trade unions. He must be aware that after the second world war the employers in the United States referred to the workers' organisations as though they were stronger than the employers.

At one stage, the Conservatives did a similar thing in this country when they produced a pamphlet called "A giant strength". That was the beginning of the Conservatives' campaign against the trade unions. It contained the nonsensical argument that the workers had immense power even greater than that of the employers. That pamphlet was rubbish. Even with the best

[Mr. Eric S. Heffer]

organisation in the world, the working class and the trade unions were never as strong as the employers' organisations. The balance was always against the workers and trade unions and in favour of the employers. The hon. Member for Thurrock may not like that or agree with me, and that is his right.

Mr. Janman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heffer: No, I will give way in a moment.

The employers have always been stronger than the trade unions. However, the trade unions have always been under pressure, particularly from Conservative Governments. I remember the Industrial Relations Act 1971 under what I must call the Heath Government. I was a member of the Opposition Front Bench at the time, and I fought that legislation every inch of the way. There were arguments then about the closed shop, and the arguments continue today. As long as employers want to use their strength and power against organised working people who want decent working conditions and to live in decent conditions with decent wages, there will always be a struggle for 100 per cent. trade unionism and for the closed shop.

I am upset by the fact that Conservative Members believe that trade unionists want to oppress other workers. That has never been our intention. We have never wanted to place the iron heel on workers' necks because they would not join a trade union. In my time, I have negotiated many 100 per cent. trade union agreements, which people can call closed shops if they like—it does not matter. They were not always pre-entry closed shops, but sometimes they were.

In some cases, Jehovah's Witnesses or members of other religious groups did not want to join the union. Did we say, "Sack them"? Perhaps in some cases they were sacked, but those cases were very few. Trade unionists said, "Right—we are not in favour of sacking those workers, provided that they are not freeloaders going along and getting all the benefits of a trade union organisation. We will make an agreement and they can pay into a charity."

I am sickened by clause 1(b)(ii) which states that it will be unlawful

"To make payments or suffer deductions in the event of his not being a member of a trade union."

That really makes me angry, because that means that everything that I have done over the years as a trade unionist, while accepting that people do not have to belong to a union, will be illegal.

Mr. Eggar: I have been listening extremely carefully to the hon. Gentleman, and in particular to his description of the closed shop as it was. Why has the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) decided that he does not want to oppose the abolition of the closed shop? Why did the hon. Member for Sedgefield not draw attention to the particular subsection to which the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) has referred?

Mr. Heffer: I will come to the point about the social charter in my own terms, and not in the Minister's terms. I do not think that the difference between my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and myself is quite as great as the Minister believes.

Mr. Eggar: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Heffer: No. I shall make my case in my own terms and in my own way. There are differences—everybody knows about them—and I shall speak about them in a few moments. I shall not answer in terms of what the Conservative party thinks, because that is not what I think and it never has been.

Let me explain why we argue for a closed shop. I was an apprentice joiner before the second world war in the south of England. My trade union was not that strong, but, on going to work, my Dad said, "There are two things, lad, now that you've gone to work: take your tea caddy with you and join the union." That is what my old feller said, and he was absolutely right.

I joined the union as an apprentice. On some of the sites, the older trade union members would look round and realise that there was a majority of members of the society—that is what we called the union then—on those sites. They would elect a shop steward, and they would then talk to the other workers to try to get them into the union. On most occasions they succeeded. After that, the union would reach an agreement with the employer and it would tell the employer that, as from then, the site was a trade union one and that anyone working on it had to be a member of the union. Conservative Members may say that that is disgraceful, but what is disgraceful about workers working for the benefit of all workers? The union ensured that workers on the sites enjoyed proper trade union conditions and decent pay.

We never had one worker set against another. We were working for the benefit of all that was why we organised other sections of workers and got a federation steward on the job. The National Federation of Building Trade Operatives meant that trade union organisation on the sites was 100 per cent.

Mr. Janman: The hon. Gentleman has spoken about workers not being set against one another. Does that mean some workers were allowed to disagree with the hon. Gentleman and other workers who shared his views?

Mr. Heffer: I have always agreed with people disagreeing with me—whether in favour or not, that has happened. I am in favour of people disagreeing, as that is the essence of democracy. The day that such disagreement ends and we impose our view on other people is the end of democracy. We do not need to go into that argument, as most people know where I stand.

I believe that trade union organisation is the essence of democracy. We fought for the right to have the democratic organisation of trade unions. We were part of the Chartist movement. We were the ones who argued for the right to vote and the right to belong to a trade union. My fellow trade unionists and I represent the essence of the trade unionist movement and the essence of democracy.

The forefathers of Conservative Members fought against our rights, and they should not try to give us lessons about democracy. We do not need any lessons about that, because we understand it only too well. That is why some of us fought from the very beginning for the rights of Solidarity and of others in Poland and elsewhere in eastern Europe. We did so because we believe in a democratic basis.

What is even more worrying than the provisions in the Bill relating to the closed shop are those relating to

unofficial strikes. I have never said this before publicly, but I believe that I have only been on official strike once in my life.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): That was a mistake.

Mr. Heffer: Exactly—because it was an inter-union dispute. I was the steward at the time, and I was told by my executive to pull my workers out because we did not agree with a certain trade union. I said that that was daft, but the executive said that it was instructing me, so I told the lads to go out. There was also a dispute at the Cammell Laird shipyard called the "screwy" strike. I was about to be elected as a full-time official, but I opposed that strike, and my vote went down the drain. People said that I was standing up against their interests.

All the other disputes in which I have been involved related to important worker rights, and they were unofficial. Some of us in the trade union movement have had experience of officials who were almost Conservatives. They never wanted to do anything when it came to the working people. We had to tell them to do something, and we fought for the right of workers to take action.

Imagine working in a bad shop that was full of fumes. Imagine that one had negotiated with the employer for years about getting some machinery to get rid of those fumes so that one could work in decent conditions. I can imagine the day when a number of such workers would say, "That's the end. We have had enough and we're not working here any longer." By walking out of the gates, they are taking unofficial action. Those workers would not ask the executive of their union about it, as it would no doubt say that it was still negotiating. The workers would be right to say, "Never mind that: we're working there and we can't tolerate it any more."

If a shop steward is wrongly sacked, there will not be a great argument about it. The workers will merely say, "We voted for him and we will defend him." That is what happens. That is what unofficial strikes are about. It would be stupid to say that every unofficial strike is right, but workers must take such action sometimes.

Do Conservative Members think that workers like losing their wages? Do they think they like going home to their wives and saying, "I'm sorry, lovey. We're on strike. We'll get no wages at the end of the week and we won't get any dole money. We won't get any money from the union either"? That strike might last three or four weeks. Do Conservative Members think that their wives are understanding and say, "That's all right, love—carry on"? Not likely. I have received a lashing of the tongue sometimes because of unofficial strikes, and so has the average worker with two or three kids. They take such action because they cannot accept the conditions any more.

If the Bill is passed, it will be the equivalent of industrial slavery. It will force workers to do things that they would not normally do because they will be afraid of losing their jobs. They will lose the right to go to the tribunal—they will lose the right to do anything. That is the essence of the Bill. It is the worst piece of class legislation that we have ever had. We have had five nasty pieces of legislation, but this is the worst. They have all been bad, and I have opposed every one of them, as I will this Bill.

Hon. Members have a right to know where I stand about the position adopted by my Front Bench colleagues. I believe that they have been somewhat misled by the European social charter. I do not want to be tied to that charter. I do not believe that any of us should be. I say, "When it is good, support it; when it is not so good, don't support it." That is my view. It is a simple, straightforward working-class view. I say, "If it benefits us, I am all in favour of it, but if it doesn't benefit us, don't support it." Conservative Members support little in the social charter because they think that most of it is in our favour. I think that all the bits that they do not like are worth while, and I am very much in favour of them.

The report of the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Communities dealing with the social charter, provides a synopsis at paragraph 8(v):

> "Freedom of association and collective bargaining. This involves the right to organise trade unions and to choose whether or not to join them".

There is not too great a difference between myself and my hon. Friends on the Labour Front Bench about this. I am not denying for one moment that there is a difference, but we all agree that Conservative Members put their emphasis not on the right to organise, but on the right not to be in a union. The Bill gives the right to be an anti-trade unionist. The Bill gives rights to a whole bunch of people who will undermine the trade unions. That is where Conservative and Labour Members differ on this issue. I accept that we should have the right to organise into trade unions; they put the emphasis on the right to choose to do so or to choose not to do so.

I return to the point about the United States of America. I once won a scholarship to go to the United States of America to study the trade union movement, and that is what I did. It was interesting that, particularly in the southern states, there was legislation called "the right to work". In fact, it was anti-trade union legislation which stated that people did not have to belong to a trade union. In the states that had such legislation, workers' wages and conditions of employment were far worse than in the states that did not have such legislation. That is why I am not in favour of this aspect of the social charter.

I believe that my hon. Friends are misled on this issue and that they have got it slightly wrong. I am asking them to rethink this matter. However, I am delighted about one thing: we are all opposed to the Bill and shall vote against it on the Second Reading. I shall join my hon. Friends wholeheartedly in that.

7.42 pm

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): The speech of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) followed a familiar pattern. I have heard him speak on industrial relations on many occasions. Sometimes he raised the temperature high, but sometimes it was much lower. The hon. Gentleman mentioned United Auto Workers of America and trade union practices there. I shall deal with that point a little later; it relates both to the Bill and to my constituency.

As has been said, the Bill follows its predecessors in employment legislation in trying to get as fair a balance as possible between management and trade unions. In many ways, it is a furtherance of the step-by-step approach. However, as has also been said, the European social charter is now elbowing its way onto the scene. British industry should be encouraged to note that the social charter clearly recognises that progress in industrial relations should always take account of national priorities and obligations, arising under national regulations.

[Mr. David Madel]

Therefore, there is a clear recognition that we have a different history of trade unionism and industrial relations in this country compared with our European counterparts. The preamble and more detailed comments of the social charter on industrial relations take note of that.

There has been a considerable change in trade union attitudes during the past decade. However, since the Bill was published, there has also been a simple query by management, which takes the form of the question, "Do we really need any more changes in the law? Is it not our job to manage better?"

Clauses 1 and 2 can be described as the "helpful-access-to-employment" clauses. They are a firm demonstration of the Government's good intentions to make it as trouble free as possible for someone to find a job, be he or she a member of a trade union or not. We must look at that in relation to what is happening in the economy. The job vacancies position is starting to look shaky. High interest rates are still with us and at best we can expect a neutral Budget in March. I hope that, when the Bill is enacted, unemployment benefit offices will go out of their way to explain to people that there are new and welcome protections for individuals who are out of work and who need every encouragement and opportunity to find alternative employment.

The most contentious part of the Bill is that relating to unofficial strike action and to what can be done about it in employment law. The background has been the same throughout the past 10 years. Most strikes in this country are unofficial and do not last very long. However, even if they are of only a short duration, their effect can be considerable. Twenty-one years ago, Donovan recognised that, stating:

"Unofficial strikes . . . will continue until the confusion which so often surrounds the exercise by management of its 'rights' has been resolved by the settlement of clear rules and procedures which are accepted as fair and reasonable by all concerned."

In other words, 21 years ago Donovan wanted a better understanding of what is expected of each employee when he or she is at work.

We must ask two questions about the proposals relating to unofficial action. First, will the democratic authority of elected trade union officials be strengthened? We have changed the law to ensure that such authority as trade union officials have must come through the ballot box and through democracy. Secondly, by writing to their members repudiating such action, will trade unions be effective in ensuring that the dispute is quickly solved?

The Bill goes into considerable detail on that point. The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) has already referred to clause 6, which sets out a new subsection (5A) in section 15 of the Employment Act 1982:

"The notice given to members . . . must contain the following statement—

'Your union has repudiated any call for industrial action to which this notice relates and will give no support for such action. If you are dismissed while taking unofficial action, you will have no right to complain of unfair dismissal.'"

In my view, that statement is far too blunt. We must include in the Bill a provision to ensure that the union refers to what it is doing to help to solve the dispute and whether it is seeking immediate outside help to resolve it and to get people back into normal working.

The clause deals with people who are members of trade unions. If we are to say that the union must send out that sort of letter to ensure that it cannot be had up for not taking sufficient action to stop the dispute, we should require the trade union to say more to its members, who may be taking unofficial action, about what the union is trying to do to get the dispute solved. I say that not least because if it is clearly stated in a letter that the union is bending over backwards to get the dispute solved, there is every possibility that the unofficial action will quickly end. In previous Employment Acts we have done all that we can to involve individual trade unionists in the conduct and affairs of their trade unions.

I now refer to two instances where there could be serious consequences if the wrong decision is taken on unofficial action. Privatised electricity is about to be launched. So far, the electricity industry has had a long history of extremely good industrial relations. Every effort has been made by the unions and the management of the industry to ensure that the employees are properly consulted and, above all, to ensure that, even if there are arguments between unions and management, the supply of electricity is uninterrupted. Already Mr. John Lyons, general secretary of the Engineers and Managers Association, has issued a warning. He hopes that when the new owners take over they will not exercise macho management techniques and introduce practices that have not hitherto existed in the electricity supply industry. Once these private companies are operating, they should take the greatest care before implementing this part of the Bill.

I want also to refer to the railway industry. Hon. Members have already mentioned unofficial strikes on tubes. The management have said that their consultative procedures were probably not right and that they may have been out of touch. We should all like rapid movement towards a single union in British Rail. Given the extent to which we shall depend on British Rail in the next 10 years, there should be enough confidence in security of employment for management and unions in that industry never to find that unofficial strikes have started due to a lack of understanding of what either management or trade unions have been trying to do to improve conditions in the industry.

Over the past 10 years, the Government have spent a great deal of public funds on management education. The latest figures available state that in 1987-88 more than £2·5 million was given in the form of recurrent grant to the London business school and £1·6 million to the Manchester business school. That is a good use of public money—to improve management education.

We should now be thinking about what we can do to extend management education to the shop floor. The purpose of management is to improve relations within a company and to make it more profitable and sensitive to markets, so there is surely a case for extending public funds to improving the education of those on the trade union side. After all, they are also in the business of making the company more profitable and sensitive to the market—and of ensuring that the general good of employees is continually enhanced. As we move into the new decade, we should think of ways of improving training opportunities for shop stewards, who play an important part in the running of their firms.

In the business section of *The Daily Telegraph* today, my hon. Friend the Minister of State refers to failures in business and pointed out that it is often lack of

managment expertise that causes businesses to go under. The lack of that expertise is also often the cause of industrial relations not being what they should be.

What can be done to promote a more constructive role for trade unions in the 1990s? What can be done to make them feel more a part of our improving industrial society? First, trade unions in certain industries should merge into single unions. The hon. Member for Walton mentioned the car industry. I dream of the day when a united autoworkers union exists in this country. We can debate ad nauseum what went wrong in Dundee, but one of Ford's problems was the unions there could not speak with a single voice.

By the middle of this decade there will be over-production in the car industry in Europe, and some plants will have to close. Let us ensure that plants in this country do not close. It is imperative that unions in the car industry merge into a single union; that will be better for their members and for the industry. If that proves impossible, I hope that they will at least speak with a single voice in the next decade and beyond. So often, upsets in the car industry have resulted from unions being unable to agree among themselves.

The unions' slogan used to be, "A fair day's pay for a fair day's work". It should now move on to be, "A generous day's pay for complete flexibility of working practices." If we are to ask that of the trade unions, we must ask something of employers, too. As it stands, the Bill could provide certain employers with an opportunity for doing rash and unwise things in industrial relations. That is why the Bill needs thorough scrutiny in Committee.

We have made great progress in industrial relations in the past 10 years. I only hope that this Bill is not a Bill too far. It is up to the Committee considering it to make sure that it is not.

7.55 pm

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): This certainly is a Bill too far. What concerns me about industrial relations legislation under this Government is, first, that there has been far too much of it and, secondly, that it rarely has anything to do with the promotion of good industrial relations. This Bill is no exception to that rule. It purports to be concerned with economic efficiency and individual freedom, but, in fact, in common with all its predecessors of the past 10 years, it is entirely born out of the narrow prejudices of the Conservative party.

If Tory Members really cared about individual freedom, that care would have to extend to views that did not necessarily coincide with their own. But it does not. If it did, staff at GCHQ would be freed from the political strictures imposed on them by the Government. How will they fare under clause 1, in terms of the right to belong to a trade union? While it is a refreshing change to see such a right proposed in Tory legislation, we all know that it is a right not to belong which the Government will promote and encourage.

With certain exceptions, I could live with the inclusion of this section of the European charter in British law, provided that the rest of the provisions of the charter were included, along with the important right of union members to be represented by their union. There is no point in being a member of a union unless a person has the right to be represented by the union to the employer.

Provided that we successfully amend clause 1 in the way outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), I do not believe that it will pose serious threats to union membership. After all, virtually outlawing the closed shop has had little, if any, effect. One hundred per cent. trade union membership shops still continue. The reason is that people know the value of union membership. If anyone working in a factory or shop did not know that value he would only have to read the Government's Green Paper, "Removing Barriers to Employment", which clearly showed that in closed shop employment, wages were anything between 10 and 30 per cent. higher than those elsewhere. So there is some value in a closed shop, and workers should realise that. When the Bill leaks out, closed shops will be springing up throughout the country.

More important, workers will recognise the value of trade unions when they get into trouble with their employers. Many hon. Members on both sides have had the experience of constituents coming to their advice surgeries with a problem connected with work. I will bet that Conservative Members ask the same first question as we do, "Are you a member of a trade union?" Nine times out of 10, the answer is no. They come to the surgery because they are not members. If they had been, we all know that they would not have needed to come, because the union would have resolved their problem.

I repeat the point made earlier: if membership or non-membership of a union is no longer to be relevant to the recruitment of labour, and if it is to be illegal for an employer to take into account membership or non-membership when selecting applicants for a job, the holding of information on people by anti-union organisations for the specific purpose of influencing their employment prospects should be not only irrelevant but no longer legal. I hope that the Government will be forced by their Bill to concede that point. If one result of the Bill is to put a stop to the sinister activities of the Economic League and the like, we will welcome it, although it will undoubtedly come as an unexpected, unintentioned and unwelcome surprise to Tory Members.

During the passage of the Employment Act 1988 we opposed the creation of a Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members, or CROTUM for short. That would be a rather unfortunate acronym if we ever got a senior commissioner for the rights of trade union members. We opposed the office on the grounds that it was unnecessary, provocative and expensive. As it turns out, we were right on all three counts.

The budget set for the functioning of that office was £1·5 million a year. The commissioner has taken up 31 cases, some of which were of doubtful validity.

Mrs. Mahon: Not very cost-effective.

Mr. Clelland: Exactly.

However, the commissioner has had to justify her existence and salary, as we predicted. The provisions in clause 8 demonstrate how badly she has failed even to manufacture enough work to justify her existence, to say nothing of her £1·5 million budget. To avoid an embarrassing admission of wasting public money, the Government decided to help her by extending her responsibilities and building her empire. We would welcome an extension of the responsibilities of the

[Mr. Clelland]

commissioner if it allowed trade unionists to refer to her their complaints about their employer, not just their union but, again, that does not appear to suit Tory dogma.

The post was designed in the first place to harass trade unions by encouraging action against them. The further provisions in this Bill are clearly intended to encourage further mischief and harassment. No other organisation has the dubious distinction of having a special commissioner paid for by the taxpayer with the express purpose of supporting actions against it. Such is the extremity of the Government's prejudices.

By far the most objectionable aspect of the Bill is the intention, once again, to weaken the hand of the employee and to strengthen the hand of the employer. The proposals on secondary and unofficial action are reminiscent of the totalitarian eastern bloc Governments who are now on the wane, and display ignorance or carelessness or both on the part of the Tory party.

Unofficial action is usually a spontaneous event, inflamed by a sudden happening and of short duration. The Green Paper, "Unofficial Action and the Law", cites the case of a manager attacking an employee physically, which resulted in a walk-out by colleagues. The Green Paper then assumes that the fault lies with the employees, not the manager, whereas it was the manager's action which gave rise to the situation and the subsequent loss of production. Under the Bill, those workers are liable to be sacked lawfully by that same manager, with no right to redress for unfair dismissal. Where is the justice or even-handedness in that?

If that is not bad enough, the trade union to which the workers belong will be open to prosecution by the employer unless it repudiates the actions of its members, although it may believe that their action was justified in all the circumstances. Such one-sided, draconian measures have no part in modern industrial relations. They can lead only to inflammation of otherwise resoluble incidents. They will, as all perceived injustice does, cause anger and resentment, possibly leading to ugly confrontations and irreversible damage to industrial harmony.

The Green Paper makes much of the lost production caused by unofficial action. It states that an annual average of 3·6 million days are lost through all industrial action. No figures are given for unofficial action. I want to be generous to the Government's case, so I shall estimate that 2 million days are lost in that way. It is probably an exaggeration, but it helps their case. Are the Government seriously suggesting that those 2 million days lost pose such a massive threat to the economy? We have only to examine the statistics to find out.

At present, the work force is about 25 million people, which is equal to 125 million working days every five-day working week, or 5,750 million working days in a 46-working week year, if we are generous and assume six weeks' holiday. On those figures the number of working days lost in unofficial strikes amounts to less than one thirtieth of 1 per cent. of the total working days. That is what paragraph 1.2 of the Green Paper describes as a

"substantial amount of unofficial action".

Paragraph 1.1 suggests that the elimination of that will make a

"vital contribution to the improvement of our economy."

What rubbish.

If the Government are concerned about the effect of the number of working days lost on the economy, why do they not turn their attention to the 10 million days lost every year through accidents at work? Why not promote good working conditions and good working practices to reduce that figure which is more than 250 per cent. of the number of days lost through all industrial action? No, this Government have presided over a worsening situation in that regard. Indeed, they have even suggested that the imposition of further regulations could be a barrier to business or employment.

If the Government are motivated by damage to the economy caused by days lost from work, why do they not turn their attention to days lost through sickness, which total 300 million a year, which is nearly 100 times the number of days lost by all industrial action? Why do they not improve health screening and health education, invest more in our ailing Health Service or even pay the ambulance crews?

In short, if it is the health of the economy which motivates the Government to examine days lost from work, why do they ignore the major causes and attack the most insignificant in terms of numbers? The answer is that this has nothing to do with the economy. The complete elimination of all industrial action by chaining workers to their desks and benches would hardly register in terms of the totality of working days in this country. The elimination of strikes under such a system, however, would probably be used by Tory Members as evidence of good industrial relations.

This is about the use of Parliament, not to improve the welfare of people or to improve industrial relations, but to pursue unceasingly the political opponents of the Tory party until, as the Prime Minister put it, her main political opponents are "abolished" and Britain becomes a one party Government and she becomes the Ceausescu of Chequers and the dictator of Downing street.

While the call in East Germany, the USSR, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Poland is for the promotion of free, independent trade unions able to take both industrial and political action—the latter even applauded by the Prime Minister—in Britain, the state is busy shackling the unions and restricting the very freedoms so eagerly sought in the East. In tandem, while the cry in the East is for freedom of political action and expression, in Britain the Government are introducing legislation which creates politically restricted posts in public office so that people are denied political freedom if they are to keep their jobs. Solidarity trade unionists in Poland now have more freedom than trade unionists in Britain.

The Bill is further evidence of the totalitarian tendencies of the Government. It does nothing for freedom, industrial relations or the image of life in Britain in an increasingly free world. It should be decisively rejected by all those who cherish the freedoms for which our country fought so hard, and in the fight for which the trade union movement played such a principal part.

8.8 pm

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): This has been an extremely interesting debate. It has highlighted many of the serious and real differences in attitude between the Opposition and the Government on industrial relations. The most interesting speech, because it was the clearest

and represented most significantly the traditional Labour view of industrial relations, was that of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer). I should like to rebut some of the elements in his speech.

One's attitude towards priorities in industrial relations and the industrial scene as a whole inevitably depends on one's experiences. The hon. Gentleman described his experiences as a shop steward in Liverpool. Equally, each of us must look at what formed our opinions. I had the good fortune to become involved in industrial relations law soon after I qualified as a solicitor which was when the Trade Union and Labour Relations Act 1974 came into force

For many years, I have been actively involved with Conservative Trade Unionists, and I am now its vice-president. Since coming to the House in 1983, I have served on the Committees of most industrial relations Bills. I hope to serve on the Committee of this Bill, so I shall leave detailed comments on its provisions until then. This evening I want to deal with the strategy behind the Bill.

Much of the debate thus far has been a recitation of history and how we have arrived at our current position. If we put back the timescale far enough, I would be in broad consent with many of the points made by Opposition Members. If there is no alternative to collective bargaining for someone on the shop floor to enforce his rights, obviously that is the right way forward. I do not think that anyone who has been faced with the cases described in times past would deny that as a basic proposition. The difference between my view and that expressed by many Opposition Members is that I believe that there have been dramatic movements forward in recent years. The Opposition's rhetoric always goes deep into distant history, to the communal memories spawned by the 1930s and before; they then carry those forward to present—day circumstances, even though the reality is quite different.

There has been a great sea change in industrial relations, which began not in 1979 but with the ill-fated Industrial Relations Act 1971. The one part of that Act which survived, and which has been of fundamental importance, was that relating to unfair dismissal. Anyone reviewing the industrial developments since 1945 must recognise that one of the great difficulties was that industrial action disrupted industrial production and that many of those industrial disputes related to dismissal. A consensus evolved during the late 1960s in favour of a statutory framework of law to deal with individual rights, and the relevant provision in the 1971 Act has stuck.

I do not think that many Opposition Members appreciate the extent to which the introduction of really important individual rights would fuel the appetite of workers on the shop floor for more rights, or the growing competition that it created between the exercise of those individual rights and the concept of collective action. The unfair dismissal provisions, once they had been assimilated, had one immediate and dramatic impact: whereas dismissals leading to strikes had been commonplace, they became a relative rarity. They have had an even more important and profound impact in that they have shaped the way in which companies have developed their procedures for management. I clearly remember many employers in the 1970s talking of unfair dismissal and echoing almost to the letter the words used tonight by Opposition Members about the role of the law in dealing with strikes. They said that it was impossible to bring the law into industrial relations, that it would not work, that it would be too complex, that it would be a benefit match for lawyers and that no discernible benefits would flow for industrial relations.

I have always argued, and I see no reason to take a different view now, that unfair dismissal rights and the other individual rights that have followed have created an alternative to bringing out a work force on strike to protect an individual's position. It meant that companies, once they understood the regulations, could steer a route through what was previously an industrial relations minefield. The number of applications to industrial tribunals for unfair dismissal have fallen significantly, and the number of strikes caused by dismissal has completely fallen away. I accept that there was a time when the law was unclear, but once people addressed themselves to what the law required and to the route that they had to follow in disciplinary matters, the whole industrial relations scene improved significantly.

The provisions in this and in previous Bills relating to strikes, the circumstances in which they can take place and the manner in which they can be conducted will have precisely the same effect in signposting a route for industrial action that means that it does not happen at the drop of a hat but is considered action that carries a great deal more weight because it is clear that it has the support of the shop floor.

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): I have been following the hon. Gentleman's remarks. The issue of unfair dismissal was not first highlighted in the Conservative legislation of 1971. During the 1966-70 Parliament, I introduced two Bills under the ten-minute rule to set up tribunals to deal with unfair dismissal.

Mr. Batiste: The hon. Gentleman should read *Hansard* tomorrow. I acknowledged that the development of unfair dismissal rights evolved from a consensus that was by no means confined to any one party. That probably explains why it was the one part of the 1971 Act that stuck and that had such a profound impact in the years to follow.

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central) *rose*——

Mr. Batiste: I shall give way, but there will be less time for other hon. Members to speak.

Mr. Watson: It is important that the record is set straight. The hon. Gentleman said that the number of unfair dismissal cases being taken to industrial tribunals had been significantly reduced. However, that is the result of the way that the legislation has changed. When the Conservative Government took office, claims could be made after six months. That was then lengthened to one year and then to two years. Fewer people now have the ability to make such claims, which is why the number has been significantly reduced.

Mr. Batiste: The hon. Gentleman should study the figures, as I have done. The main reason why the number of claims for unfair dismissal has fallen is that, when the legislation was new, many employers did not know what was expected of them, many decisions to dismiss were taken arbitrarily and many were procedurally incorrect. With the development of experience of what was

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permissible within the law, the incidence of successful findings for unfair dismissal has diminished because of the dramatically improved procedures throughout industry.

The development of the unfair dismissal legislation has signposted the way in which the rule of law within industrial relations can have a positive effect in showing routes that actually work, that minimise industrial disputes and that are of lasting industrial benefit. That will carry across, in exactly the same way, into clearer legal definitions of strike action and of the circumstances and the manner in which such strike action can take place.

Even more important than the immediate results of that change has been the way that it has encouraged a new approach to industrial relations and the rights of individuals on the shop floor. One of the growing disputes between the Opposition and the Government has been the way in which the interaction between individual rights and collective action should function, when many aspects of individual protection that hitherto had no redress in law are now met by the law. That is a considerable problem for the Labour party because, inherently, it is about collective action, whereas protection of individual rights is very much associated with the Conservative party.

It has been said several times during the debate that the Bill is a turning point in the step-by-step approach to industrial relations reform. I agree, but I hope that it is not an end to the programme. Most of the 1979 agenda that Conservative Trade Unionists presented to the Government has now been enacted. The closed shop will now end. However, I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to recognise that there are closed shops that exist by law but that there are also closed shops that exist by intimidation by a number of employers.

I should like my right hon. and learned Friend to address the situation in respect of certain local authorities where every conceivable step is taken to force people into joining a trade union. Those closed shops are just as much a fact of life as are legal closed shops, and I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will not lose sight of that fact.

It has been said that we have come to a turning point in the step-by-step approach. We must look to the future and recognise what has to be done to build upon the things that we have achieved. The step-by-step approach has been very successful in changing industrial relations attitudes. Indeed, it has changed the whole industrial relations environment. Our approach to legislation now is not just to look back at the 1979 agenda but to recognise that in 1990 things have changed. We have to look forward to the last decade of this century and the first decade of the next century and to reflect that approach in our attitudes to legislation on trade union reform and on industrial relations reform in general.

How can the individual rights that I have described grow and gain even greater strength in the context of trade unions? I believe that in two important respects we have to go further—going with the grain of individual rights. I hope in Committee to table amendments dealing with both points, so I will refer to them only very briefly tonight. First, there is the question of trade union mergers. I am not sure that I agree with the comments that were made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr. Madel). In the United Kingdom the current trend is towards large general unions, to unions breaking away in cases of dispute, to considerable growth in non-TUC affiliated unions, and year by year to contraction of TUC-affiliated unions.

If the individual industrial rights that have been created are to grow and prosper, we must create a competitive framework within the trade union world in which they can operate. I agree with the many hon. Members who have said that, thus far, the need in the United Kingdom has been for the merger of unions. Even now there is a need for further mergers, but all the evidence from around the world of the tendency of organisations to move towards monopolies suggests that, if the process continues without check, we will move towards a relatively small number of very large general unions that are relatively remote from their members. I question whether that is a healthy or sensible way to proceed. The necessary corollary of individual rights is that there should be choice against which people may exercise their judgment and that unions should be responsible and responsive to what their individual members say.

At this stage, we ought to be considering whether some legislation comparable to the companies legislation on monopolies and mergers should be put in place. I make no recommendation as to what that should be. The use of the commissioner in this role may be the best way forward, but it would be better to look at this issue before the realities of the industrial relations world force it upon us. If people are to have real choice, they must be given real options.

That leads me to the second area which my right hon. Friend should consider. I refer to the anti-poaching provisions of the Bridlington agreement. I shall not take up the time of the House by quoting the regulations——

Mrs. Mahon: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is the hon. Member addressing himself to the Bill? It seems to me that, in talking about the anti-poaching provisions of the Bridlington agreement, he is going into the question of some future Bill about which he is thinking.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Bill is very widely drawn, and I think that the hon. Gentleman is in order at the moment.

Mr. Batiste: I am grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Clause 1 refers to the right of people either to join or not to join trade unions. The point that I am making is quite simply that that choice is inadequate; people must have the option also to join the union of their choice. It is in that respect that I propose to table amendments for consideration at Committee stage.

Let me refer to two examples that were widely quoted in the press last year. Airline cabin staff approached the British Airline Pilots Association with a view to joining because they disagreed with the attitude, philosophy and tendencies of the Transport and General Workers Union. The Bridlington agreement was invoked, and the cabin staff were barred by the Trades Union Congress from membership of BALPA, despite the fact that that union would have been quite happy to accept them.

A similar case that achieved widespread publicity related to shop workers—members of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers—who disagreed fundamentally with the position that their union had taken on

Sunday trading and wanted to join GMB. USDAW approached the TUC and blocked the transfer of its members to GMB.

If individual rights are to mean anything, it will be in circumstances in which individual members of a trade union in disagreement with their union over policy have the right to transfer to a union that more accurately reflects their hopes and aspirations. That is not an anti-union point. I believe profoundly that competition between unions for members is the most effective way of implementing change in a rapidly changing world.

As we have seen all too often, the difficulty about unions is their very slow response to change. We have seen this in relation to flexibility in working practices, and we have seen it in relation to single union agreements. Dundee has been mentioned many times today. The essential way of speeding up that process of change would be to give to individual members of unions rights similar to those that exist for consumers of services of any other kind.

The Bridlington principles would not be allowed to exist in respect of any other aspect of British industry, and I question whether they should be allowed to exist in the context of trade unions. However, I agree fully with the comment of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) that the necessary corollary is that demarcation dispute strikes must be made unlawful.

I have argued this evening for a way of enhancing the framework in which healthy competition for members is an engine for union change. That that change is needed is not in dispute. I believe that it is not disputed seriously even by members of the Opposition. Industrially, we are moving into an era of collaborative management because the successful companies will be the ones that handle their industrial relations well. Bad industrial relations will drive out incompetent companies—and quite properly so—but the corollary of collaborative management is skill and flexibility on the part of unions—skill and flexibility based upon the sure knowledge that they are carrying their members with them without coercion because those members agree with what their unions are doing and can see that it is individually to their interests to follow.

It is therefore with considerable pleasure that I welcome this Bill and the substantial completion of the 1979 agenda. However, I urge upon my right hon. Friend the necessary corollary, which is to look forward and see how we can build upon the successful foundations that have now been laid.

8.28 pm

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): I see, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the tradition of the 1980s is being carried into the 1990s: when I am called to speak in the House, it is usually because you are in the Chair.

Other hon. Members on the Opposition side wish to speak, so I shall be brief. However, I reserve the right to deal in Committee with lots of matters that have been referred to today. I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) is not in his place, as I would have congratulated him on accepting voluntary redundancy from the Cabinet—though on more generous terms than are enjoyed by most people in industry.

The reality of this piece of legislation is not so much the Secretary of State's argument about tyranny and about freedom. Indeed, it is rich, in the first place, that it should come from the Minister who introduced the poll tax legislation—one of the most tyrannical and unfair pieces of legislation in this century. His speech was all about the freedom of employers to take action against trade unionists and unions—not so much a step-by-step approach as a bit-by-bit attack on trade unionists and their organisations.

The Bill is really about undermining the ability of unions to secure excellent working conditions, proper training, the right to collective action, and the facility to work alongside union officials when taking official or unofficial action. The Bill is also aimed at prohibiting unions from operating in areas where trade unionism has hitherto not been strong.

As a result of Britain's employment pattern in the late 1980s and in the 1990s, unions are looking to non-traditional areas for their membership. The Government are attempting to prohibit the extension of trade unionism in that way. The Bill is not so much about closed shop arrangements as about the ability of management to manipulate trade unions, by crippling their ability to organise in the workplace.

In many debates over the past few years, the Government have often spoken of the principle of a level playing field. They used it in relation to private sector housing, the balance between public and private transport, deregulation of old people's homes—when they gave subsidies of about £1 billion to make it easier for people to open homes in the private sector—pensions provision, and even refuse collection. That principle of a level playing field has been introduced in every area except industrial relations, where it would give people the right to take action individually and collectively to protect themselves.

The Government abolished the fair wages clause, and they have an abysmal record of vocational training. The Government also abolished wages councils so that young, unskilled and disabled workers can easily be exploited. The only bodies capable of preventing that were the wages councils, but the Government chose to destroy them.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McCartney: No, I shall not do so—not least because the hon. Gentleman has not been present in the Chamber the whole evening. I prefer to allow other right hon. and hon. Gentlemen to speak. On any other occasion I shall be happy to debate with the hon. Gentleman his unfair attitude towards trade unions and working people. We have heard it all before from him, and I do not intend to hear it all again this evening.

The Government have also restricted worker representation at tribunals. Whereas they introduced measures allowing employers to take trade unions to court, unions wishing to take employers to court are severely restricted by Government legislation. Under the present Government, 10 million working days have been lost through industrial injury, yet the resources of the Health and Safety Executive have been reduced time and again. At the same time, no legislation exists to protect workers against unfair dismissal.

The Government's training schemes are the biggest scandal of all. Young workers live in a twilight world of low wages, little or no training, exploitation, and virtually no health and safety provision. That is the Government's record of level playing fields in industrial relations.

As to responsibility for unofficial action, I shall give three examples of workers legitimately taking action to

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protect themselves and other workers that would be the subject of crippling penalties under the Bill, were they to be repeated in future. Twelve months ago in my own constituency, two workers at a factory collapsed with heart attacks caused by zinc poisoning. Attempts by the work force to persuade management to bring in the Health and Safety Executive and the alkali inspectorate to take action about the conditions in the factory were rejected. The workers walked out for their own safety. Within 30 minutes of taking that action, they were sacked. Under the Bill, workers taking similar action will find themselves hauled up before a court by their unscrupulous employer.

So far this year, five workers have been killed on the Channel tunnel construction site. Despite efforts by the trade unions and the Health and Safety Executive, the employers have done little to improve safety. Under the Bill, Channel tunnel workers taking unofficial action will render their unions liable to unfair court penalties. On some sites it is necessary for workers to take action against sub-contractors for reasons of health and safety. Again, under the Bill, unions will be liable for any such action.

I refer also to the National Union of Seamen members working for P and O Ferries who took action after the bow door incident because of the company's appalling safety record, and who were summarily dismissed. They were fighting not for increased wages but for their safety and that of their passengers on the Channel routes. The Government will also make such action illegal.

A fortnight ago, the British Leyland Volvo manager jetted in to Manchester airport from Sweden and informed the work force that 400 of them would be down the road in 14 days. Later that day, union members took action in support of their right to negotiate their redundancy terms. I presume that under the Bill, those members individually and their union could be taken to court.

I refer also to sexual harassment at work by unscrupulous employers and—unfortunately, on occasions—by other employees. A female who walks off the job to escape sexual harassment and to prevent some pervert from continuing to molest her could be taken to court along with her trade union if the very employer guilty of molesting her decides to take that action. Such cases are not isolated. I know of a young girl who was molested by her employer. Her mother came to me because the girl was too frightened to report the matter to the police or the Training Agency. She was too frightened to speak out because that job was her only hope of employment. Any union taking unofficial action over sexual harassment of its members will also be liable to court action.

The Bill is a tacky piece of legislation and the latest in a long line of Government activities designed to undermine trade unionists and their unions. Intellectually, the Government find trade unionism incompatible with the type of society that they wish to create. They want to see in the 1990s a society in which young people are on training schemes or in low-paid work with no opportunity to organise themselves and to take collective action to improve their working conditions and health and safety at work.

When the Minister winds up, it will be useful if he replies to the telling points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) about blacklisting and the Economic League. If the Government are serious about individual and trade union rights, the Minister will give a promise that the Government will introduce amendments to the Bill to outlaw the activities of organisations such as the Economic League.

The Minister does not need to look far for evidence. Its blacklist includes myself and other right hon. and hon. Members. I was on the dole for three years because of that organisation's activities after I organised an attempt to secure trade union recognition. I could not find a job in the industry in which I had been working.

Organisations such as the Economic League are a blot on our democratic society and should be outlawed. I hope that the Minister will reassure the thousands of workers who are unfairly blacklisted and who may consequently lose their right to work, not just for a few days or weeks but for year after year because of such eastern European, Stasi-type organisations. Their days should be numbered, and the Minister can ensure that they are by amending the Bill in Committee.

There is much to be done in Committee, and if the Minister thinks that he will get off lightly, given the attitude of Conservative Back Benchers and Opposition Front Benchers, he has another think coming. We shall welcome the opportunity to use the Bill to test the Government's intentions in relation to individual trade unions rights, the European Community and the wider role of trade unionists throughout Britain. We shall table positive amendments to improve the Bill, and to test the Government: let us hope that the Minister is not found wanting.

8.40 pm

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): I am pleased to see the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) in his place. He is the storm trooper of the unions, and he and I have debated the issue once or twice in the past.

I apologise for having been absent for about an hour and a half this evening; I had a long-standing arrangement to participate in a debate on the Broadcasting Bill in one of the Committee Rooms upstairs. At one stage, members of the audience were asked to raise their hands if they worked in broadcasting—in other words, if they had a vested interest. A number raised their hands, and several of those then spoke in favour of their industry.

I could do the same here: I could ask Opposition Members to raise their hands if they were sponsored by a trade union. Some 50 per cent. of Labour Members are sponsored by unions, and it is therefore in their interests not to go against the arguments of those unions and not to allow their power to be diluted. I do not object to hon. Members having such vested interests; I make the point only to put into context Labour's opposition to any moves that the Government make on the trade union front.

As we know, it was the last Labour Government who effectively enshrined the closed shop within employment law, and it was the abuse of that legal entity by over-mighty and over-powerful trade unions that—more than anything else—encouraged my interest in politics. Then, as now, I regarded the closed shop as a gross infringement of individual rights, and I welcome the Bill as another of the extensions of basic human freedom that have been behind so many of the Government's actions over the past 11 years.

I also welcome the Labour party's apparent conversion to the belief that people should be free to make up their own minds whether or not to belong to a trade union. I believe, however, that that conversion is only skin deep, and that it owes more to electoral considerations than to a genuine change of opinion. Just as the Polish people would be wise not to trust the new, as yet unnamed, successor to the Communist party that was proclaimed over the weekend—because the new players in the new party will no doubt prove to be the old players in the old party, with the same Communist beliefs—so the British people would be wise not to take at face value the supposed conversion of Labour to the primacy of individual rights over collectivist trade union action.

At least a number of Opposition Members are honest enough not to go along with the sham propounded by their Front Benchers. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) on making their beliefs entirely clear in an early-day motion. They believe that the closed shop should exist, and I have no doubt that the vast majority of Opposition Members feel the same: they help to remind us that a streak of authoritarian trade union collectivism is alive and well in the Labour party.

The House may be amused to learn about the *Morning Star's* approach to the issue. I understand that Opposition Members occasionally read that organ, and even make occasional contributions to it. On 11 October last year, the paper described

"the three-pronged attack on workers' rights".

It continued:

"The labour and trade union movement has to take up the challenge. The further attempt to screw down working people must be resisted all the way."

It is interesting to contrast that with what the paper had said on 3 October, under the headline, "Soviet MPs legalise right to strike":

"Soviet MPs passed a law yesterday legalising the right to strike except in key industries including power and rail.

It is the first time in Soviet legislation",

the *Morning Star* blandly reported,

"that the right to strike has been enshrined.

The exceptions—which include also civil aviation, city transport, communications, defence and law and order bodies—were clearly regarded by practically all deputies as necessary in the present grave economic situation . . . According to the new law, it will be up to the courts to decide whether a strike is legal or not after it has been declared.

What on earth would be the reaction of the *Morning Star* if the British Government had, for instance, declared all transport or telecommunications strikes illegal? That is a clear demonstration of the hypocrisy of the political Left in this country.

One wonders whether anything has really changed, and whether the Labour party is really no longer in the pockets of the trade unions. Labour would end the sequestration of trade union funds, thereby making it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for courts to collect fines imposed on trade unions. It seems that Labour is still prepared to allow secondary picketing, and perhaps—who knows?—mass secondary picketing at that. We must remember that the party is financed largely by unions, and therefore cannot really afford not to do what it is told by them. I found the performance of the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) extremely unconvincing, and I do not believe that he or his colleagues have experienced a conversion at all.

I warmly welcome my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment to his new role; I hope, however, that he will forgive me if I contradict his reported comment on his appointment, that this was likely to be the last Employment Bill. A number of significant improvements remain to be made to employment law. The Bill would not, in fact, make the closed shop illegal, although it would make it unenforceable.

My local council, Kirklees metropolitan district council, currently has a union membership agreement—that is, a closed shop—with five trade unions. Nothing in the Bill would force Kirklees to tear up that agreement. While I would not expect it to try to enforce the agreement—I say that rather optimistically, but none the less in good faith—it would still be there for the trade unions to use when trying to persuade, cajole or mislead non-union employees to join the union. In such circumstances, many people tend to join just for a quiet life, and are not prepared to go to a tribunal, as the Bill would require.

Mr. McCartney: Give an example.

Mr. Riddick: I can give the hon. Gentleman an example. Constituents have approached me about the problem and have asked for my help and support. I was able to point out that Kirklees council is unable legally to enforce a closed shop agreement.

Let me give the hon. Gentleman another example of people acquiescing in such circumstances. That is what happened after NALGO's strike last year.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I am sure that my hon. Friend knows that Kirklees Labour council members became involved with the unions above the heads of their employers to ensure that the union closed shop agreement was introduced ahead of Government legislation. Those poor workers were forced into unions, although the vast majority of them did not want to be union members.

Mr. Riddick: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend. He knows a good deal about Kirklees council. He lived in Huddersfield. When Labour party members hammered out the agreement with the trade unions, they did not bother, even once, to talk to individual trade unionists and ask them whether it was what they wanted. They talked to the trade union leaders but not to the individual members.

After last year's strike, individual NALGO shop stewards cajoled and threatened a significant number of NALGO members who did not strike in an effort to persuade them to leave the union. That directly contravened section 3 of the Employment Act 1988. A number of such cases have gone to industrial tribunals. Compensation has been awarded against NALGO. However, the majority of people, when so requested, have acquiesced.

People find it difficult to put their heads above the parapet and take their case to a tribunal. They have never appeared before a tribunal. Even if they have a cast-iron case, they are reluctant to take it to a tribunal. They opt for a quiet life. We may have to tighten the closed shop legislation so that unscrupulous employers—in particular, some Labour-controlled local authorities and intimidatory trade unions—cannot exploit the loopholes that will certainly exist, even after the Bill becomes law.

Those who feel that they have suffered discrimination at the hands of a closed shop employer should have the right to ask the Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members to provide advice and assistance. I draw to the attention of the House a letter that I received today from

[Mr. Riddick]

some people who are very concerned about the provision that employers should not discriminate against individual people because of union membership. Mr. Pollard and Mr. Bruce say in their letter:

"Our lives centre around the Lords' Supper and the Scriptures which contain many references to Masters having direct relationships with their employees . . . and the need to be separate from other associations . . . Consequently we do not employ members of trade unions or professional associations, likewise we do not join employers associations, nor do we negotiate with these bodies . . . we would appeal for provision to be made so that we might be able to continue with a clear conscience in this way. If the Government were hesitant about providing a general conscience clause, perhaps a provision at tribunal stage could be considered".

A few of my hon. Friends intervened during the speech of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment. He said that he would consider the point. It certainly deserves to be considered.

One abuse is not tackled by the Bill, which I understand is still fairly widely practised. Union members in a number of industries, notably the docks, demand to see a lorry driver's union card before he is allowed to unload his cargo. I have received a number of complaints from the managers and employees of transport companies. They have complained bitterly that they have to belong to a union, usually the Transport and General Workers Union, if they are to obtain contracts as hauliers. I am not sure whether such a practice is covered by the existing employment law. If it is, the law needs to be strengthened and more clearly defined, since this gross abuse of trade union power continues.

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service has an important part to play in industrial disputes, but its terms of reference have not changed since the Employment Protection Act 1975. That Act placed a duty on ACAS "of encouraging the extension of collective bargaining." That means the encouragement of trade union membership. The role of ACAS should be wholly neutral. The reference to encouraging the extension of collective bargaining should be struck out.

The 1990s will see markets both in this country and worldwide becoming more open and competitive. It is vital, therefore, that all sectors of British industry should operate at maximum efficiency and with the minimum of restrictive practices. The public sector should no longer be sheltered, as it still is, by over-powerful unions and managers without the tools to tackle the problems. Britain's rigid labour market is characterised by central bargaining and traditional systems of pay negotiations that do not properly reward individual performance. That stifles new methods of working and attempts to improve productivity. The dispute in the ambulance service, together with last year's dispute on London Underground and on London buses and British Rail, are classic examples.

Changes to the way in which these organisations are run will come about as a direct result of policy decisions and management implementation, but it is likely that such changes will not be brought about unless more liberalising reforms in the employment law are introduced in the years to come.

The Bill is another important step in this Government's brilliantly successful step-by-step approach to reforming the industrial relations law. The changes have been brought about in the face of relentless and often venomous opposition by the Labour party. The reforms have played a highly significant role in Britain's economic and industrial regeneration during the last 11 years. I fear that they will not be the last reforms that will be necessary if we are to be fully competitive with our industrial competitors. However, I am delighted to add my strong support for this Bill to that of my colleagues.

8.57 pm

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): I am not a supporter of mandatory closed shops and I am not a sponsored Member of Parliament. However, I come from a community which has always had a high trade union membership because its members believe in the principles of trade unionism. Compunction to join a trade union is always a poor second to the desire to belong to a trade union because of what it stands for.

I am deeply concerned about and unhappy with certain clauses, especially clauses 6 and 7, which extend the liability of union members in tort of certain actions. Trade unions have a constructive role to play in society and they have played that role even in the most fractious of industries. Certainly in the past decade there has been no more fractious industry than the coal industry. Yet in my experience the management in the coal industry, like that in many other industries, prefers to deal with the representatives of a disciplined and organised work force than with a work force that displays anarchy and is willing to take action wherever and whenever it feels like it.

Trade unions, from their national executives to individual shop stewards, frequently play a most constructive role in the production process. Unions are and always have been part of the disciplinary machinery of large sections of British industry. I am sure that some Conservative Members understand that role—I wish that more of them did. They will also understand that even the most disciplined trade unionist may find himself or herself carried along by the sheer force of events, whether inspired by a perceived injustice or by any one of a thousand combinations of circumstances. Clauses 6 and 7 seek to discover and punish scapegoats in those cases.

The Minister knows that the right to strike is an individual and not a collective one. He knows that trade unions give the individual right to strike practical application. Trade unions were forced to allow combinations of individuals—free-born men and women—to band together to help redress the imbalance that dominated industrial relations.

For most of this century, legislation by Governments of all political shades has recognised the role of those in trade unions who are chosen by their fellows to act as spokespersons and local organisers—a task which is frequently difficult and thankless and requires more than a little personal courage as well as ability. One of the most astute and courageous trade union leaders this century was the late Will Paynter, whose analyses of industrial relations in the late 1960s led him to be criticised as frequently by the so-called Left as by the self-proclaimed Right. He once told me in the midst of the most bitter and damaging post-war strikes in Britain that, while it can take some courage and ability to order men and women out on strike, it takes infinitely more courage to order them back to work when it looks as though the tactical worth of a strike has become exhausted or redundant.

Clauses 6 and 7 threaten to take away even the fragile protection of existing legislation from men and women who are local trade union officials. The clauses threaten to undermine one of the central pillars of responsible and valuable trade unionism. No one in his or her right mind will put himself forward for a trade union position if, as a result of unofficial industrial action which he may have opposed in the first place, he finds himself at the wrong end of the law.

There may be those in the Government who rejoice at such a prospect, but I fear that theirs will prove an extremely limited prospective, for they will be undermining a central pillar of that often fragile platform on which industrial harmony is based. Ironically, I suspect that any sense of triumphalism which may be evident among the Government will be shared only by the nutters who occasionally surface in the trade union movement claiming that all strikes are good strikes. All strikes are not good strikes, but it makes no sense to use scattergun legislation to control irresponsibility. It will injure and destroy precisely those elements in the trade union movement that bring to the movement a sense of discipline and industrial perspective which all industries and services desire.

Instead of encouraging and enhancing the spirit of democracy and responsibility, the clauses will promote demagogy and anarchy—qualities which have a nasty habit of surfacing within work forces in which a sense of order has been replaced by disillusionment and helplessness. I therefore hope that the Minister will consider again the likely long-term implications of the clauses becoming law.

9.4 pm

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): I am saddened when I listen to Labour Members dealing with industrial and employment matters. I well remember the days of strife when the Labour Government experienced great difficulty in the governance of the land because of problems with unofficial action and discord in industry. That was harmful not only to the Government and the people but to trade union members, who were often used as the tools of extremists. I well remember as a young industrial engineer that often young people who were brought out on strike by extremists were unsure why they were on strike and returned to work after about a week disillusioned about why their leadership had called the strike. I have always welcomed the sensible step-by-step approach of the Government in bringing industrial relations into the 1990s.

I was interested to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick)—as one of his constituents I had the great honour of voting for him when he was first elected to this place—congratulate the Government on introducing the Bill. I recall serving on the Committee which considered the Employment Bill of 1988. Many Conservative Members told my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) and my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) that the closed shop legislation would not be sufficient to deal with the problem.

I cannot understand any hon. Member saying that people should not be allowed to follow their calling because they do not have a trade union card. It is difficult to get into the acting profession or to work in the docks without trade union sponsorship. No Labour Member, bearing in mind the fairness of treatment of individuals, could disagree with that.

Mrs. Mahon *rose*——

Mr. Bruce: I shall continue my speech. I am showing the hon. Lady the courtesy that she always shows me when I try to intervene in her speeches—I am ignoring her.

The closed shop works against the rights of the individual. I was pleased to see the chink in the armour of Labour employment spokesmen when we were debating the social charter. They were willing to embrace not only the right of everyone to belong to the trade union of their choice—as an employer, I have always believed that people should have such a choice—but their right not to be a member of a trade union.

I sincerely hope that the hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) will state the Labour party's policy more clearly than the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), who hedged on the issue. People join a trade union for the extra benefits that membership offers and because it will fight for them. However, one must have the right to say, "I do not want the union to fight on my behalf," or, "I do not like the way that it is doing it." Such a right should be supported by all hon. Members.

Clause 2, which deals with employment agencies, is interesting. I must admit that until I had read the Bill I had not realised that the Government were aware of the abuses that occur. Having spoken to my right hon. and hon. Friends, I still am not sure whether they fully understand those abuses. I ran an employment agency in Yorkshire, and I was extremely surprised to discover that one company—I shall not mention its name as my information may be two or three years out of date and it may have changed its methods—gave trade union membership forms to all those who filled in an application for temporary work. Applicants were clearly told that they could not be taken on by that company unless they became a member of a trade union.

Perhaps that in itself was not so worrying, but there is another side to the story. I was asked by one company to set up an employment agency dealing with drivers. We were told that we would have the co-operation of the trade union involved, the Transport and General Workers Union, as long as we signed up not only every driver we sent to the company as a member of the TGWU—admittedly, that was not too difficult, because most of the drivers wanted to be members—but all our staff.

Even that would not have been so harmful, were it not for the fact that the members whom we were signing up and from whom we were taking subscriptions were not getting any rights in exchange. Negotiations took place between the temporary driver controller and the trade union; there was no real negotiation between drivers and the management of the company. Once the trade union got the money—to my mind, protection money—Bos-Recruitment could send the drivers without harassment from the rest of the trade union.

I submit that that was a harmful way for a trade union to use its rights. By all means let the union ask for rights to organise my temporary drivers if it was prepared to give those drivers their negotiating rights, but it was not interested in that. It was interested only in the money that it could take from our company in return for giving us an

[Mr. Bruce]

okay—the assurance that it would not cause us any problems provided that we signed up all our people. Clause 2 is an interesting and long overdue clause.

Clauses 4 to 7 will help to prevent unofficial industrial action. People tend to say that the Bill is an employer's charter and helps only employers. But often it is the ordinary trade unionist whose life is ruined—the person on a low income who lives from one pay cheque to the next. He is the person likely to suffer most. Often companies involved in a dispute cannot help such workers. They find that some form of secondary action is taking place and they cannot get rid of it. Although the changes in this respect are marginal, they are to be welcomed. The provision that introduced a tribunal to look after trade union members' rights was also a fairly marginal proposal, but, clearly, if even one individual is not being supported by his trade union and needs to take action against it, we ought to support that person.

Clause 12 is interesting, and I am surprised that the Government have not gone further with it. I hope that they will consider the matter carefully in Committee. To my mind, work experience represents an important way of showing schoolchildren what they are likely to encounter when they leave school. The technical and vocational education initiative has allowed schoolchildren to see what the working environment looks like. I see no reason why we should not have work experience for children from the age of five onwards. If there is any stop in law to allowing schools to set up work experience schemes appropriate to children's needs, it should be removed. To say that children may undertake work experience only from the last term of the first year of their GCSE course is to limit their opportunities to benefit from it.

Two of my children are engaged in GCSE courses, one in the first year and the other in the second year. I am aware of the difficulties that face schools with the requirement to fit in all the aspects of the national curriculum and also find time for work experience. Properly supervised work experience at the behest of the school should be available to children at an early age, and I believe that the school and the governors are best able to judge those matters. Many children leave school at 16 or 18 years of age without experiencing a week of real work.

The Bill is good and it follows on from other Conservative employment legislation which has primarily looked after the interests of workers. By doing that, Conservative employment legislation has been good for them and has ensured that there is peace for the employers and for the trade unions. Earnings and productivity have risen as a result of industrial peace. I commend the Bill to the House.

9.15 pm

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): I want at the outset to declare that I am a skilled member of the Amalgamated Engineering Union. I am proud also to be a member of section 1 of the AEU and a sponsored Member of it. I am proud of that for a variety of reasons, but the main one is that it is the most democratic organisation in Great Britain. It sticks in one's gullet to be lectured on democracy by Conservative Members when the Conservative party does not have an ounce of democracy in its ranks.

The hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) said that the Labour party is dependent upon finances from the trade union movement. It will be a wonderful day when the Conservative party publishes its accounts so that the world can see where its finances come from. It will also be a wonderful day when members of the Conservative party vote to elect their party chairman, who is at present elected on the block vote of the Prime Minister.

Because of the constraints on time, I, like my colleagues, will concentrate on clauses 6 and 7 which relate to unofficial action. I was a convenor and shop steward for most of my working life in the ship repair yards on Tyneside. We operated a pre-entry closed shop, but no problems arose from it. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), I found that most of the disputes in which I was involved were unofficial. The employers regularly sought to change the terms and conditions, wages and health and safety arrangements of employees. Our only recourse in response to the employers' action was to walk out of the yards.

Clauses 6 and 7 are based on the Green Paper entitled "Unofficial Action and The Law". The clauses are based on prejudice, anecdotal evidence and, in some cases, sheer invention. Paragraphs 1.4 to 1.9 in the Green Paper seek to paint a horrific picture of Britain in turmoil as a result of unofficial strikes. The Green Paper refers to the coal industry, the motor manufacturing industry, the docks, shipbuilding, construction, the North sea oil platforms, British Rail, London Underground and the Post Office. The suggestion is that turmoil existed in those industries.

Paragraph 1.6 states:

"A broad categorisation of the stoppages covered by the Employment Department's industrial disputes statistics shows that three-quarters of those which could be classified were official."

I tried to discover the truth and I tabled several written questions to the Department of Employment, to which I received answers in December. I asked how many unofficial strikes took place in each industry over a five year period to 1989 and how long those disputes lasted. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment replied:

"The information is not available except at disproportionate cost."—[*Official Report*, 21 December 1989; Vol. 164, c. *449*.]

I tabled another couple of questions, and asked to be told "how many unofficial strikes took place in Great Britain in 1989 . . . the total number of days lost through unofficial strikes in Great Britain in 1989; and what were the comparable figures for the five previous years."

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State replied:

"Separate statistics on unofficial strikes ceased to be published as a regular series in 1981."—[*Official Report*, 12 January 1990; Vol. 164, c. *786*.]

In other words, the Department has no hard evidence about the extent of unofficial strikes in Great Britain.

If the Bill is implemented, it will be the most draconian legislation ever put on the statute book. It will simply amount to a denial of the right to strike in any circumstances.

Why is unofficial action taken in the first place? Some 95 per cent. of unofficial action is caused by employers who arbitrarily change the terms and conditions of employment, arbitrarily withdraw bonus payments, arbitrarily alter health and safety conditions or sack employees arbitrarily. The overwhelming majority of such strikes are settled within two or three working days and they are unknown to the respective union. Frequently, the first that

the union hears about such an unofficial strike is when the district officer is rung up by the employer, who asks him to get the lads and lasses back to work. They frequently return to work on the understanding that the status quo will be reintroduced.

The Green Paper has said that unofficial strikes take place because the proper procedures are not followed. Frequently it is the employer who has not proceeded with the official disputes procedure. What do the Government propose to do in those circumstances? They seek to clobber not the employer but the employee who is seeking to defend himself and his terms and conditions.

If the Bill goes through, clause 7 will be worse than anything that now applies in eastern Europe. The Bill will be condemned by the International Labour Organisation because it contravenes its statutes, but it will almost certainly be condemned by eastern European countries as they move towards greater democratisation.

An employee who is sacked for taking unofficial action will have no right to go before an industrial tribunal. The Bill goes further, however, as the trade union or the work force will be denied the right to take any action to protect that sacked employee. A number of my hon. Friends have already said that that is tantamount to slavery.

If an employer physically or verbally abuses one of his work force, that person and the rest of the work force might respond by walking out. If one of those workers is a shop steward, the employer could demand that the trade union should refuse to acknowledge that action. That power effectively denies workers the right to take such action, because, should they do so, the employer may take his employees to court. A worker who lost his job through the actions of his employer will have no right of recourse to an industrial tribunal, and his union will have no right to take action on his behalf. The union will have no right to protect that worker or his colleagues. Many of my hon. Friends have already said that, as a result of the Bill, our workers will have fewer rights than the workers in any other EEC country. Our work force will be entirely exposed to the actions of the employers.

Mrs. Mahon: My hon. Friend has talked about fairness and about how workers are treated. Two of my constituents have just lost a case for unfair dismissal on the basis that they were casual employees. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Bill would give them the dubious rights that he has just outlined? Does he further agree that such workers will be treated unfairly, having extra duties imposed on them on the one hand, while on the other hand they will not be able to go to an industrial tribunal and to win?

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is perfectly right. The workers to whom she has referred will have no rights whatsoever.

We shall pursue every element of the Bill in Committee. We shall test the Government's integrity, because we intend to seek to table many amendments to ensure once and for all that the Government will be seen by everyone to be an anti-trade union Government.

9.25 pm

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): The debate has been like many of our previous debates on trade unions. Many of my hon. Friends' speeches have been based on their experience, whereas all that we have heard from Conservative Members has been the usual massaging of prejudices and the lunatic fringe—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members may laugh, but we know full well that the Government were running short of Members willing to speak this evening. Indeed, those who spoke in the debate were, even by the Government's standards, those who urge the Secretary of State to go just that little bit further.

We also know that the Bill has almost no role in terms of the industrial relations framework of Britain in the 1990s. Ironically, the former Secretary of State for Employment, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) virtually said as much. Having been the author of the Bill—I shall explain a little later why he was the author—he then sought to explain why he had handed to his right hon. and learned Friend the present Secretary of State perhaps not a poisoned chalice but a slightly leaky chalice, which has little merit in terms of the realities.

Tonight the former Secretary of State began to address some of the issues that he so signally failed to address when he was in government. I welcome him to the Back Benches because perhaps we can now begin to have the kind of meaningful debate with him that was not possible over the Dispatch Box. If the right hon. Gentleman would like to serve on the Committee, Opposition Members will certainly give him a great and sincere welcome.

The Bill owes its existence to two factors. The first is the fact that the Prime Minister, ever spiteful, was faced with a massive deficit in the opinion polls and said to herself and to the former Secretary of State for Employment, "I'm in a hole, Secretary of State, can we not knock the unions once again? We have tried it before in the past 10 years. Can we rattle the same old skeleton once again?" The second factor was the summer of discontent and the belief that political gains could be made from the Government's promises to reform industrial relations, which had begun to come unstuck at the seams last year.

It is interesting that even a magazine such as *The Economist* has advised the Government:

"The government's achievement to date has probably captured most of the gains available through the courts."

I must emphasise that I do not agree with that first sentence, which relates to industrial relations. The article then states:

"Going further could be to sail close to the invisible line where the loss of individual freedom outweighs the good for the economy and society."

I charge the Government on that latter point. Under the Bill, the individual freedoms of our citizens will be so undermined that the Bill cannot be regarded simply as an extension of the previous legislation. In its own right, it is a particularly obnoxious, nasty and vindictive piece of legislation which will do real damage.

It was only when my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) made it quite clear where Labour stood on this piece of legislation that the Government realised that they could not possibly justify being seen to penalise people at their place of work simply because they were members of a trade union. At that point, the Government were bounced into trying to bring in some form of equity. I congratulate my hon. Friend on that achievement. We have already won the first argument in the battle on the Bill.

Sir Norman Fowler: Will the hon. Gentleman accept that what he has just said is wholly untrue?

Mr. Lloyd: In that case the right hon. Gentleman must tell the House why this was not in the Green Paper and why it was only after my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield had made his announcement that the then Secretary of State leapt to his feet, metaphorically speaking, to tell the world—he even advertised it in the *Employment Gazette*—that the Government were falling into line with the social charter.

Sir Norman Fowler: If the hon. Gentleman reads my intervention on the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) he will see that the hon. Gentleman put himself on the hook of abolishing the closed shop. The hon. Member for Stretford (Mr. Lloyd) has said something totally untrue. The House wants to know whether the Opposition are saying that they are opposed to the closed shop and will remain so.

Mr. Lloyd: The right hon. Gentleman knows full well that we are saying that we shall live in conformity with the social charter—the Government are not prepared to do that. They are not prepared, for example, to live with a regime that guarantees people rights at work because they are trade unionists. The Secretary of State was repeatedly challenged in the debate to say whether he would take action against blacklists; he declined to do so. He knows that the ILO has condemned the Government for their unfair practices perpetrated on GCHQ.

Mr. Howard: Will the hon. Gentleman withdraw that allegation? The ILO has not condemned the Government. Indeed, the latest complaint that the TUC put to it has been withdrawn by the TUC. Does he not know that?

Mr. Lloyd: If the right hon. and learned Gentleman reads the ILO's "Observation 1989" he will see that the organisation roundly condemns the Government's action on GCHQ, and on secondary action. I have no doubt that the ILO will also condemn this Bill, especially its provisions on secondary industrial action.

The Bill is even-handed neither on the right to be a trade unionist nor in its treatment of employer and employee. I remind the Secretary of State that one of his predecessors, Lord Prior, made it clear that he thought it necessary to leave in the law what he described as a gateway to legality. If the freedom to strike was not to be rendered illusory, he said, trade union members should have the right to take strike action. Tonight, the Government are trying to close that gateway.

I listened carefully to the Secretary of State's speech and I hope that the Minister of State will tell us what has changed. We have heard no justification—*[Interruption.]* Does the Secretary of State want to intervene? I thought I heard the right hon. and learned Gentleman mutter a defence. I shall educate him a little in industrial relations law.

The Bill is not necessary to achieve what the Secretary of State claimed it would achieve. The Government's previous legislation has already clarified the legality or otherwise of these provisions. This legislation is a fraud if the Minister claims that it has been brought in for these reasons.

The nastiest part of the Bill concerns unofficial action, and we are entitled to ask why it was introduced. My hon. Friends have already pointed out that the Government referred in several ways to the great problem of unofficial action. My hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) has just told us that the Government's claims were bogus. The Green Paper suggested that unofficial action was a uniquely British practice, but neither the Secretary of State, nor his predecessor, nor the Minister of State will tell the House why unofficial action in this country is a different proposition: it is because we have a completely different legal framework. The German legal framework encourages official action, but in this country the legal framework increasingly makes official action more and more difficult. The Government were warned of that. If anything, the surprise is that unofficial action is not more widespread.

The Government may claim that clause 1 gives an individual the right to be a trade union member. What will happen to a trade unionist, perhaps the only one at a place of work, when unofficial action takes place and he is sacked? Will he have any rights under clause 1 to maintain his place as an employee there? The Minister looks puzzled. I hope that he will address that question because we will return to it until we receive an adequate answer.

In the Green Paper the Government argue:

> "The unofficial strike action earlier this year by steel erectors on construction sites in London was not only damaging in itself; it also threatened to undermine the industrial agreement in the engineering construction industry."

Presumably that is the view of Ministers. I talked to the Amalgamated Engineering Union, which organises steel erectors, about the dispute. The union made it clear to me that on each and every occasion it had done exactly what the Government seek to provide in the Bill: the union made it clear to its members that the action was unofficial and not approved of by the union. Its members were under no illusions. The Government prayed in aid that dispute, but what difference will clause 6 make to such a dispute? The answer is none.

During the dispute on London Underground earlier this year, the management said:

> "The management made more mistakes when the first unofficial one-day strikes began in April. Tunnicliffe announced there would be no attempt to punish the ringleaders because he did not want to create martyrs."

Most sensible employers will recognise that the creation of martyrs is ridiculous, but that is far from a universal view.

Mr. Brian Ward Lilley, director of the Institute of Personnel Management, warned the Government that some employers might misuse the legislation. He said:

> "I hate to say this, but there are some managers who could use this as a way of avoiding redundancies: by provoking a strike, dismissing some people then hiring back the ones they wanted, thus getting rid of the few too many."

I challenge the Minister to tell us how the Bill will prevent such action by unscrupulous employers.

I have already challenged the Secretary of State once on this next matter, but I do not think that he understood. I hope that he will reply this time. My hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) raised the important issue of health and safety. Under German legislation, for example, it is not necessary to take unofficial action when equipment is defective or unsafe, because regulations protect employees and allow them not to work until it has been inspected and declared safe or declared unsafe and corrected. In Britain there is no parallel right.

I hope that Ministers understand that: if employees stopped working because equipment was unsafe, it would count as unofficial action. Under the Bill employers are likely to say to the instigators of such unofficial strike, "I

am sacking the troublemakers who brought their colleagues out on strike." Those workers would have no right of appeal.

The Under-Secretary of State was challenged late last year during the construction safety campaign about the rights of employees working on unsafe construction sites. His advice was clear. He told construction workers that they had the right to walk off the job. He incited them to take unofficial action, and I applaud his decision. I challenge the Minister to say whether my interpretation is correct. If I am not correct, I shall withdraw my charge. However, if I am correct I expect the Minister to say that he will accept amendments that will take away that nasty, vindictive and spiteful part of the Bill that will do so much damage not only to individuals at their place of work but to the whole concept of health and safety in our society.

The Bill is not simply a step beyond what has gone before. It has a number of nasty features that will damage industrial relations. Above all, it has nasty features that, in the final analysis, may kill people at the workplace.

9.40 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Mr. Tim Eggar): It has been an enjoyable and interesting debate, not least because of the separate debate on the Opposition Benches, not only between Front-Bench and Back-Bench Members, but between Back Bencher and Back Bencher. The speeches of the hon. Members for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells) and for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) represented different attitudes to the whole question of industrial relations legislation. That added to the interest of the debate.

I much enjoyed listening once again to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler). I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State will not take it amiss if I say that it was a pleasure to hear my right hon. Friend's dulcet tones. However, the highlight of the debate was the vintage voice of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer). During a fascinating perambulation of a speech, he announced that he had been on official strike only once, and that any other industrial action, as a union official, was on the basis of something that we are now making illegal. I was not entirely sure whether he was recommending or opposing the Bill. But it was an interesting comment.

The Bill is our latest stage in our reform of industrial relations legislation. It places the last nail in the coffin of the tyrannical closed shop practices that were actively promoted by the last Labour Government. It is a further reinforcement of the rights of the individual. The Bill will remove legal protection from all forms of secondary action, and so will protect jobs. It will bring unofficial action within the scope of the law, and so improve the climate of industrial relations.

No one seriously doubts that, finally, there is a wide consensus to end the closed shop. As recently as 1984, Tony Dubbins, the general secretary of the National Graphical Association, said:

"To us a closed shop is as natural as getting up in the morning and having breakfast."

The reality is much less homely. In fact, the closed shop is a euphamism for a blatant and outrageous denial of individual rights. It is wholly indefensible in a free society.

The Government have reduced the scope of the closed shop, through successive pieces of legislation. We have already made the post-entry closed shop unenforceable, and now is the time to deny the closed shop any legal status. The Bill's provisions on the closed shop are entirely even-handed. Clause 1 makes it unlawful to deny someone a job because he is not a member of a trade union, and it represents a major step forward for civil liberties.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) adduced two reasons for his concern about clause 1. First, he said that it had a conclusive presumption. The fact is that conclusive presumptions can be made only in two particular sets of circumstances—they do not apply right across the board. Both sets of circumstances apply to the position of an employer. I must say that I welcome the hon. Gentleman's concern for the position of an employer. In both sets of circumstances, the remedy is in the employer's own hands.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield considered the sanctions in these two instances to be extreme—I think "extreme" is the word that he used. I do not deny for a moment that they are severe. They need to be severe, because we must bring an end to the most blatant and most extreme of the closed shop practices. That subsection refers to blatantly discriminatory advertisements and to union-controlled recruitment, such as that at Smithfield market. I cannot see why the hon. Gentleman is concerned about that. If he is genuinely opposed to the closed shop, why is he not opposed to strong action being taken in those two sets of circumstances?

Then the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) referred to the problem—they saw it as a problem—of the Economic League. The hon. Gentlemen know full well that the Economic League does not submit candidates for employment and that employers do not agree to employ only persons that the Economic League puts forward. The Economic League simply supplies information to employers on request from them. If, acting on that information, an employer were to turn an applicant down because of his union membership, the Bill would catch that employer.

The claim that the Bill is not even-handed because it has no effect on the activities of the Economic League is therefore simply nonsense, and unsustainable. The hon. Gentleman's expression of concern about those two provisions is nothing more than a cop-out. He wants to find an excuse for not supporting clauses 1 to 3, despite the fact that he claims to support abolition of the closed shop.

Mr. Blair: Let me repeat something that I said earlier: if the two points that I have made are so small and so feeble, let the Minister deal with them and we will support the provision. Now, will he deal with them?

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman has simply not understood the provisions of the Bill, and has misconstrued the relevant clauses. I very much look forward to debating this matter with him in Committee. Undoubtedly I shall be able to explain to him in considerable detail why he is wrong.

The Bill will close the last remaining loopholes that might permit secondary action. Of course, we know from the Leader of the Opposition——

Mr. Heffer *rose*——

Mr. Eggar: I am talking about the hon. Member's leader, so he ought to pay attention.

[Mr. Eggar]

We know from the Leader of the Opposition that he believes that secondary picketing is "a right that should be enjoyed". The hon. Member for Sedgefield, and the Leader of the Opposition, should recall that there was precious little to enjoy in the 1970s, when secondary picketing prevented food deliveries, blocked hospital treatment, and left the dead unburied. Those were the effects of secondary picketing.

There was precious little for the people of Dundee to enjoy when they lost 1,000 jobs and £40 million of investment because of threats from the Transport and General Workers' Union. The Labour party has never condemned the threat by Mr. Ron Todd. I am sure that it was an oversight on the part of the hon. Member for Sedgefield, who, of course, is sponsored by the TGWU, that he should fail to condemn that union for the disgraceful action that prevented jobs and investment from going to Dundee.

Mr. Heffer: I return to my point concerning the Economic League and similar agencies. The Minister says that they supply names only if requested to do so by employers. If an employer decides not to appoint an applicant, giving a reason other than his trade union activities, but if that is the real reason for his non-appointment, how will the applicant ever know? Such agencies will stop people being employed, and that is not something that the Bill or any other measure can deal with.

Mr. Eggar: I know that the hon. Member for Walton is totally opposed to the position of his hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield, and I understand his concerns about the Bill's provisions. The hon. Member for Walton opposes not only those subsections that worry the hon. Member for Sedgefield but clauses 1 to 3 overall, because he is in favour of keeping closed shops.

Mr. Robert Hughes *rose*——

Mr. Blair *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call Mr. Eggar.

Mr. Eggar: The third main plank of the Bill is the provision that brings unofficial strike action within the scope of the law. All too often, unofficial and unballoted industrial action causes damage and disruption to British employers. The Bill removes the anomaly whereby a union is protected by statutory immunities when a shop steward organises unofficial action even if no ballot has been held.

The Bill will make unions responsible for industrial action caused by any of its officials down to and including shop stewards. No longer will union leaders be able to give tacit encouragement to unofficial strikes caused by any of their officials. The unions will be required to repudiate unofficial action effectively and speedily if they wish to retain their legal immunities. They will retain the option to ballot for an official and legally protected strike. I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Bedfordshire, South-West (Mr. Madel) that the Bill's provisions do not in any way prevent a union from adding words to the notice of official repudiation, provided that those words do not undermine the effect of the repudiation.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Will the Minister give way now?

Mr. Eggar: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman, but I have only a little time left and I must move on. He will have plenty of opportunity to make his points in Committee.

Employers will be permitted selectively to dismiss anyone taking official action, and that will be an important and necessary deterrent—as the CBI has recognised.

The Bill will mark a further major advance for industrial relations. The hon. Member for Sedgefield, with no little effrontery, suggested that the Bill shows that the Government are seeking to refight the battles of the past, but the opposite is true. The Bill is designed to ensure that this country never revisits the industrial battlefields of the 1960s and 1970s. Still less do we want to revisit the trade unionism and attitudes of the 1930s so well described by the hon. Member for Walton. It is clear that it is the Labour party that is stuck in a time warp, for it wants to take us straight back to the rampant trade union power, widespread strikes and industrial chaos of the late 1970s.

When the hon. Member for Sedgefield reads his speech tomorrow morning, he should feel a little embarrassed, because it was all about making it easier to strike and to bring about the industrial disruption that has caused this country so much harm. The hon. Gentleman's message was clear. His message from Labour's Front Bench was, strike long and strike often. He was propounding a strikers' charter. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to deny that, why did he not take up the challenge laid down by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State? Why has he not clearly denied the statement made by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott)—who has been conspicuous by his absence—who said that Labour would repeal all the Government's employment laws?

The reason for the hon. Gentleman's silence is clear: he will not deny his hon. Friend's proposition, because he knows that what his hon. Friend says represents the true voice of the Labour party. If he does not believe me, let him look behind him at all the stern faces of the 35 hon. Members who signed the early-day motion in favour of the closed shop. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East is clearly right: Labour would get rid of all the Government's employment legislation—it would "get rid of the lot".

I sat patiently through the speech of the hon. Member for Sedgefield, but he did not deny that Labour would repeal every last one of the union reforms of the past 10 years. Let me give him another opportunity. Will he now deny that the Labour party will repeal our legislation? Clearly he has not sorted out his little internal differences with the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East.

The fact is that Labour never condemns any strike, however much damage it does to the public. The hon. Member for Pontypridd (Mr. Howells) had the courage to recognise that not all strikes are good strikes; I wish that the hon. Member for Sedgefield would show the same courage. Whatever a strike may put at risk—the rail network, export orders, energy supplies or even the Health Service—the Labour party will always endorse it, encourage it and wish it effective success.

There has been one exception during the past 10 years: Labour's leaders have condemned one strike. You may be as surprised as I am by that information, Mr. Speaker, and I see Labour Front Benchers furrowing their brows, wondering what on earth that strike could be. They did condemn a strike, however; they even—let me whisper it

—supported a management that threatened to suspend striking staff without pay. Who was that ruthless employer? Yes, it was the Labour party at Walworth road, which engaged in a bitter dispute with its own staff from the National Union of Journalists only last August. According to the Labour party, only one employer in Britain should be allowed protection against industrial action: itself. That is the only occasion in the past 10 years when Labour Front Benchers have condemned a strike: what an appalling record.

I have some sympathy for the hon. Member for Sedgefield: he has sat through the debate with little company on the Opposition Front Bench. Where were his shadow Cabinet colleagues? I think that we have a right to know—or at least the hon. Gentleman has a right to know—which of those colleagues told Tribune that his policy was a "gross mistake" and "totally unnecessary". For the hon. Gentleman's sake, will the author of those remarks stand up and be counted? Was it the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East? Was it the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), who seems reluctant to relinquish his old habits and responsibilities? Was it the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who looks thoroughly puzzled? Was it perhaps the Leader of the Opposition himself? Answer comes there none: no one is prepared to own up.

According to the terms of its policy review, the Labour party has ducked the challenge and faked the change. The Opposition oppose the Bill because they do not want union leaders to be responsible for their members. To Labour, a trade union ballot is either an administrative inconvenience or a means of compelling employers to concede to union demands. To us the ballot is an essential democratic right to protect members against abuses of union power.

Question, That the amendment be made, *put and negatived.*

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order (Amendment on Second or Third Reading:

The House divided: Ayes 255, Noes 198.

Division No. 53] **[10 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, W.
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cartwright, John
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Riddick, Graham
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony

Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tom Sackville and
Mr. Nicholas Baker.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ilisley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Allen McKay.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second Time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

EMPLOYMENT BILL *[Money]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Employment Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums so payable under any other Act.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

Milk

10.15 pm

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Welfare Food Amendment Regulations 1990 (S.I., 1990, No. 3), dated 3rd January 1990, a copy of which was laid before this House on 5th January, be annulled.

By these regulations the Government have achieved a rare feat. Few measures have aroused with equal passion the wrath of both the Child Poverty Action Group and the National Farmers Union. This is a mean malicious measure that has been universally condemned, and the whole milk business speaks on it with one voice—producers' milk producers, milk processors, creameries, milkmen, milkwomen and milk drinkers. I am sure that, if the cows themselves could join in, they would, bellowing a chorus of derision and denunciation.

More than 120 Members of the House signed an early-day motion, which condemned this inept and damaging decision to short-change the milk industry. It states:

"this House condemns the decision to reduce the redemption value of welfare milk tokens; is convinced that this autocratic cut will put in jeopardy a beneficial nutritional service to handicapped children, vulnerable nursing and pregnant mothers and their children; believes that it unfairly slashes the precarious income of milkmen and the milk industry."

The decision is based on the Government's failure to appreciate the value of the work of milkmen in collecting and redeeming the tokens.

My normal practice is magnanimously to refer at first to any beneficial effects of legislation, but this time that is not possible because the regulations are damaging in every syllable, and every assumption that they make is wrong. They are friendless regulations, which can be justified only if one believes that the only function of Government is to reduce public spending, regardless of the social havoc that will be caused.

To understand the thinking behind the regulations is not easy. I would ask my hon. Friends to try to perform the mental gymnastics necessary to get down to the primitive protozoan level of thinking at which the Government's corporate brain functions. It is not the brain of homo sapiens—of reasonable humankind; it is the regressive, crude, tunnel-thinking brain of homo Thatcherus. So single-minded has the Government's pursuit of price-cutting and penny-pinching become that they now bargain and cheat with the guile of a stallholder in the souk in Baghdad and with the morality of an Arthur Daley. The Government have decided that there is virtue to be gained by getting good value for money. That is a laudable aim and one that we would all applaud. Big-spending Governments need to be circumspect, especially when they are buying Trident missiles, battle tanks, and jet aircraft. Of course these should come cheaper by the dozen. However, the crude assumption is that all bulk buying must be rewarded with a discount.

The Government certainly buy milk in bulk—£80 million worth. Therefore, they quite illogically deduce that there must be economies of scale. Of course, there would be economies if the milk was sold in bulk by tankers going round to the delivery points. However, that is meaningless in this case because welfare milk is delivered in pints very expensively and slowly on individual doorsteps. Not one drop of it is bulk delivered. There are no economies of scale and no price advantages from bulk purchase.

The regulations will cause a serious financial loss. The Associated Co-operative Creameries knows of some milkmen who deliver 200 welfare pints of milk a week. Under the regulations, that would represent a loss of £42 a week, or £2,184 a year. That could be a mortal blow for a small business.

The Department of Social Security and the Department of Health claim that they are being scrupulously fair and claim that the grief of the cut in milkmen's incomes could be shared with other sectors of the industry through a process of horse trading. In that case, the milkmen would be negotiating from a position of weakness.

The Government will save the not inconsiderable sum of £10 million, but that is a small sum in terms of DSS and Department of Health spending. At whose expense will that saving occur? The milkmen will suffer directly this week, out of their own pockets.

A milkman from the Gaer in my constituency has written to me asking,

"Why should I foot the bill for a welfare benefit? Why should I take a cut in my income in order to provide a service that the Government should provide? This is on top of the taxes that I pay already. What will happen next? Will the Government ask bus drivers to chip in to pay for free trips for pensioners? Will they ask nurses for a whip round to pay for operations?"

The NFU, a friend of the Conservative party, states:

"This is an unjustifiable attempt to force the dairy industry to pay for a national welfare scheme that is primarily in the interests of the nation."

The milk industry suffers from low profit margins. If it cannot absorb the cuts, the loss must be repaid by the customers and the price of milk will rise. That is a familiar story of the Government cutting their costs by shifting the burden on to the milk buyers—the taxpayers.

All hon. Members will be aware that it is impossible these days to have a conversation with small business people without their bringing up their great anxiety that their businesses will no longer shortly be viable because of high interest rates and inflation. Last year there was a record number of small business failures. For many milkmen, this theft of a small part of their legitimate income may be the final straw that wrecks their business.

One of the Government's false claims that has greatly angered the trade is that they have negotiated with the industry on this matter. Negotiation is understood to be a process of bargaining and give and take at the end of which a consensus and agreement is struck. That is not what has happened in this case. The Government have obviously been reading the book entitled, "How to Strike a Bargain" by the late unlamented Nicolae Ceausescu. It is not a consensus so much as a Caeusensus. It is an autocratic act.

The managing director of Associated Dairies in Leeds confirms that there was no agreement. He wrote angrily:

"As recently as January 10th representatives of the dairy trade met with the Minister reponsible to advise her that the changes had been constructed on false assumptions. They were met with a simple refusal to reconsider the decision."

"Change has been imposed", state the master dairymen of London. The Dairy Trade Federation, which represents all first-hand buyers of milk from the Milk Marketing Board, has refuted the claim that amendments came about through negotiations with the dairy industry. It insists that it consistently opposed any proposals regarding the discounts scheme. The Associated Co-operative

[Mr. Paul Flynn]

Creameries in Tyne and Wear state that there has been no agreement and states that the proposed changes are an imposition, not a negotiation.

What will be the outcome of these damaging regulations? Some milkmen with a small number of welfare milk beneficiaries will abandon those deliveries as the continuing hassle of collecting the small number of milk tokens will not be worth their while because of diminishing returns. It is clear that the Government have foreseen that as regulation 9(1) will allow beneficiaries who cannot exchange their tokens for milk to redeem them for cash. That is proof that the Government have anticipated the actions of many milkmen.

The Government's action is also sinister as it may be the start of a process to undermine the welfare scheme. The purpose of that scheme is to provide fine, nutritious food for those in greatest need. I believe that the Government may come back at a later stage to say that the scheme is not working.

Other milkmen will have no choice but to continue with the scheme. I am told that in some areas it is not uncommon for welfare milk to account for between 25 and 50 per cent. of the total round. Such milkmen are in deep trouble as they will be unable to recover the cost from their claimant customers, or abandon that business without inviting swift bankruptcy. Inevitably they will be faced with a crippling new financial loss.

Governments of all colours have long recognised that whole or homogenised milk should be a staple item in the diet of the under-fives and other vulnerable groups. There is a social obligation to ensure that such valuable food reaches pregnant mothers, nursing mothers, children in families whose income is uncertain and families where access to shops is restricted because the lone parent, usually the mother, is encumbered by pushchairs, shopping baskets or her pregnancy. Often such mothers are virtually imprisoned in their homes because of the demands of their young families. The daily delivery of a heavy, essential item of food is a godsend. Now it will be put at grave risk.

The regulations also pose a threat to the daily pinta. The dairy industry has already made a strong case against milkmen being short changed. It believes that milkmen should receive extra money for handling the tokens, especially as it involves a great deal of extra work. The milkman must collect the tokens, collate them, parcel them up and send them off. If there is any loss the milkman must make up the difference. Once the tokens have been despatched, he must wait at least a fortnight to be repaid, and often that results in a cash flow problem. The process is lengthy and cumbersome. The NFU has confirmed that the new procedural arrangements set out in the regulations and the extra records required by the Department will increase the administrative burden at all stages of the process.

Milkmen provide a splendid service by delivering the daily pinta—a service unique to Britain.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Government stand to save about £7·5 million as a result of the regulations? My hon. Friend has given a comprehensive list of our reasons for opposing the new scheme as well as a full list of the organisations and individuals opposed to it. Why are the Government seeking to introduce such a maladroit and vindictive scheme, which will save them a mere £7·5 million? In terms of the Department's total budget, that sum is infinitesimal. Given that my hon. Friend is trying to interpret the Minister's mind, what reasons does he believe lie behind the Government's decision?

Mr. Flynn: It is not for me to delve into an area of psychology that has always been beyond me. I do not pretend to understand the mind of the homo Thatcherus. The Government have tunnel vision, which dictates that they must save money. They believe that that principle, having worked in some areas, must work in all. That is why they have fallen into the trap of believing that, if there is bulk purchase, they must receive a discount. That policy may work in the corner shop, but it should not be adopted by a Government who should have other responsibilities other than merely reducing public spending. The Government have blundered on this because their thinking is fixed on tramlines and they cannot get off them. Certainly there are many contracts in which money can be saved.

All Governments have a duty to ensure that they get the best bargain and the best arrangement, but that is totally unjustified in a case such as this, where the casualties will be vulnerable people. In my experience, reaction to the provisions has been universally hostile. I do not know anyone, other than Government spokesmen, who have seen this as anything other than a calamity.

We must consider the service provided to us by the milkmen. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) that the total amount that has been spent on milk is £80 million and that the saving will be at least £8 million, but it could be as much as £10 million. Milkmen provide us with a marvellous service and are popular people in our society. They turn up in the most miserable weather, and at the most bleakly unsocial hours to deliver a heavy, awkward, essential food to our doorsteps.

The daily pinta is already enjoying a fragile survival, trading on the good will of the milkmen who toil for poor financial rewards. Why do an ungrateful Government insult them and the value of their work by imposing this penny-pinching cut on their small earnings?

Welfare milk tokens are lifesavers. They form a good-value scheme that provides a fine daily nutritional base for 500,000 families in greatest need. The Government are short-changing the milkmen. They are putting the pinta at risk and are sabotaging a welfare provision that has beneficially nurtured two generations. The regulations are miserly, inhuman and unjust.

10.31 pm

Mr. Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): This is a niggardly little piece of legislation. I shall not repeat all that the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) said, but my hon. Friend the Minister has obviously been misled by inadequate, half-baked consultants and has been badly advised by whoever advises him on this matter.

I can see the reasons for saying that there is a huge purchase of this milk and for the Government therefore thinking that there should be some discount, but to do it in this way is short-sighted. The Secretary of State will gain another "milk-snatcher" title if he proceeds with the regulations.

How can we talk about "remote areas" in the press release, but not understand that to be at the top of a high-rise block of flats, with a couple of kids and a husband who is out at work all day, is to be in a "remote area"? How can we say, "You can exchange these tokens for cash", because that is what will happen? People will trade in the milk tokens and buy and sell them. The supermarket will take, say, 15 box tops and six milk tokens and knock the value of them off the bill. The cashier will say, "Thank you, Mrs. Smith, that's £35·72 less £7·80, including the milk tokens", but there might not be any milk in the basket. The Government and my hon. Friend do not care about that; nobody cares except the milk industry. Under this system, we will drive people to swapping milk tokens for cash. We may as well have food stamps that can be sold for cash.

The whole crux of this badly advised, badly constructed, half-baked, consultants' dream is regulation 5. How can we say that people can sell milk for any price that they like, but that a chap cannot charge for going to the top of a block of high-rise flats? How can we say that a milkman cannot say to Mrs. Jones, "I've got to charge you 3p for this", when she may say that she does not want to pay 21p or 42p per week, or whatever it is, and that she will go down to the supermarket instead?

How can our party stop a deal like that? We are in business to do a deal. What if someone says, "I'm not going to pay you 3p for your milk"? It is true that the milkman will be able to charge a general charge of, say, 3p to everybody, but he will be able to say, "You lot don't pay —I'll only charge this lady with the milk."

Are we to have another 50,000, 5,000 or even five civil servants conducting sweeps to determine whether people are charging 3p or 2p to deliver a bottle of milk? We are supposed to be getting rid of that sort of practice.

I know no one in favour of these regulations. I also know no one who does not believe that a small charge for delivery would be reasonable. Regulations 5 and 7 could be amended or deleted to make the regulations more palatable, at the very least.

Some months ago my hon. Friend the Minister and I were wise enough to weigh public opinion on green top milk. We did not receive much help from the Opposition, I may say. Anyway, my hon. Friend and I listened to what the consumer had to say, and we withdrew our regulations on green top milk because we had listened to public opinion. I advise my hon. Friend to do the same tonight.

10.36 pm

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): I shall not detain the House long. The hon. Member for Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson) comes from the part of the West Riding in which there are many small dairies and he understands the issue well. He has made many good points, adding to those made by my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn).

I agree that the regulations should be withdrawn. For the greater part of my time of nearly 30 years in the House I have represented an inner city. Many people in it need welfare milk. This marks the beginning of finding an end to the scheme, which has been with us for 40 years. As a result of a redistribution of boundaries, my constituency now contains many small dairies on the borders of the constituencies of the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) and of my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden). I imagine that we have received similar letters. I want to raise one or two points from letters that I have received from some of the larger dairies.

Associated Dairies, whose head office is in Kirkstall road, Leeds, has written to me to say that towards the end of last year a Minister

"assured the House of Lords that 'There will be provision to enable this reduction to be shared between all sectors of the trade on a voluntary basis'."

That has not been done; there is no such scheme. The letter went on:

"It is now clear that the Department of Health has made no provision for this sharing"

I hope that the Minister will explain that—

"apart from a suggestion to welfare milk suppliers that the cost of the reduction which the Government have imposed, should be shared equally by the milk producer, the milk processor and the milk distributor. Indeed, I believe that the DOH/DSS officials acknowledge that they laid the Statutory Instrument before Parliament after having received advice from officials at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food that it would not be possible under the Milk Marketing Scheme, for the Milk Marketing Board to contribute on behalf of its producers."

What is the point of making a suggestion if it cannot then be implemented? The letter effectively alleges that the Minister misled the other place. That only fuels concern about what has been done to the welfare milk scheme——

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): Before the right hon. Gentleman leaves the point about sharing, has he managed to perceive—I have not—how a producer-retailer can share the cost with anybody when he has no one with whom to share it?

Mr. Rees: I imagine that some of the hon. Gentleman's constituents know a great deal about dairy farming and will also suffer from this.

The other letter came from the managing director, Mr. Blackburn, of a dairy at Wakefield which no doubt serves Batley and perhaps Bradford. He said that even in high-density welfare milk areas, which affect a relatively small number of rounds, the dairy men will be adversely affected. He raised the same point differently. He said:

"Admittedly, the proposal allows the constituent parts of the industry, including the Milk Marketing Board, to negotiate a sharing of the 'grief. Such a negotiation would appear to us to be of the type generally frowned upon by the OFT."

It has been alleged that the other place was misled and that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food could not substantiate the claim made by the Department. Now it appears that the Office of Fair Trading would be against the Government's sharing plans. I leave my case there.

We all know the problems that the dairy industry will face, particularly the small dairy men in the West Riding. The best thing that the Government can do is to withdraw the regulations. The former Minister, the hon. Member for Calder Valley, recalled, "Thatcher, Thatcher, Milk Snatcher". Is that the Government's theme: that money can be saved on welfare milk? The scheme is misconceived and bad. All Members who feel strongly about it will vote against the Government.

10.41 pm

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): One puzzle about the scheme is why it has anything to do with the Department of Health. When the Department of Health and Social Security was dismantled I would have expected

[Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop]

the scheme to come under the Department of Social Security, because it exists to cater for deprived people for whose benefit the original scheme was proposed. This is not primarily for the Department of Health. My hon. Friend the Minister needs to explain why he is sitting on the Front Bench dealing with this matter, instead of a Minister from the Department of Social Security. Clearly, this is in the nature of a welfare benefit.

That cat is well and truly out of the bag when people can cash the tokens in a social security office, not for milk, but for money, almost all of which in many cases will have gone to the bus company which brought them there, especially if they come from rural areas.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): Because of bus deregulation.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: That would have been equally true without deregulation. If people have to get to a social security office miles away it will cost money.

Villages do not have social security offices, nor do many towns. It may not have occurred to officials in London that some parts of Britain do not have social security offices. That is the reality in vast areas of Britain, particularly where there are producer-retailers. They are not to be found in the centres of London, Birmingham and Manchester. They are, by definition, in rural areas.

This is one of the most ill-conceived schemes that I have seen. The sum of money, even gross, is negligible, let alone when net of the consid rable administrative costs. It serves no obvious purpose that the benefit should be taken away. Wise Ministers withdraw ill-conceived statutory instruments when defects are pointed out. That is the fate which should overtake this one tonight.

10.45 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): The broad issues of concern about and the objections to the scheme have been expressed to good effect by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I shall be brief and raise a specific regional point about the impact of the scheme. I hope that the Minister will pay attention and respond to my point at the end of the debate. One of my constituents, Mr. Robert Hosford, who is a retailer running a small village shop on the Isle of Skye, has written to me about the dreadful impact that the revised scheme will have on him. Apart from the additional weighting that has been given to London, the scheme does not adequately take account of the different purchasing costs of milk in different parts of the country. The Minister must appreciate that, for transport and other reasons, the costs and overheads in an area such as the Highlands and Islands are that much greater.

If the scheme goes ahead, the token replacement value will be reduced to 27p per pint. The milk purchased wholesale by my constituent from the local milk board in Dingwall—which is a fair haul from Dunregan—costs 29p per pint. Therefore, small retailers such as my constituent will have to subsidise the Government to the tune of 2p per pint without any profit being made. That is hopelessly unrealistic and quite unworkable. My constituent wrote:

"We were under the impression that these tokens were given to people who were receiving some sort of subsidy, ie either Social Security or Unemployment Benefit to supplement their low incomes. Although the Milk Marketing Board are obliged to take the tokens, it has been left to the retailer's discretion whether he accepts them or not. We now find that if we do accept the tokens and do not supply 7 pints of milk, at a loss to ourselves, we are liable for a fine of £400."

That is a pathetic position in which to place the small retailer. It is typical of what will happen in rural areas. The effect on the Orkneys, the Shetlands and the Western Isles will be even greater because they will have far greater overheads. No proper attention has been given to that matter.

The alternatives that have been suggested by Ministers, for example, that the consumer could use a large store or supermarket, are quite unrealistic. For those living in Dunregan there is no point in looking for a supermarket, as that involves a round trip of 46 miles—quite a journey, and petrol costs would wipe out any benefits.

Officials appear to have been wholly unaware of the diversity in the price of milk throughout the country. It would be wise to withdraw the scheme and think again. It is causing great social concern and direct practical economic concern both to those who are due to be the recipients of the scheme and to those small retailers in rural areas who have to administer it. I hope that the Government will have the good sense to take a step back from what is a quite unnecessary and avoidable brink.

10.48 pm

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): I regret to inform my hon. Friend the Minister that I cannot support the regulations. They are ill-thought-out, damaging, and against the best interests of all concerned, especially those in most need of the benefit. It is a serious disadvantage to many milkmen—who are small business men, the very people whom we supposedly support.

What is even more serious is that it is a long-term threat to the delivery of the doorstep pinta—the retention of which I have campaigned for over many years. The elderly, the disabled and those with small children living at the top of blocks of flats cannot walk to the supermarket or the corner shop to buy their milk. They are the very people whose nourishment we want to encourage. I agree, of course, that the Government should get the best value for money. Obviously, with bulk purchases they should receive a discount. But bulk purchases should mean bulk delivery as well. I expect the Government to look for good value in all its contracts. As I come from Yorkshire, no one would expect anything else from me. But I do not know any housewife who has a tankerload of milk delivered very often. To me, that—not a pint bottle—is bulk.

Obviously the Government want to spend very wisely the £80 million that is involved. We have a responsibility to the taxpayer to make sure that it is spent wisely. But I am afraid that this is not a means of saving money. The 3p discount that the Government propose is nonsense. As we have all been told, there is no agreement with producers and suppliers. Discussions have taken place, but they have been one-sided. Therefore, either the milkmen or the dairy companies will have to stand the discount. Large welfare milk rounds in inner city areas will suffer huge losses—£50 to £60 a week, it has been prophesied. The milkmen who came to my surgery on Saturday say that even in good areas they will lose £10 to £20 a week. It is outrageous to expect small business men to subsidise any Government scheme by such an amount.

As the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) said, Baroness Hooper, in answer to a

parliamentary question in another place on 20 December, said that there would be provision. Where is that provision? At the moment it is not obvious to any of us. It has been suggested that Baroness Hooper misled the House in saying that there would be provision. No one can find it.

Will welfare milk deliveries come to an end? The milkmen are saying that if they do not get a proper price they will have to think very carefully about whether to accept tokens. There is no onus on the retailers to take tokens. If they decide not to take them the whole scheme will be in danger. The idea that tokens could be exchanged for cash is outrageous. What guarantee is there that the money would not be spent on cigarettes or gin? That is not the purpose of subsidising a milk scheme. It is essential that the people in question get nourishing milk, and not other things. The exchange of tokens for cash is not something which the Government or the industry could police; the people receiving the cash could spend it as they pleased.

We are led to believe that this matter was investigated by a consultant. I suggest that a consultant, once he has collected his fee and gone on to his next job, has no responsibility. Perhaps this consultant based his report on what may happen in areas of central London. But central London is quite different from the rest of the country. Milk is usually delivered direct in London by dairy companies. Those companies may be able to make special provision. Certainly in my part of the country the situation is quite different. There, milk is usually delivered by small business men—either people who run their own businesses or people with franchises from dairy companies. The loss to such people would be great.

I am all for Governments spending taxpayers' money wisely and carefully, but this exercise will save only a very small amount and will cause a major upheaval in the very important service of the delivery of milk to our doorsteps. That is my main concern. I suggest that the Government look again at this matter—and do so urgently. Certainly I shall not support the regulations.

10.54 pm

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): It is rather interesting that, so far, not a single hon. Member on either side of the House has been willing to say one word in favour of this measure, and I suggest that it is very unlikely that in the next half hour any hon. Member, except the Minister himself, will defend this decision by the Government. It is absolutely astounding.

In all the literature and statements that they have put out, the Government have talked about negotiation. Negotiation implies agreement at the end of the day. One negotiates in order to reach agreement. But there has been no agreement with the milk processors or with the dairymen, and any suggestion that there has been is completely refuted by a document issued by the Dairy Trade Federation. The federation ends by saying:

> "Finally the Dairy Trade Federation would like to refute the statement, promoted by the DSS, that amendments to the scheme came about through negotiations with the dairy industry. The DTF has consistently opposed any proposals regarding the introduction of a discount system."

Many of the people working in the dairy industry are small business men. The Government tell us—though I never believe them—that they are firmly on the side of the small business man. I have always argued that they are on the side of the small business man's biggest enemy—big business. In my view, it is big business that the Government try to protect.

In many areas, franchises are more and more the accepted way of retailing milk. The people who run franchises have to take out a second mortgage, repay bank loans at high interest rates, rent vans, and pay for relief roundsmen when they fall ill or take a holiday. They should be given proper consideration by any Government, let alone the present one.

A probable consequence of the regulation is that some of those people will go out of business, and that will affect many households. An estimated 650,000 households currently receive tokens, accounting for 800,000 children, so the best part of 1 million children will be affected by the change. The Government may argue that they are not ending the scheme, only changing the way it operates, and that existing beneficiaries will continue to benefit. But will they?

One of the regulation's consequences is that many dairies and roundsmen will, to save costs, be forced to cut their services. One franchise on Merseyside is talking of reducing its labour force by 25 per cent., causing more jobless in an area of existing high unemployment. The Co-operative movement in Skelmersdale may also be forced to make redundancies and to review its delivery services if the scheme goes through. The question of the additional costs burden also arises.

In some cases, as much as 40 per cent. of weekly takings will be affected by the Government's proposals. Even those firms that do not go out of business will suffer heavy losses. Those worst affected on Merseyside will include a Bootle franchise that currently takes 260 tokens valued at £546, so that that small firm will lose £54·60 per week. A franchise in Huyton collecting 250 tokens valued at £525 will lose £52·50 weekly. Another in Toxteth, a poor area of Liverpool, takes 180 tokens valued at £378 per week, so it will lose £37·80.

There can be no argument but that that loss will be shared by the Government, and the Milk Marketing Board has already stated that it does not wish to deviate from the selling price agreed with the federation. Perhaps the Minister has some influence with the Milk Marketing Board, but it appears that the full burden of the change will fall initially on the back of the retail milk trade.

Ultimately, those of our constituents living in poorer areas will suffer, because many milk delivery services will end. It may be said that they can make their way to the supermarket, but many are old and disabled. Moreover, that would leave the scheme increasingly open to abuse. Milk, like bread, is used by supermarkets as a loss leader for other products, and there is nothing to stop them from using milk tokens for other supplies: indeed, that is probably happening already. The only way in which we can be certain that value for money is being obtained—that the tokens are being used for their intended purpose—is to ensure the continuation of a viable retail dairy facility.

There is a further social aspect to doorstep deliveries. For many old or disabled people, they provide a point of contact with the outside world. I am aware that milkmen are not there to act as social workers, but I know of at least one case—and there have probably been many others—of an old or disabled person being found very ill. No one has visited for days and days; it is the milk roundsman who finds that Mrs. Jones is unwell. It is not, of course, the

[Mr. Robert N. Wareing]

Minister's responsibility to provide that social service, but it is there none the less, and many people will miss the contact that it provides.

People who do not receive milk tokens will suffer as well. For one thing, the loss of a delivery service in a particular area will hit the general customer as well as the milk token customer; indeed, in some cases it will be the general customer who bears the cost. In many impoverished areas poor Peter will be paying poor Paul, subsidising a scheme that should properly be paid for by the Government.

This is a penny-pinching regulation. When the Government talk of achieving better value for money, what do they mean? Do they mean better value for the customer? Certainly that cannot be so. Do they mean better value for the milk roundsman? That cannot be so either. Do they, perhaps, mean better value for the Government? I suggest that the real reason for the debate is that the Department—like all Government Departments—has been faced with a diktat from the Prime Minister. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has said, "Here is the public expenditure survey: look at the high interest rates and the balance of payments, and tell me whether we can afford tax cuts this year. You had better do your share and come up with an idea that might save a little money here and there."

I do not think that £8 million is worth it, and I think that the general public—the electorate in all our constituencies—will be up in arms as the regulation starts to take effect, as it apparently did yesterday. There is time for the Government to reconsider, though, and I hope that what has been said by hon. Members on both sides of the House will show the Minister that he must do so. If he has not the authority to deal with the matter tonight, I suggest that he promise a review of the scheme's impact in three to six months' time, and undertake to enter into proper negotiations that will produce an agreement with the trade unions and other interested parties.

11.3 pm

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): It appears that the result of tonight's debate is a foregone conclusion, as the regulations that we are discussing were introduced on Sunday 28 January. That opinion is shared by my milk-delivery constituents, who wrote to me on 26 October 1989 opposing the proposals. When I wrote on their behalf to the Department of Social Security asking for clarification, my letter was forwarded to the Department of Health, as that Department was now responsible; only today did I receive a reply. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will agree that a wait of three months is unacceptable.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Will my hon. Friend give those dates again, please?

Mr. Stewart: I wrote to the Department of Social Security on 26 October. I have received a reply today.

The welfare milk scheme, introduced in 1945, has benefited millions of children. Milk—nature's natural food—cannot be bettered. I welcome the Government's commitment that the scheme will continue. Milk roundspeople in my constituency feel that the proposed 10 per cent. reduction in the value of the tokens will come solely from their business operations, yet the Department of Health stated that, following negotiations with milk producers' organisations, wholesalers and retailers, each would bear about one third of the total cost of the reduction. Why should milkmen complain if that were the case? They believe that the Department of Health is naive in thinking that milk wholesalers will be willing to buy milk tokens at a higher price than they would obtain if they surrendered them to the milk token surrender unit.

There are further consequences to consider in my constituency if the regulations are implemented without a guarantee that the price reduction will be shared equally. My constituency is made up of small communities. Delivery costs, therefore, are high. As some dairymen receive 15 per cent. of their income from token sales in poorer areas, they may have no choice but to cease operations.

If there is a reduction in the number of milk rounds that are willing or able to accept tokens, recipients of tokens will be forced to go to the shops where tokens are frequently accepted for goods other than milk. An increase in that practice would undermine the scheme and what it purports to achieve.

The Department's argument, that procedural changes will make reimbursement simpler, is unsubstantiated. I am told that the additional records that would be required by the Department would increase the administrative burden on all processors. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will assure us that he will review the workings of the regulations in a few months to ensure that they are working as he suggests and that the price reduction for milk tokens will be shared equally and not exclusively by milk roundsmen.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have now heard enough from hon. Members on both sides of the House to convince me that the scheme is flawed. Would it not be helpful if we were now to hear the Minister's explanation of why the scheme——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. That is not a point of order. When the Minister rises and seeks to catch my eye, that will be the appropriate time for me to consider whether he should be called.

11.7 pm

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): I wholeheartedly endorse all that was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn). The regulations will strike at the heart of a balanced system which, on the whole, has worked well and has been appreciated by those who have received the milk. The milk provided by the scheme for many of these people guarantees that they have some nutritious food. Anything that adversely affects the milk supplier must also affect the future viability of their involvement in the supply of welfare milk.

I am sponsored by the Co-operative movement. I am well aware of the commercial impact that the regulations will have on Co-operative and other milk suppliers. The scheme costs £80 million per annum. The Government are trying to save £8 million. The Co-operative movement, reflecting the philosophy upon which it was founded, is also concerned about the commercial implications of the Government's proposals and the well-being of the users of

the scheme. We have not been told why the Government have decided to make an arbitrary 10 per cent. cut. They have given no rational or logical explanation for it.

The hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) referred to what happens in Scotland. The difference between the cost in London and that in the rest of the country is due to higher costs in the London area. Surely the Minister must be aware that in Scotland, in Wales and in many rural parts of England costs must be higher because of distance and terrain.

A letter from a civil servant to suppliers states that in certain circumstances, such as when a supplier has very high distribution costs, a higher reimbursement price will be paid. That seems to be the status quo. I join the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye in asking for some clarification from the Minister about whether that applies to Scotland and whether it will continue as nothing in the regulations makes that clear.

The Government boast about the free market. Usually, Conservative Back Benchers do, too, but tonight it seems to be only the Government. They boast about the free market and then abuse their position by imposing the idea of a discount without any rational justification for reaching the level of that discount. Surely it is infantile to suggest that the Milk Marketing Board will volunteer to take a share of the cut. The Government know full well that the board will not offer to take a share.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is the view of the dairy associations that under the milk marketing scheme it could be illegal for them to implement the cut?

Mr. McAvoy: Yes. A letter from one of the Co-operative organisations about sharing the grief makes it quite clear that if the Milk Marketing Board were invited to share the grief, it would certainly be a different sort of grief if Oftel were involved in those considerations. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point.

There is no bulk delivery and no guaranteed continuity of supply. The Government quote a free market philosophy, but use their power to fix the market. That is despicable, particularly when it is used against small business men.

Occasionally Conservative Members have accused Labour Members of being too closely associated with clause four of the Labour party constitution. I am quite sure that tonight's vote will demonstrate another clause which is continually the refuge of Conservative Members trying to dodge responsibility for their actions. It is the suitability clause—"never mind the principles, the policy or the people, just do what suits us". That is the clause that many Conservative Members will follow tonight when they troop through the Lobby to support the Government.

The selling price of the milk must be a matter for individual dairy companies in open competition. The Dairy Trade Federation believes that the imposition by legislation of a fixed national discount will greately impede the viability of the welfare milk scheme.

I believe that the measure is the start of the death by a thousand cuts of the welfare milk scheme. It is the Government's first step towards getting rid of the scheme. They can hardly find £2 million or £3 million here and there to cope with this, but I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House believe that it is the beginning of the end for the scheme, and that is disgraceful.

11.13 pm

Mr. Christopher Hawkins (High Peak): I realise that time is short and I shall be very brief. I can save time by saying that I am sad that I cannot support the Government and I agree with the views expressed by my hon. Friends the Members for Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson) and for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock).

I have been asked by my constituents to put three short questions to the Minister. First, why should the small dairies in my constituency carry the cost of a national welfare benefit? Secondly, why give milk tokens at all if the benefit will not be spent on milk as the tokens will be cashed instead? Thirdly, where did we find the imbeciles who have recommended such a crazy scheme?

So far everyone who has spoken has been against the measure and all outside bodies that made representations to me or to anyone else I have talked to also oppose the measure. If the Minister does not withdraw the measure tonight, despite the unanimous opposition, what does he think is the purpose of this Chamber?

11.14 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): It is clear that the scheme has been ill-thought out and shoddily proposed. As hon. Members have said, it was implemented yesterday, yet tonight we are debating the regulations for implementing it. That is completely the wrong way to legislate.

The comment of the hon. Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) that the scheme has been shunted from the Department of Social Security to the Department of Health came as a surprise to me. I thought that the Department of Health was the big-spending Department and was not involved in pound pinching or cuts. The Under-Secretary of State for Health may say that he needs this money to settle a current industrial dispute, but I cannot believe that that is the reason. The Government have a budget surplus of £20 billion, so why do they need to save £7·5 million through this scheme?

The scheme has been going for 40 years and is dependent on one-man businesses. I have received a letter from John Healy, a milkman in Wortley, which says:

"I collect around 30 Tokens a week which is about £63. I am writing to object in the strongest manner to the way this issue has been handled without any consultations or consideration to its effect".

That is precisely the point. The most vulnerable groups in society—single parents in receipt of family credit with children under five, the long-term unemployed and pregnant women—are provided with the benefit of the weekly token. The Government say:

"The entitlement of beneficiaries to welfare milk is not affected by this change"—[*Official Report*, 24 January 1990; Vol. 165, c. *714*.]

That was said in reply to a question tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies), so we are entitled to say, "Their entitlement may not be affected, but from where will they pick up their entitlement?"—because this will mean the end of the doorstep delivery.

The dairies have said that there can be no economies of scale. Associated Dairies wrote to me saying:

"Welfare milk is provided pint by pint to individual households and costs the same to distribute as other milk."

[Mr. John Battle]

Milkmen will refuse to deliver welfare milk for tokens. As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) said, the cost of the change cannot be passed down the chain. Can the Milk Marketing Board legally pick up the tab for the change?

We are debating a pound-pinching measure. We should be concerned to preserve one of the great British institutions—the doorstep pinta. Conservative Members resisted EC proposals to get rid of the doorstep pinta, yet this proposal will have the same effect if it is passed. I urge the Minister to give us a last-minute reprieve.

11.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Roger Freeman): Three major concerns have been expressed by Labour Members and by my hon. Friends, who spoke forcefully and with great authority in this brief debate. They were mentioned initially by the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) and were touched on by my hon. Friends the Members for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) and for High Peak (Mr. Hawkins). In the short time available, I shall seek to answer not only their concerns but the other points that were made.

The first concern was whether the regulations would damage the welfare milk scheme. The Government do not intend to harm the beneficiaries of the scheme. We do not intend to add to the burdens or diminish the value of the scheme; there is no hidden agenda to remove or modify it.

The second concern was that the regulations will place an unreasonable burden on the milkman. We do not seek to place a burden or inequitable share of the discount on the milkman.

The third concern was that £8 million is an insignificant sum. That is equivalent to about £40,000 per district health authority, or three extra nurses. The money comes out of the Department of Health vote, and I do not think that it is an insignificant sum.

I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) for the unacceptably late reply. As a Minister, I accept responsibility for it, and I shall look into it. The fact that the Department of Health has to answer 30,000 letters from Members of Parliament each year is no excuse, and I apologise unreservedly for the delay.

Let me deal with the welfare milk scheme. We have no intention to alter that and the proposals will have no effect on the right of beneficiaries under that scheme. As the hon. Member for Newport, West said, it benefits children under the age of five, pregnant mums in families drawing income support, and handicapped children aged from five to 16 —some 800,000 beneficiaries in all. It is an important scheme and we have no intention of changing it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) asked why I was to reply to the debate rather than a Minister from the Department of Social Security. The answer is that the scheme is financed from my Department's vote. It costs £80 million for Great Britain, paid for by the various health Departments. It is an important programme, providing nutrition—that is its purpose—to families and children, and accounts for about 2·5 per cent. of all liquid milk produced on our farms.

We are not basing our argument on the fact that we are a bulk purchaser. Unlike Sainsbury's, for example, we are not a bulk purchaser because the milk is delivered in individual pints. But we argue—and we have sought the advice of our consultants, Handley Walker—that without the welfare milk scheme some extra sales, although not all the welfare milk scheme sales, would be lost. If the argument advanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton were pursued to its logical conclusion and the Department of Social Security made a cash payment to the appropriate families, not all that money would be spent on welfare milk. We estimate that about £20 million of contribution to overheads and profits can conservatively be attributed to the scheme. That is equivalent to about 0·3 per cent. of total milk turnover.

Our proposals envisage a saving of about 10 per cent. on that £80 million cost—about £8 million—and that is less than half of our estimate of the additional contribution to profits and overheads that the whole of the milk industry makes from the operation of the scheme —through the Department of Health, as opposed to the Department of Social Security, vote. We therefore propose a 3p discount on the 30p pint delivered in most of the country and the 31p pint in London, with a resulting cost per pint of 28p in London. In reply to the hon. Members for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) and for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy), I can say that separate provisions are made for parts of the country where the regular cost of sale is significantly higher, and the discount would operate off that higher price. The 27p price that I have cited for most of England would not apply in those instances. The discount of 10 per cent. would be taken off the larger sum.

The central point of Opposition Members' arguments turned on the question of who should bear the cost of the discount of £7·5 million to £8 million, which benefits patient care. At present the cost is being recycled in the Department of Health vote. In answer to the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) and others, the Department of Health strongly believes that the burden of the discount should be borne equitably among the producer, the processor and the distributor—I shall refer to each briefly—not the family beneficiaries through a specific delivery charge. My hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson) is quite right to draw attention to regulation 5. Although we do not countenance a specific charge on the beneficiaries, a general delivery charge applied to all customers is a matter between the milkmen and their customers. That is not dealt with in the regulations.

We believe that negotiations between the Milk Marketing Board and the Dairy Trade Federation should commence promptly. A mechanism exists—through the statutory joint committee—for the very modest reduction in price that would be implied by the farmer—the producer—bearing an equitable proportion of the discount.

The independent deliveryman would account for 40 per cent. of the total distribution element for milk. He should bear only an equitable part of the total discount. He should pass on the other part of the discount—which we argue that the farmer and the processor should bear—either by getting his milk cheaper or by the processor—the bottler—paying a premium on the redemption of the tokens.

Mr. Hawkins: Does not my hon. Friend believe that the Government have a responsibility to sort out who pays for the scheme before they ask the House to approve the regulations?

Mr. Freeman: I will give the assurance asked for by my hon. Friends the Members for High Peak and for Sherwood and others. The regulations come before the House regularly because they must be amended. Unless there is evidence of the principle that I have outlined tonight—an equitable sharing of distribution of that modest burden between the producer, the bottler and the deliveryman—I give an undertaking that we will review the regulations.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): The Minister seems to be struggling to defend the indefensible and the assurance that he has just given is not good enough. Will he give a clear assurance that if the burden is not shared fairly between the three sectors to which he has referred, and if we show within three months that dairymen are losing up to £40 or £50 a week, will he agree to scrap the regulations and reintroduce the status quo with which everyone is satisfied? No one can understand why the Minister is fiddling about with the regulations in this way.

Mr. Freeman: I repeat the assurance that I gave to my hon. Friends who pressed me on that point. If the burden is not being shared in the equitable fashion that I have outlined, we will review the regulations and doubtless the issue will be debated again in the House.

Mr. Hawkins: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister. His comments show that debates in the House sometimes achieve something.

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

11.28 pm

Mr. Flynn: With the leave of the House, I will respond to the Minister. I believe that we will find that the Milk Marketing Board cannot take on this burden.

A few days ago I had the great privilege of discussing our Parliament with the aspiring members of the new Government in Bucharest and I spoke with pride to the people who expect to be running the country in a few months. I spoke to them in the same way that I have spoken to people in Budapest. I cannot send the *Hansard* report of tonight's debate to such newly democratised countries with any pride.

In this debate hon. Members from all parties have denounced the regulations. Conservative Members described them as damaging, ill-conceived, flawed and even crazy.

The regulations will be a disgrace to our statute book and a dishonour to democracy. They will cause damage, downgrading and cheating. Even at this late hour and in the event of the regulations being passed, I beg the Government to review them at the earliest possible date.

11.29 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I shall try to be helpful to the Minister in the final minute of the debate.

Will the Minister consider using some of the money that will be robbed from milkmen as a result of the regulations to promote the scheme—it operates within the welfare milk regulations—which enables every state nursery with under-fives to claim free milk for them? The Minister is refusing to promote that scheme—he is making local county councils apply individually. Although those authorities that care about their under-fives make such an application, many others are unaware of the scheme. Given the benefits of milk to young children, why does he not promote it?

It being half-past Eleven o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Prayers against statutory instruments, &c. (negative procedure)):—*

The House divided: Ayes 117, Noes 149.

Division No. 54] **[11.30 pm**

AYES

Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
George, Bruce
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Patchett, Terry
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Rogers, Allan
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Soley, Clive
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Batiste, Spencer
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bowis, John
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Durant, Tony
Evennett, David
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Sir Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Gerrard
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Pawsey, James
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Wilshire, David
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nicholas Baker and
Mr. Irvine Patnick.

Question accordingly negatived.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.)

That the draft Health and Personal Social Services (Special Agencies) (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, which was laid before this House on 12th December, be approved.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

Question agreed to.

Paternal Support

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

11.41 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I am pleased to have this debate to adjourn the House on the issue of paternal support for single mothers. However, before I put my main points, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope that you and the House will allow me to make a couple of introductory remarks.

This issue has gained considerable public coverage recently, largely because of the Prime Minister's comments. Opposition Members know full well that when the crew opposite are unhappy with the captain, they do not make criticisms directly; they talk about the message not being put across to the country effectively. I shall use similarly coded language to begin the debate, and will ask the Minister if she will pass on to the Prime Minister the question that I and my hon. Friends would like answered: where have the Prime Minister's officials been for the past 10 years?

The issue of non-payment of maintenance has arisen largely during this decade. Far from being able to blame the swinging 60s, the real issue of concern for most of us has been the significant increase in the number of young single mothers, and that is not an issue of the 60s; it is very much a product of the decade dominated by the Prime Minister.

Although I shall suggest a number of reforms on this issue, I do so tentatively and with a fair amount of humility. One of the characteristics of Government is that they can be very clumsy with people's lives. Although I am anxious to hear what the Government have to say on this issue, I am aware that we can make the wrong decisions. However, I do not want the danger of making wrong decisions to be a case for not doing anything. There is a balance to be held in this, and I am anxious to understand the Government's balance.

The main theme of my speech—I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) wishes to speak as well—will be to consider the extent to which the Government are facing up to the hard issues involved. So far, the Prime Minister has made great political capital out of dealing with generalities and the practical side of the issue of paternal support for single-parent families. However, I maintain that at least five other issues need some answers also, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's.

First, to what extent can we expect single mothers to name the fathers of their children? The rules are such that, if a mother says there is a threat of violence or of potential violence if the father is named, the local office will ask no further questions. I come from an area in which the potential for violence in such cases is very real. I do not want to play down the anxiety that it causes mothers and the officials concerned. If, however, fewer people were on means-tested benefits—the Government have done nothing but shove millions more people on to them—and if we paid our civil servants more suitably, we should now have many experienced officers in the services who could tackle this delicate problem.

If the problem of the fathers were linked with a series of reforms, single mothers would perceive a risk, but many of them would be prepared to take that risk. All we hear from the Prime Minister is a scheme for mothers on benefit. I hope that the Under-Secretary will not tell us that the Government are contemplating a scheme only for those on benefit; all single mothers should be included in it.

If I understand her thinking aright, the Prime Minister wants a scheme in which mothers on benefit will be able to make over the collection of their maintenance orders to the state. If the scheme is to be successful, it must apply to all single parents. If not, I ask the Government to consider the penalties for mothers moving from benefits to work. They will have to leave the certainty of an income, if only a low one, and move to a wage that may or may not come in each week. Their maintenance orders will have been paid because the state will collect the money and pay it to them, but if they find a job they will have to take on that responsibility themselves.

Unless, therefore, we extend the scheme to all parents, it will not get off the ground for most mothers; nor will a majority of them consider the option to work——

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that maintenance is not a way of getting women off benefit and back into paid employment. However low their benefit, women at least know that it is guaranteed and regular, so they can plan.

Secondly, my hon. Friend made an important point about violence. Many women escaping from violent, intimidatory relationships need to make the break emotionally, economically and socially in order to reconstruct their lives and their families' lives.

Thirdly, men may think that payment of maintenance gives them certain rights over their former families. That poses a problem.

Finally, there is no evidence that making a father pay maintenance will result in his becoming more committed to his family.

Mr. Field: I thank my hon. Friend for those pertinent points. Before I deal with the point about access, I want to talk about disregards, which follow logically from what I was saying.

Even Opposition Members have said that the scheme that the Government have tentatively suggested should benefit the mother. But I maintain that it would create new forms of unfairness. I would not support this scheme. What about mothers whose former husbands have died? Why should they be put at a disadvantage? What about mothers who, because of violence, cannot name the fathers? They should not be disadvantaged. We know that large numbers of people are prepared to work the system, so there will be trendies who will use the system to put their families in an advantageous position.

Many of those mothers in my constituency look forward to being able to afford to go back to work. If they have the maintenance order paid over to the state, they should have a right to some of the money, not as weekly cash but to be paid into personalised training accounts. In that way, when training opportunities arise while they are on benefit, they will have the right to choose their training scheme as consumers, with the money to pay, rather than have to accept some of the Government's schemes. I hope that the Minister will comment on that proposal when she replies.

I have been reprimanded by a man in Somerset who objects to how I talk about single-parent families. He is

[Mr. Field]

divorced, pays his maintenance, has a good relationship with his ex-wife and says that his family should not be regarded as a one-parent family. He says that where parents, like him, are divorced, the children are not bereaved:

"Indeed my three children aged 10, eight and six are still nurtured, loved and cared for by two loving parents. Albeit mother and father live apart."

I applaud that. Nevertheless, we think about access, as there are real problems of violence in some families. There should be no question of access if violence has taken place or is threatened.

Mothers have told me that they regard the father of their child as a jerk and do not want him in their lives. They make it difficult for their child to meet the father in satisfactory circumstances, so social workers take note of that. I understand why many women do not want the father to have access to them, but access to their children is different. I hope that those with no record of violence who want to play a part will be considered sympathetically.

While we think of immediate changes, we should also think of long-term changes. We need to give a moment's thought to what is happening in our schools. I applaud the Bartonhill group which visits schools and has the support of one-parent families. Young mothers tell pupils that it is a wonderful joy to have a child but that it is not necessary to have the child at 15 or 16. It can come later in life. I hope that we can match that by teaching young male pupils about the cost of fathering a child. The most conservative estimate puts the total cost at about £15,000. We should make an issue of telling young men the cost of fatherhood.

I have raised five hard issues. To what extent should fathers be named? Will we cover all single mothers or only those on benefit? What will happen to the disregard? What are the rights of access? What will we do in our schools?

11.53 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): I congratulate the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on securing this Adjournment debate, and I am grateful to him for providing the House with an opportunity to discuss this important issue. I thank the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) for her intervention.

The hon. Gentleman made a number of interesting points and asked some specific questions to which I shall return. I am aware that he is an expert in this and many other social security policy areas, and does not need reminding of the figures, but much has been said about lone parents in recent debates and I think it would be helpful to set out some background. The number of lone-parent families in Great Britain has increased rapidly during the 1970s and 1980s. In 1971, there were estimated to be some 570,000 lone-parent families. By 1979, that figure had grown to 840,000, and by 1986, the latest date for which figures are available, it has grown to slightly more than a million.

I must remind the House that the term "lone parent" covers a variety of situations—from the young unmarried mother with a very small child to a divorced mother in her thirties with teenage children. The hon. Gentleman touched on that point. I say "mothers", because some 90 per cent. of all lone parents are women. While the rate of increase for unmarried mothers is faster than for other groups, as the hon. Gentleman said, marriage breakdown accounts for by for the largest proportion. Some 60 per cent. of all lone-parent families are headed by separate or divorced women, while 23 per cent. are headed by lone mothers who have never been married. It would be difficult to apportion the blame for the breakdown of marriage or the numbers of lone parents to any Government, although the hon. Gentleman attempted to do so.

Even more striking than the increase in lone parent numbers has been the increase in dependency of lone-parent families on supplementary benefit and its successor, income support. In 1979, about 40 per cent. of all lone-parent families were dependent on supplementary benefit, but by 1988 the number had risen to about two thirds. Part of the reason for that is the maintenance situation.

Of course, there are a number of reasons for that. For instance, the absent father may not be able to pay maintenance for a period if he is sick, unemployed or on low earnings with a second family. It may not be possible to trace him, or we may not have his name. Obtaining or enforcing a court order may take time, especially when the absent father is being unco-operative. Whatever the reasons, the position is totally unsatisfactory.

Taxpayers are currently shouldering an enormous burden of more than £1·5 billion a year because absent fathers are not doing enough to provide for their families. Those facts are important, and not just because of the cost to the taxpayer. It is quite wrong that absent fathers who can contribute towards the cost of bringing up children fail so do so. Most people accept that absent fathers should meet their responsibilities, in so far as they can, for the sake of their children, their families and, indeed, themselves.

The benefit system gives considerable help to lone-parent families. The Government are concerned that social security benefits should contain some recognition of the additional needs of lone-parent families and they are structured so that, while not requiring lone parents with children up to the age of 16 to be available for work, they are nevertheless not unduly discouraged from working if they wish to do so. Many do want to work, and help is provided in a variety of ways.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned disregards. For those who work part time, there is an earnings disregard of £15 a week within income support, which is higher than the disregard for single people and couples. For those who work full time, the same adult credit is given for lone parents as for couples in family credit, one-parent benefit being completely ignored when family credit is calculated. We have recently announced an increase in the housing benefit earnings disregard from £15 to £25, which, with the lone-parent premium and together with the community charge benefit, is expected to help some 95,000 lone-parent families.

That is what the benefit system currently does, and regular payments of maintenance from the absent father, as well as being right, would also be a great help, as that would provide a useful basis of income to lone parents wanting to start or to continue in work. The benefit system should help families in difficulties, but that does not diminish the absent father's responsibility. The benefit system does a great deal to help families with children in difficulties, but, when all is said and done, it is

unacceptable that the state should shoulder a burden that is properly the responsibility of the absent father, and, as the hon. Gentleman said, something must be done.

As the hon. Member will know, the Department has already commissioned some independent research on the situation of lone-parent families. This has involved interviewing about 2,000 lone parents, drawn from a sample of local DSS offices, about their circumstances and perceptions, and we shall look very carefully at the results, which should be available later this year. But because maintenance is ultimately a matter for the courts, as well as for the DSS, we need to look not just at how DSS arrangements are working but at the whole system and at possible alternatives. We have been working on this with the Lord Chancellor's Department, the Home Office and the Scottish Office. As the problem of increasing numbers of lone parents dependent on benefit and diminishing maintenance payments is faced by many countries, it is worth looking at what is done elsewhere, particularly where there are systems that appear to work well, and we have already begun to do this.

I should like to take a moment to describe what happens in Australia—one example that is being studied. There, reforms were introduced in two stages. The first stage established a child support agency as part of the tax office responsible for the collection of maintenance. Wherever possible, child maintenance is collected by the automatic withholding of income at source. In the second stage, which was introduced last October, Australia implemented the more radical component, which also transferred the responsibility of assessing maintenance awards from the courts to the child support agency. Maintenance is assessed by applying a formula that takes account of both parents' incomes and circumstances and the number of children for whom the absent parent is responsible. The first results look very promising. Stage 1 alone doubled the number of families receiving regular payment.

However, Australia is not alone. In the United States, federal legislation has also been considerably tightened to ensure that all states are doing the maximum to make certain that maintenance is paid. All states must introduce strict guidelines on the level of maintenance awarded; some, like Wisconsin, have introduced a formula—as in Australia—for this. In addition, all states must introduce the means of automatic withholding from earnings by November this year. In New Zealand, a formula is applied to calculate maintenance for lone parents on benefit, while in France maintenance is collected through the tax system. There is a lot to be learned over the coming months from the experiences of these countries and many others.

But we need better information about how existing arrangements here work, so the Department, together with the Lord Chancellor's Department, the Home Office, the Scottish Office and the Lord Advocate's Department, has commissioned a survey of information from a sample of courts and DSS local offices. The survey will obtain information on amounts of maintenance awarded and collected by the courts and on amounts of maintenance paid for those on benefit. The scope will therefore be very wide. That answers, in part, one of the questions put by the hon. Gentleman. The two sources will produce information that we need to enable us to determine what maintenance we can reasonably expect from a different system. We expect results in the summer, and we shall look very carefully at them.

One of the hon. Gentleman's questions related to the education system and what can be done in schools. He will appreciate that that is really a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science. However, I can say that those of us who have studied what is going on in some of the schools in Bristol have been very interested in the experiment that he has described.

The hon. Member asked a number of other specific questions, including one about the requirement that a mother who has not been married should name the father of her child as a condition of receiving benefit. In the real world, it would be very difficult to insist that a mother name the father of her child. She may genuinely not know his name. As the hon. Member for Bristol, South pointed out, she may have very good reasons—such as the fear of violence—for not naming the father.

In any case, the birth certificates of 70 per cent. of children born outside marriage bear the names of both parents, so the problem is not quite as great as the hon. Gentleman has suggested. He is right to say that it is very important that the staff who do this work be aware of the difficult and sensitive issues involved. We aim at discussing the entire situation carefully with the single mother who has never been married and at ensuring that the staff concerned are as experienced as possible. Schemes such as those operated in New Zealand and in the United States impose such a requirement, but I understand that in practice it is not strictly applied.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether the Department could collect maintenance payments when the mother is not receiving benefit. That is an interesting idea. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate as well as anyone that such an arrangement has enormous implications—not least for the Department, in terms of additional work load. The study is aimed at studying the collection methods used in other countries to establish which would work most effectively in Britain.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead asked also about access. The Government have already made clear their view that absent fathers should do more to support their children, but access is a separate issue. We believe that there should be one set of procedures for determining access issues and another set for determining maintenance issues. Clearly the child's welfare must be the main consideration in both cases.

I feel sure that the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Bristol, South understand that one is dealing with an extremely sensitive area and that the possibility arises of straying into relationships into which many people would feel that the state should not intrude. In any case, the Government's view is that maintenance and access are separate issues.

Mr. Field: But the state already intervenes. It intervenes through the courts.

Mrs. Shephard: The courts are another matter. The hon. Gentleman sought, in a sense, a reward from the state benefit system in return for access being allowed. I hope that I have not misunderstood the hon. Gentleman, but that is what his remarks implied.

Mr. Field: I was agreeing with my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) that the issue was very delicate, but that if a person paid up and if there

[Mr. Field]

was no record of violence, and so on, then if the matter went to court, that is something that the court should consider—and would not automatically ignore.

Mrs. Shephard: We all agree that it is a delicate matter and that there is widespread support for the line that the current situation is unacceptable. In the interests both of children and their parents, effective action must be taken.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead asked many detailed questions, and the answers to many of them depend on the outcome of the study. We aim at an efficient system that will strike a fair balance between giving lone-parent families the financial support that they need, and which is their due, and taxpayers who are currently shouldering an enormous burden because absent parents—absent fathers—are not doing enough to provide for their families. That is a considerable task and the issues are complex. That is why we need sound, up-to-date information on what is going wrong, what we need to do about it, and what we can learn from other countries. We are compiling that information as a matter of urgency.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seven minutes past Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 30 January 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BROMLEY LONDON BOROUGH COUNCIL (CRYSTAL PALACE) BILL

Read the Third time and passed.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No. I am on my feet.

ADELPHI ESTATE BILL

EXMOUTH DOCKS BILL

HYTHE, KENT, MARINA BILL

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY BILL

LONDON UNDERGROUND (VICTORIA) BILL

PENZANCE SOUTH PIER EXTENSION BILL

SHARD BRIDGE BILL

TEES AND HARTLEPOOL PORT AUTHORITY BILL

VENTNOR HARBOUR BILL

Orders for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday.

BRITISH RAILWAYS BILL *(By Order)*

Order for consideration, as amended, read.

To be considered tomorrow.

KING'S CROSS RAILWAYS BILL

Motion made,

That, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order 121 (Quorum of committee on opposed bill), leave be given for the Committee on the King's Cross Railways Bill to proceed with a quorum of two.—*[The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered tomorrow.

BRITISH RAILWAYS ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Order for consideration read.

To be considered tomorrow.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Initial Teacher Training

1. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what measures are being taken to improve initial teacher training in the area of classroom experience.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Alan Howarth): On 1 January the Government introduced revised criteria for the approval of initial teacher training courses. The requirements for school experience have been strengthened. This autumn we shall be piloting the articled teacher scheme, in which more than four fifths of the training course will take place in schools. I am pleased to say to my hon. Friend that his own local authority, Hampshire, is participating in one of the pilot schemes.

Mr. Hunter: I warmly applaud the Government's commitment to improve initial teacher training, but may I ask my hon. Friend to take matters a stage further? Does he accept the proposition that in no circumstances should any teacher be granted qualified status unless he or she has first demonstrated in the classroom that he or she is capable of doing the job of teaching?

Mr. Howarth: I readily accept my hon. Friend's proposition. We have made it a rule that no qualification attracting qualified teacher status should be awarded unless the student has demonstrated a satisfactory standard of teaching in the classroom. That means that the student will have to show that he or she can keep order and manage children in the classroom and can teach in such a manner that children learn effectively.

Mr. Flannery: What an alarming lack of knowledge about teachers Conservative Members show. The Education Reform Act 1988 does not even apply to the private sector. The Government have imposed it on the public sector, yet it has nothing to do with the sector in which they are involved. How can the Minister advance the cause of children and teaching by putting in front of a class a so-called licensed teacher—someone who has never taught a class? Are not the Government demeaning our children and our teachers by that dreadful Act and by their sheer ignorance of teaching children?

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman all too frequently chides us for not doing enough, in his view, to increase the supply of teachers. The licensed teachers scheme is a new initiative that will encourage mature entrants—people who have been doing something else in life, who decide that they would like to teach. Many valuable recruits will be brought into teaching in that way. There will, of course, be a carefully designed teacher training package, individually designed to suit the particular licensed teacher. The scheme will be arranged between local education authorities and the schools in question and I am pleased to note that more than half the local education authorities in Britain dissent strongly from the hon. Gentleman's view and have applied to us for funding under the scheme.

Mr. Thornton: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a vast amount of experience in the classrooms in our schools and that more ways should be found of utilising that classroom experience in initial teacher training? Will he give an undertaking that he will look into that, with a view to allowing opportunities for career development for teachers, so that their classroom experience can be used in our initial teacher training colleges?

Mr. Howarth: As I mentioned earlier, we have strengthened the requirements for classroom experience. The new criteria that we have published for the accreditation of teacher education strongly insist that there should be an increased element of practical classroom experience for trainee student teachers. Therefore, there will necessarily be a close working relationship between teacher training institutions and schools. It is for them to develop the flexible pattern that meets their own requirements. The fact that there should be a close working association between teacher training institutions and schools is not in doubt and we have insisted that those who teach and lecture in teacher training institutions should have no less than one full term's teaching experience every five years to update their experience.

Supply Teachers

2. **Mrs. Ann Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what discussions he has had with local education authorities about the number of supply teachers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. Friend has not had any such discussions. He is aware that supply teachers are more readily available in some localities than in others. A total of £2 million of expenditure by 45 local education authorities will receive education support grant in 1990-91 on schemes designed to enable local education authorities to encourage qualified teachers in their area to come back into service, whether as supply teachers or on a part-time or full-time basis.

Mrs. Taylor: Does the Minister accept that the national shortage of supply teachers is just one reflection of a deeper malaise in British education? Does he further accept that until we restore the confidence and morale of our teachers, we shall continue to see a shortage of classroom teachers? Does he agree that the main reason why we have those shortages is the pressure that the Government have put on teachers and the way in which this Government have undermined the confidence of the classroom teacher by the weight of legislation and by not taking proper account of experts and of those who actually teach?

Mr. Howarth: All of us on the Government Front Bench, including my right hon. Friend, honour teachers and have the greatest respect for what they do. We shall continue to give them all the practical support that we can. It would better become the hon. Lady if she spent less time on opportunistic and cynical denigration of the position in which teachers are held in society and was a little more generous in her recognition of the respect in which they are properly held.

Mr. Sims: Is my hon. Friend aware that teachers who have taken early retirement from full-time teaching are liable to have their pension reduced if they take up part-time teaching in the state sector, whereas they suffer no such penalty if they work in the private sector or in higher education? Would it not be as well to remove that anomaly and to encourage teachers who have taken early retirement to resume part-time teaching if they feel able to do so?

Mr. Howarth: I agree with my hon. Friend that it is important to ensure that there are no pension obstacles to enabling teachers either to continue in the teaching profession or to return to teaching, or that may discourage other people who may wish to come into teaching later in life. We have that area of policy under review. My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that I am consulting various sectors of industry and taking their advice on how we can best ensure that pension arrangements do not provide the discouragement to which my hon. Friend alluded.

City Technology Colleges

3. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress there has been on the city technology college programme.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. John MacGregor): The city technology college programme continues to make excellent progress. Three colleges are now open and at least a further eight will open in 1990 or 1991. I have just announced the establishment of two new colleges in Corby and Derby.

Mr. Michie: As it now looks as if industry will contribute about 20 per cent. of the capital cost of CTCs, which means that the taxpayer will have to pay 80 per cent., is it not time that the Secretary of State admitted that the programme is a failure? Is he aware that senior educationists describe it as a criminal waste of public money? Is it not time that money went into the present maintained schools? One such school in my constituency, Carfield infant junior school, has waited many years for repair and maintenance work to be done. Is it not time that the Government stopped their rhetoric, which is doing nothing for education, swallowed their pride and admitted their mistake?

Mr. MacGregor: The three new colleges have already demonstrated their worth, not least in helping to improve standards in the area where they are located. I reject entirely the suggestion that they are a criminal waste of public money. City technology colleges have many advantages and they involve industry in education. I wish that the hon. Gentleman would pay tribute to, rather than denigrate, the £43 million or so that has been offered by sponsors and industry. He should also pay tribute to improving and pioneering technology in education and above all to raising standards in inner-city areas. I do not usually hear the hon. Gentleman complain about expenditure in those areas. I hope that he will recognise that expenditure on CTCs is fundamental to improving standards in inner-city areas.

Mr. Pawsey: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is concern about CTCs among Conservative Members, too? We are worried that there are not enough and that the programme is not going forward quickly enough. We believe that CTCs will help to improve the quality and

standard of state education, where the overwhelming majority of our children are educated. Will my right hon. Friend bring forward a policy to accelerate the development of CTCs?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend about the contribution that the colleges make to improving standards and I have talked to him before about it. He recognises that there are practical constraints on the speed at which one can operate, not least of which are finding sites and developing them. I hope that he will acknowledge that my announcement in the past few weeks of two new CTCs in Derby and Corby illustrates that the programme is moving ahead as swiftly as possible. I hope that he also noticed the announcement that I made about funding curriculum development in the CTCs, to ensure that the benefits of CTCs go more widely into the whole maintained sector.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Will the Secretary of State explain how he reconciles the statement of his predecessor—which gained the most applause at the Tory party conference—that CTCs would not be part of the local education authority, with the proposal of the Tory-controlled Wandsworth borough council that Battersea Park school, currently a local authority school, should become a part-local authority, part-private CTC? Has not the CTC programme become so bogged down that the only way to rescue it will be to break two major pledges? First, CTCs will include Church schools, which were originally excluded. Secondly, CTCs will include local authority schools, which will remain with the local authority, as the Tories in Wandsworth now propose.

Mr. MacGregor: I am interested to hear that the hon. Gentleman believes that the programme is bogged down. I find it difficult to understand how he can reconcile that with the fact that I have just announced two more CTCs. We are making progress. The proposal to which the hon. Gentleman refers is for a CTC in the voluntary-aided sector. It is being considered by the local authority. I was interested to hear of that development. As it is worked out, I shall consider it carefully.

Mrs. Currie: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on bringing a new CTC to Derby, where it will be welcome, and we shall make it a great success. Would he care to reflect on how it will raise the level of technical and engineering education in Derby and south Derbyshire, which is now the engineering success story of the country?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I know that she will be an enthusiast for this latest development. I am sure that, like me, she will wish to thank the industrial sponsors for the part that they played. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. CTCs, the technical and vocational education initiative—which the Government have undertaken, and on which we are spending considerable sums—and the national curriculum all aim to improve technical and engineering excellence in schools. I am sure that the CTC in Derby will make a major contribution to that.

Mr. Straw: As the previous Secretary of State promised that 20 CTCs would be in operation by the end of last year and as this Secretary of State has managed to produce only three, he must know that his bluster about progress is wholly unconvincing. Is he aware that the business sponsor of the new Wandsworth CTC, a sleazy, Bermudan-based second-hand car trader, Mr. Michael Ashcroft—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Yes. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We should all calculate how we frame our questions.

Mr. Straw: A sleazy, Bermudan-based, second-hand car trader, Mr. Michael Ashcroft, has admitted in a letter to the leader of Wandsworth council that he sees his sponsorship of the Wandsworth CTC as no more than Conservative party political propaganda, but at the taxpayers' expense. In view of that, is it not now clear that expenditure on CTCs is not only a criminal waste of money, but deeply corrupt?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman is getting really desperate in the way in which he is trying to criticise the CTC programme. His attack is disgraceful. The other day the hon. Gentleman made a similar attack on the industrial sponsors of CTCs generally. Was he including in that attack the following sponsors, all of which are contributing to CTCs—Austin Rover, W. H. Smith, Boots, Marks and Spencer, Coats Viyella and Wimpey? Such an attack does no credit to the hon. Gentleman and represents a disgraceful attack on the industrial sponsors that are contributing so much to the CTC programme.

Mr. Malins: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in September a new CTC will open in Croydon, the Harris CTC? There are 180 places at that college, but more than 500 parents have applied to send their children to it. Is my right hon. Friend further aware that there have been more than 500 applications for the 40 staff vacancies? Surely those figures demonstrate that the CTC operation is a huge success among teachers and parents.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend is entirely right and the programme for that CTC is going well. My hon. Friend has already given some of the figures and, in September, there will be an intake of 180 pupils—160 have already been accepted. That is not all, however—places have been allocated to pupils across the full ability range. Ninety pupils will come from Croydon and 90 from the wider catchment area, including Southwark, Lewisham, Lambeth and Bromley. As my hon. Friend said, the applications for the teaching posts are going well. It is a clear illustration of the fact that the CTC programme is making a major contribution in certain parts of the country and is on course.

Nottinghamshire

4. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assistance by Government is given to pupils per head *(a)* at schools in Nottinghamshire and *(b)* at the Nottingham city technology college.

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): This year Nottinghamshire received almost £150 million of block grant. CTCs receive recurrent grant equivalent to expenditure by local education authorities on schools in comparable areas.

Mr. Allen: I should like to extend to the Minister another chance to apologise to the parents and children of Nottinghamshire for spending three times more on one school, the CTC, than on all the other schools in

Nottinghamshire. While she is at it, will she offer an explanation for the appalling disciplinary record of the CTC in Nottinghamshire and of those elsewhere?

Mrs. Rumbold: Far from apologising, I should be congratulating the parents in Nottingham on their ability to send their children to a good school that has been provided in part by industry. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said, we have every confidence that those schools will be highly successful.

I must explain to the hon. Gentleman that he is talking about capital grant. I have already explained perfectly clearly that CTCs, in common with other schools, receive recurrent block grant, which is equitable to expenditure on schools within the maintained sector.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Instead of knocking Nottingham's magnificent new CTC, which is widely welcomed by local people, why does not the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) admit that, in the past 10 years of Conservative Government, Government education expenditure per pupil has gone up by no less than 71 per cent. in real terms? That expenditure has increased from under £1,000 per pupil to more than £1,700 per pupil.

Mrs. Rumbold: My hon. Friend is right. The Government's record of education expenditure per pupil is extremely good. He is also right to say that the people of Nottingham should be grateful. I second that, as the establishment of the CTC is in spite of the disgraceful behaviour of Nottinghamshire county council, which tried to do everything that it possibly could to prevent its establishment.

Agricultural and Food Research Council

5. **Dr. Bray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the primary role of the Agricultural and Food Research Council.

Mr. MacGregor: The council was established by royal charter to organise and develop agricultural and food research; to establish or develop institutions or departments of institutions for investigation and research relating to the advancement of agriculture or the production and processing of food; and to make grants for such investigation and research.

Dr. Bray: Is the Secretary of State aware that it will only confuse and prolong uncertainty if the merger with another research council, with quite a different role, is pursued? Does he acknowledge that the AFRC has been going through a time of major change? It has successfully pursued new science and is tackling new problems. It has important work to do in the genetic engineering of plants, food safety and the effects of diet on health. Arrangements have been made for co-ordination with other research councils. Will the Secretary of State let the AFRC get on with its job?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman will know that I know a great deal about the AFRC because I have been involved with it in more than one of my departmental responsibilities. He will know that the Advisory Board for the Research Councils recently made recommendations to me about its reconstitution, which I accepted and which will greatly improve its co-ordination role and various other matters relating to research. The ABRC also advised about a proposal for improving co-ordination between the AFRC and the Natural Environment Research Council, which I think is what the hon. Gentleman has in mind. The Government are actively considering that and will announce their conclusions as soon as possible. I hope that we shall do so fairly soon because I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the need for a response to that matter.

Mr. Aitken: Will my right hon. Friend consider that it might be a little short-sighted to withdraw Government funding from the AFRC's specialist meat laboratories in Bristol when there are anxieties about issues such as mad cow disease and so on? Surely, to cut back on £1·6 million of expenditure on an industry that earns more than £8 billion a year is a false economy, given the need for high quality specialist research such as that laboratory has provided for many years?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend is not quite right. We have been withdrawing Government funding from near market research, the primary objective of which is the development of a specific product or process for commercial sale or use. That is absolutely right because it enables us to concentrate our priorities on where public funding should be spent and to avoid duplication and overlap with the private sector. One part of the restructuring of the Institute of Food Research, Bristol to which my hon. Friend referred, was related to that. He will know that the restructuring means that we are concentrating on the Norwich and Reading laboratories, where we will increase the number of scientists. That will ensure a more effective outcome from research.

Mr. Skinner: What about Bristol?

Mr. MacGregor: I am coming to that. The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) should allow me to continue. I partly dealt with that point when I explained the restructuring.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) will notice—I am sure that he will—that this Government have actually increased Government funding of food research by more than 120 per cent. in real terms. We have just announced an additional £12 million to deal with the very livestock problems that my hon. Friend's question addressed.

Mr. Skinner: Will the Secretary of State confirm that, despite all that he has just said, the Government intended to close down the Institute of Food Research, Bristol? When the Japanese found out about that, they proposed to the Prime Minister, during her visit, that they would hand her £1 million to take back to save that research institute —and took the money out of Japan's Third-world budget. What a sorry state this country is in.

Mr. MacGregor: As usual, the hon. Gentleman prepares his question before he has heard the answer to the previous one. The research project, which has had so much attention, was reaching the end of its useful research life, as those evaluating the research made clear. The restructuring affecting Bristol is part of a general restructuring. The clear sign of how the hon. Gentleman has got it wrong is that we have announced an additional £12 million for bovine spongiform encephalopathy research for the coming year—a substantial increase.

Nursery Schools

6. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on nursery school provision.

Mrs. Rumbold: The number of under-fives in school rose by 28 per cent. over the last decade and the age participation rate rose to 45 per cent. Our plans enable that healthy trend to continue.

Mr. Knox: Is my hon. Friend aware that in Staffordshire there is excellent nursery school provision in Stoke-on-Trent, but virtually none in the rest of the county? Does she think that that is satisfactory or fair to the rest of the county?

Mrs. Rumbold: My hon. Friend will be aware that it is for the local education authority to decide how best to deploy its educational spend, but there has been a tendency for local education authorities to concentrate on the provision of nursery education in the urban rather than in the county areas.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Will the Minister confirm that the 20 best providers of nursery education are Labour-controlled authorities and that the 20 worst are Tory or Social and Liberal Democrat-controlled authorities? Is it not a fact that some of those Tory-controlled authorities do not spend any of the money provided in the old rate support grant for nursery schools or classes?

Mrs. Rumbold: The hon. Gentleman is not quite accurate. It is true that funds go to the urban areas as part of the Government's strategy to help those who are in most need, but it is not true to say that there is no provision within the county areas for education for the under-fives, because there is through the voluntary sector.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Do the Government accept the principle, enunciated in the recent report of the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts, that under-five provision should be available to all parents who seek to avail themselves of it for educational reasons, and will my hon. Friend seek to persuade all local authorities in principle to move towards that end?

Mrs. Rumbold: My hon. Friend knows that I am at present chairing a committee which is looking into the quality of education for the under-fives in the voluntary and state sectors. We must remember that that falls between two Departments, but we hope to improve the quality of the provision for the under-fives in the voluntary and the state sectors—the very point that my hon. Friend makes.

Ms. Armstrong: I am pleased that the Minister recognises that the policy often falls between two Departments, but the Department of Education and Science has a responsibility for the education of our young children. When will the Government ensure that all children have the opportunity about which the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) talked, and when will they recognise that a child has twice the chance of attending a nursery class or school at the age of three or four in a Labour-controlled authority than in a Tory-controlled authority? Will she congratulate those Labour-controlled authorities, and make sure that money is available next year for all children in all areas?

Mrs. Rumbold: As my committee is considering just those questions, perhaps the hon. Lady will read its report with great interest when it comes out later this year.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: In view of the amount of surplus accommodation in many of our schools, would not this be an appropriate time to see whether some of that accommodation can be adapted for pre-school use by the private or the public sectors, or in partnership? Would not that help to deal with the problem of attracting more women, whom we so badly need, back into the workplace?

Mrs. Rumbold: My hon. Friend may be aware that many authorities are sensible about adapting some of the surplus primary school accommodation to do just that, working in concert with the voluntary sector to provide pre-school education. In addition, many authorities are now taking children into school before the age of five in order to give them a good start in their first year of compulsory education.

Student Loans

7. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what estimate he has made of the cost of administering student loans in respect of students attending universities in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Scotland in each year until 2010.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Robert Jackson): The administration costs of the loans scheme for United Kingdom students will be in the order of £10 million to £20 million in the first three years. Precise costs will be published shortly.

Mr. Darling: I understand that the banks have agreed to write off half the cost of the sums incurred when it was thought that the banks would go ahead with the scheme. What is the Government's share of the money that has now been written off and when does the Minister expect to know how much the Student Loans Company will cost during the next 20 years? Who will pay for that, or will those sums be recovered from the banks by way of the retribution that the Prime Minister has apparently promised them?

Mr. Jackson: Much of the expenditure incurred in line with the supplementary estimate approved by the House is adaptable to the student loans scheme in its new form, so the question of additional costs to the Government does not arise. The banks' £500,000 contribution will be gratefully received. As to long-term costs, with any loans scheme there is a period when money is being advanced before it starts to come back. We have told the House that we expect current savings from the beginning of the next century.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Does my hon. Friend agree that what really bothers the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) is that all that money will be spent in central Glasgow? Can my hon. Friend give an up-to-date estimate of the number of jobs that the Student Loans Company will create for the Glasgow area?

Mr. Jackson: We estimate that some 200 additional jobs will be created in Glasgow as a consequence of the company's premises being located there.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Will students attending colleges and universities in Northern Ireland draw from the same scheme or will there be a separate one for them?

Mr. Jackson: The loans scheme will be national, so students in Northern Ireland will also draw from it.

Mr. Bowis: Has my hon. Friend been able to estimate the cost of existing bank loans to students when they have to pay for them at the full commercial rate? Will he reveal the savings that students will enjoy as a result of his new scheme?

Mr. Jackson: Our survey suggests that the average student has an overdraft at the end of each year of study of the order of £340. Much of that money is loaned at commercial rates of interest, whereas the Government scheme will operate at a zero rate of interest, with repayments deferable if income is below 85 per cent. of national average earnings.

Mr. Andrew Smith: Will the Minister admit that his estimates of additional costs amounting to £2·17 billion over the next 20 years, over and above the cost of uprating grants in line with inflation, excludes administrative costs and interest rates subsidy—both of which will add hundreds of millions of pounds to the cost of the scheme—and provides for no expansion in student numbers beyond the end of the century? Does not that show that his deeply flawed scheme is financially as well as educationally bankrupt and ought to be abandoned forthwith?

Mr. Jackson: The hon. Gentleman complains that the Government are being too generous to students.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the number of students entering higher education in 1989 and the number making applications to do so in 1990 confirms that the scheme provides no barrier to entry?

Mr. Jackson: Yes, I can confirm my hon. Friend's proposition. Last year's recruitment of higher education students reached a record. They were also the first generation of students applying in the knowledge that there will be a student loans scheme.

Bradford

8. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he intends to visit Bradford to meet local education authority members.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has no immediate plans to do so.

Mr. Madden: Before the Minister meets members of Bradford local education authority, will she read chapter 11 of "The Pickles Papers" and pass copies of that book to the Director of Public Prosecutions and to the Audit Commission? Will she invite the DPP to investigate the recent abortive management buy-out of Bradford school meals service and the recent and unexplained resignation of one of the two senior council officers concerned? While the Minister is at it, will she lean on Bradford council to reduce substantially the cost of school meals, which have been substantially increased to boost profits on privatisation, resulting in——

Hon. Members: Too long.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Rumbold: No, Sir. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the people of Bradford elect their local councillors. They did so recently, and Bradford's Conservative-controlled council is doing extremely well.

Mr. Riddick: When my hon. Friend next visits Bradford, will she congratulate its Conservative council on its successful efforts to encourage a city technology college to Bradford? Will she also congratulate Councillor Riaz on his good sense in resigning the Labour Whip and going over to the Conservative group, thereby doubling the Conservative majority on Bradford council?

Mrs. Rumbold: I shall take great pleasure in congratulating Bradford council on both counts. I am particularly delighted to be able to commend the opening of Bradford's new CTC in September.

Student Loans

9. **Mr. Doran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has for the administration of the student loans scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The Student Loans Company Limited will be responsible for the administration of the scheme. As recent announcements demonstrate, preparatory work is well in hand.

Mr. Doran: I understand that the scheme is to operate commercially. Has the Secretary of State any plans at this stage to privatise the loans company, and as part of its commercial operations will it allow the sale of lists of student addresses and names and the debts of students?

Mr. MacGregor: The answer to the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question is no. We are still setting up the company. It must be commercial in the sense that we shall have to pay commercial rates for the staff with the kind of expertise we want. It is being set up as a private company and that is how we intend to run it.

Mr. Maas: Will my right hon. Friend consider discussing with the Open university the possibility of extending the student loans scheme to Open university students? During those discussions, will he take the opportunity of congratulating the Open university on the first 20 years of its existence and the graduation of its 100,000th graduate?

Mr. MacGregor: We have no plans to extend the loans scheme beyond where it is. I am happy to tell my hon. Friend that I did indeed congratulate the Open university this morning, when I presented the 100,000th graduate with her certificate. There is no doubt that from many points of view the Open university has been a great success and one which the United Kingdom has been pioneering.

Natural Environment Research Council

10. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the primary role of the Natural Environment Research Council.

Mr. MacGregor: The council was established by royal charter to promote, support and carry out research in the earth sciences and ecology; to provide and operate ships, equipment and other facilities for common use in such

research; to provide advice and disseminate knowledge in the fields of its responsibility; and to make grants for such research.

Mr. Mullin: Does the Secretary of State accept that it is important that the Natural Environment Research Council be kept independent of pressure from farmers and food manufacturers and that therefore it should not be merged with the Agricultural and Food Research Council?

Mr. MacGregor: I have already made it plain that I hope to make an announcement on that issue as quickly as possible. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will recognise, as the ABRC recommendation and the report of the Select Committee from another House recognised, that there are many areas in agriculture, land use and on environmental questions where there is an overlap and an identity of interest. Therefore, it makes sense to look at how better co-operation can take place. But I hope to make an announcement on the matter as soon as possible.

Self-governing Status

11. **Mr. Robert B. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what estimates he has of the average sum from central education overheads of local education authorities which would be available to schools seeking self-governing status.

Mr. MacGregor: The addition for services previously provided centrally by a local education authority amount on average to £94,000 in 1989-90, which is 15 per cent. on average of the direct costs of grant-maintained schools. Grant-maintained schools have the freedom to choose how to spend most efficiently their share of this central spending.

Mr. Jones: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Does he agree that it confirms that the additional money will be available, if schools want it, to spend on additional staff or extra equipment instead of on the salaries of bureaucrats and providing offices for them to work in? Does he further agree that it would be available for all schools if there were a big cut in the amount of bureaucratic overheads that schools have to carry?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend that this gives much greater scope for flexibility for resources to be deployed as the school wishes—as the head teacher, staff and governors wish—and to use the resources more efficiently. There is already considerable demonstration that that is happening, and that is one of the many merits of grant-maintained schools.

Mr. Fatchett: Will the Secretary of State explain how he equates last week's statement on opt-out schools when he made available in capital terms 42 per cent. more to each of those schools than to equivalent maintained sector schools? How does he justify that when he told the House that there would be no difference in treatment between those schools and maintained sector schools? Is it really a case that the social division of this programe can be maintained only by the political bribes that are involved in that amount of money?

Mr. MacGregor: That is a nonsensical question. There is no social division in this programme because the schools continue to draw, and their character is precisely as it was before. As for the comparison, the hon. Gentleman makes a point that fails to take into account many other factors —for example, that the grant-maintained schools are concentrated entirely on the secondary sector, whereas 80 per cent. of all maintained schools are primary schools and are therefore smaller; that in the maintained sector other sources of revenue are available for capital expenditure, including capital receipts; and that the maintained schools have to pay VAT. The hon. Gentleman really does not have his facts right.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: When considering the reallocation of central education overheads, will my right hon. Friend consider extending that principle to schools operating under local financial management? Is not their track record one of obtaining more value for money than the central bureaucrats?

Mr. MacGregor: As local management of schools comes into operation, I expect savings to be made in the central administration of local education authorities, reflecting the direct transfer of a considerable amount of their responsbility to the schools.

Standard Assessment Tests

12. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what decisions have been made about the publication of standard assessment tests at seven years; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Standard assessment tests for seven-year-olds in English, mathematics and science will be piloted in a sample of schools this summer. In the light of lessons learned, revised SATs will be produced for the first full national assessments in these subjects in summer 1991.

Mr. Turner: How will the Secretary of State ensure that the tests are used diagnostically to improve education development, rather than being employed simply to pit one seven-year-old child against another?

Mrs. Rumbold: As I think hon. Gentleman knows, we are very keen to ensure that the purpose of assessments, and standard assessment tests, is to help teachers, parents and the children themselves obtain the best possible education, and assessments will be undertaken with that in mind.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 30 January.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Maclennan: Is the Government's dogged inflexibility a fair response to the exceptional sense of duty shown by our ambulance men when dealing with injured and dying victims of this week's gales and tempests? What greater catastrophe is required to bring home to the Prime Minister the justice of our ambulance men's case?

The Prime Minister: What the hon. Gentleman says is not correct. The Government and management have

moved on the ambulance men's case for more pay; it is the ambulance men who have not moved at all since their unions recommended, a long time ago, that they accept a 6·5 per cent. increase. The Government moved to an 18-month settlement, which would offer the men increases of between 9 and 16·3 per cent.—a considerable increase that would cost £6 million more to implement in this financial year. That is far from being inflexible; it represents actual movement.

Q2. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 30 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Townsend: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, when we are faced with the present historic uncertainty in eastern Europe and the collapse of law and order in East Germany, idle talk of a peace dividend is premature? Would it not be prudent for the United Kingdom to look to Vienna for serious and constructive negotiations, rather than slashing our defence forces unilaterally?

The Prime Minister: I agree wholly with my hon. Friend. Piecemeal reductions would be fatal at this time of great uncertainty. In such circumstances, the right way is to negotiate through the conventional force reduction talks in Vienna. That is how we managed to secure effective reductions in the Warsaw pact forces—larger reductions than those on our side, indeed—and also some verification. NATO is already considering precisely how those reductions should be shared out equitably between its members.

Mr Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister tell us her response to yesterday's statement by Church leaders appealing for the Government to set up an independent inquiry with the purpose of resolving the ambulance dispute?

The Prime Minister: Had the right hon. Gentleman listened to my previous answer he would already know that the Government have moved on the ambulance dispute. There is already a negotiating body, which is the right body to conduct negotiations, and the increases that the management has offered would cost the taxpayer some £6 million more this financial year.

Mr. Kinnock: On the subject of the cost to the taxpayer, can the Prime Minister confirm that she has already spent £10 million of the public's money on keeping the dispute going? That is more than it would cost to settle it. Where is the sense in that, either for the public or for the ambulance personnel or, indeed, even for the Government? When the public so clearly support the ambulance workers' case why is the Prime Minister so completely out of touch with the feelings of the British people?

The Prime Minister: The sense is to stick to established methods of negotiation, whether a pay review body or a Whitley council. Once one departs from that, it is very difficult for those who have honoured their own methods of negotiation and, indeed, settled at the amounts they were offered, as 85 per cent. did early last summer. It is a great pity that ambulance men did not accept the advice of their union and settle at that time.

Q3. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 30 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Carrington: My right hon. Friend will know that my constituents who live around Stamford Bridge greatly welcome the determination of herself and of the Home Secretary to bring football hooliganism to an end. Is not this in marked contrast to the attitude of those who reject all-seater stadiums and, incredibly, even seek to deny that football hooliganism exists? Will my right hon. Friend undertake to use the licensing powers under the Football Spectators Act to close any ground where football hooliganism persists in the street outside the stadium?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, and as my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary made clear yesterday in his very robust way, the Government accept the Taylor alternative strategy for dealing with these matters in football stadiums, and we accept Lord Justice Taylor's recommendations. During the passage of the Football Spectators Bill we made it clear that having all-seat stadiums could be made a condition of a licence being given by the Football Licensing Authority. It would be open to the licensing authority to do that. I think that the conditions for a licence do not apply to hooliganism outside the grounds. That matter is already dealt with by other measures, such as the Public Order Act, and by some of the changes that have been made to prohibit the availability of alcohol on buses and trains travelling to designated football matches.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: On this day when there has been support for ambulance workers in Britain, why is the Prime Minister so quick to praise them but so slow to pay them?

The Prime Minister: Of course I am always quick to praise ambulance men, as I am quick to praise other people who work in the Health Service, 84 per cent. of whom accepted pay increases between 6·5 and 6·8 per cent. last summer. We have, in fact, offered the ambulance men, according to where they work or their qualifications, increases of between 9 and 16·3 per cent. over a period of 18 months. That offer represents an increase on the first one, which was rejected.

Q4. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 30 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Gorman: In view of the Hansard Society's report on women at the top, does not my right hon. Friend agree that it makes sense that a job created in the home, or elsewhere, that helps a woman to go out to work is just as valid as any other job and should be treated in the same way for tax purposes? While we are on the subject, what about a few jobs for top women in our own Whips' Office and in the Cabinet——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady should ask only one question.

Mrs. Gorman *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. To ask more than one question would be unfair to the hon. Lady's colleagues.

The Prime Minister: I am sure that all my hon. Friend's comments were interesting, but I heard only the first half. I should like to reply to the half that I heard. My hon. Friend asked for tax allowances for people who look after children. As she knows, this is not allowed for tax purposes, any more than are the expenses of travelling to work or of having someone at home to look after an elderly relative would be allowed. That is the present law. A change in the Finance Bill would be needed to change it. I hope that my hon. Friend will make her representations to different quarters, because I can say nothing about that matter.

I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Patronage Secretary will have heard my hon. Friend's other request, and will consider what further action to take.

Dr. Owen: What is going wrong with Anglo-American relations? The United States President is cutting defence expenditure by 2 per cent; further, faster and deeper reductions are emerging in the conventional forces European negotiations; and the United States President is openly advocating a NATO defence review. The Prime Minister refuses to do any of those things. The two Governments cannot even split their differences between six months and a year on the compulsory repatriation of Vietnamese boat people.

The Prime Minister: That is two questions in one. As the right hon. Gentleman will be aware, the United States spends a much bigger proportion of her national income on defence than does any other major NATO country. She spends 6 per cent. of her national income on defence whereas, on a similarly calculated basis, we spend 4 per cent., so I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman can criticise the United States if it makes some changes.

Any changes that affect the mainland of Europe, from the Atlantic to the Urals, are made through the CFE negotiations. Any proposals go through the NATO machinery first, so that we are all consulted and agree what should go forward to the CFE negotiations. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman realises that that is perfectly right.

I agree that there is a difference of opinion on the Vietnamese boat people—possibly because of America's history in Vietnam and because she lost 55,000 people in her fight there which kept communism back long enough to prevent its extending throughout the area. We shall, of course, go forward with compulsory repatriation.

Q5. **Sir Hal Miller:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 30 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Sir Hal Miller: Does my right hon. Friend agree that whatever other Governments feel able to do, the main responsibility for maintaining the confidence of the people of Hong Kong, on which their prosperity and stability must depend, inevitably lies with the People's Republic of China? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the conclusions of the draft basic law committee on elections in Hong Kong are hardly likely to add to their confidence? Are we yet ready to say what we will do?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right in saying that China has an important part to play—although not the only part—in maintaining confidence in Hong Kong, as do the Hong Kong people and as does Britain during our administration until the lease is terminated in 1997. Ideally, we obviously wish to agree with China improvements in democracy and increases in the democratic process in Hong Kong which could be continued through 1997. We shall continue to do our best by the people of Hong Kong and to observe the Sino-British agreement on the future of Hong Kong, in the belief that that is in the best interests of the future beyond 1997.

Q6. **Ms. Short:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 30 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Ms. Short: Does the Prime Minister agree that the ambulance workers have overwhelming public support? Does she consider herself to be a democrat and, if so, why does she not listen to the view of the people and agree to binding arbitration so that this dispute can be brought to an end?

The Prime Minister: No. The ambulance people have their own negotiating body through which the negotiations should take place. As the hon. Lady is aware, this claim comes from last year when 84 per cent. of the people with whom the ambulance men work in the National Health Service settled at 6·5 and 6·8 per cent. Since then the ambulance men have been offered an increase, so it is not the management which has not moved, but the ambulance men themselves.

Dame Jill Knight: Bearing in mind that the union leaders of the ambulance men have not always been straightforward in the matter, will my right hon. Friend confirm that it is a question not only of a 9 per cent. increase on offer now, but of an offer that goes back to April 1989? That should also be taken into consideration.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is quite right. The offer is backdated to April 1989 and for those who have still been working at their posts, considerable back-dated lump sums are to be picked up now, which vary from about £650 to about £1,400. They will be available when the ambulance men settle in respect of their back pay.

Q7. **Mr. Boateng:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 30 January.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Boateng: Why does the Prime Minister continue to set her face, like stone, against the ambulance workers while giving a £40 million tax handout to the private medical insurance industry? If she were to fall under a bus tomorrow—and it would have to be a brave one—would she call for BUPA or for an ambulance man?

The Prime Minister: As I have already indicated, the ambulance men had an offer, according to where they work and their qualifications, of an increase in pay varying from 9 to 16·3 per cent. Many of them are still maintaining an accident and emergency service—and we honour them for it—although others are not. I should have thought that 9 to 16·3 per cent. was a very fair and reasonable offer.

Hill Farming

3.31 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Gummer): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement.

My right hon. Friends and I have now completed the annual review of economic conditions in the United Kingdom's less-favoured areas, in consultation with representatives of farming interests. The conclusion of this review was delayed until after the decision of the EC Council on the new hill livestock compensatory allowance conditions.

The review has shown that average net farm incomes of livestock producers in our hill and upland areas are forecast to fall in 1989-90, following an increase in Great Britain in the previous year. In particular, there is a reduction in the incomes of specialist sheep producers in the high hill areas, where the opportunities to diversify are limited. In farming as a whole, diversification is an important matter and in these areas such opportunities are not very wide.

I am therefore, pleased to announce that, subject to parliamentary approval, my colleagues and I are proposing to increase the rate of hill livestock compensatory allowance payable under the 1990 scheme on hardy breed ewes maintained in the severely disadvantaged parts of our less-favoured areas. The rate per hardy breed ewe will be increased by 75p, from £6·75 to £7·50 per animal. All other HLCA rates and conditions will remain unchanged in 1990. We shall be laying before Parliament a draft statutory instrument giving effect to this rate increase as soon as possible. The additional HLCA payments are expected to cost £5·2 million in a full year. This will increase total HLCA payments to about £125 million a year, which represents a very significant commitment to the hill and upland areas of the United Kingdom.

As I said in the early part of my statement, which some hon. Members may have missed, the reason for the lateness of this statement is the discussions in the European Community about changes in the HLCA regime —changes which are discriminatory against the United Kingdom because of the headage limits which are provided. We are therefore aware of the concern felt by the LFA livestock sector at the possible impact of the reduction in FEOGA funding of HLCAs based on the size of holding which I reported to the House on 22 November 1989. The House will remember that on that occasion I was able to report that we had made some significant improvements in what the Commission had proposed. One of those was that it would not apply this year but would start next year. But of course many in the industry are concerned to know now what it will mean for them then.

First, the changes in the European Community rules will not affect the 1990 HLCA scheme. From 1 January 1991 the mandatory European Community limit on payments of 1·4 livestock units per hectare will come into operation and will have some environmental benefits. We cannot anticipate at this stage the level of HLCAs or the other arrangements for 1991, but I can say that there is no question of automatically carrying through into our payment arrangements the impact of the new European Community ceilings on FEOGA funding. We do not believe that they should be related to the size of the enterprise. Therefore, any changes would be made only after the needs of the LFA livestock sector had been assessed in the normal way following the autumn review later this year. This will be our review, on our terms, about our hill problems, and we will not automatically carry through the views that have been approved by the European Community contrary to our wishes.

Finally, there is the new provision in the European Community regulation which allows member states to include measures in the HLCA scheme to take account of environmental requirements. *[Interruption.]* Some Opposition Members do not find these matters important, but for those farmers in our most difficult areas they are vital. I hope that those farmers will notice the cavalier way in which the official Opposition, although not others, have received this most important announcement for their future.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I represent a hill farming area. I have been trying to hear the Secretary of State and cannot do so because of the noise from the Government Benches. I hope that Conservative Members will keep quiet so that I can find out how this statement affects my constituents.

Mr. Speaker: I will refrain from saying what I was going to say about that on behalf of the hon. Member. Let us hear the statement.

Mr. Norman Buchan (Paisley, South): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am sorry to say this, but I found the last remark of the Minister objectionable. Would you ask him to withdraw?

Mr. Speaker: Nothing out of order was said.

Mr. Gummer: The HLCAs already provide a significant contribution in terms of environmental benefits, but the British Government will be looking carefully over the next few months to see whether this should be made more specific. One of the things we seek in all the actions of the European Community is to make sure that what we do in farming is applied not only to the need to produce the food that the nation requires but to keeping up the countryside, which is one of the most important jobs of farmers and one in which they serve the country and the countryside well.

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): This is the first time ever that we have had an oral statement to the House on hill farming. My colleagues and I welcome it. We have a particular interest in upland areas and over the years we have often demonstrated that in the House. I only wish that the Minister's statement had had a little more substance in it, but I hope that it will become a precedent and that we will have an annual statement to the House on this vital subject. So that we might explore his proposals further, may I suggest to the Minister that he should initiate an early debate to find out whether we have constructive ideas to put forward from this side of the House?

I also welcome the increase in the hill livestock compensatory allowance for sheep from £6·75 to £7·50. As the House knows, the payment has been frozen for four years. However, the increase hardly keeps pace with inflation. Even with the increase to £7·50 the allowance is not in real terms at the same level as two years ago because

of spiralling inflation and interest rates running at 18 per cent. for many upland farmers who face many other economic difficulties.

Hon. Members may have missed the fact that there was no mention in the statement of HLCAs for cattle. That is a serious omission. The Minister spoke about environmental considerations. He has missed a great opportunity for extensification and improving the environment of upland areas by refusing to uprate the support for cattle. That is doubly so when beef rearers are facing falling prices for cattle because of the effect of bovine spongiform encephalopathy and the Government's mishandling of that crisis.

Towards the end of his statement the Minister mentioned FEOGA payments. As the House knows, the level of those payments will be reduced. The Minister talked in strange terms when he said that he could not ensure that the system would be guaranteed. What does that mean? Will the Minister make up the shortfall of FEOGA contributions? Will he ensure that upland farmers get the guaranteed benefits which they need? If he did, he would have the support of hon. Members on both sides of the House because we believe that upland farmers need much more support.

May I clarify a further point? The Minister mentioned that the scheme would cost £125 million per annum. In the Government's expenditure plans, which were published just five minutes ago, I noticed that the budgeted figure for next year is not £125 million but £120 million, a shortfall of £5 million. Will the Minister assure the House that the figure of £125 million which he has quoted today supersedes the Treasury figure published in the Government's annual expenditure plans? That is very important.

We welcome the Minister's statement, but it is most unimaginative. He said nothing about cattle or about direct income payments to farmers. He said nothing constructive about how he intended to improve the environment of upland areas. He said nothing about diversification or environmentally sensitive areas. In short, there was no single constructive proposal in the statement other than to increase HLCAs for sheep to take account of inflation. It is a most unsatisfactory statement.

Mr. Gummer: I think that you, Mr. Speaker, would have found it embarrassing had it been necesary to call me to order for speaking about environmentally sensitive areas when I was supposed to be making a statement on hill livestock compensatory allowances. The hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) gave a whole list of matters that I did not mention, which might have gone on ad infinitum. I did not mention them because they had nothing to do with my statement. Nevertheless, my statement was of considerable importance.

The figure in the estimates published today is £5 million less than the figure that I cited because the figure that I announced today represents an increase of £5 million. That does not need any underlining. Whereas before the proposal that I announced in my statement the cost would have been £120 million, it is now £125 million. I should have thought that it was obvious from my remarks that an extra £5 million was being made available.

The hon. Member for South Shields also asked about the fact that the amounts have been frozen. Last year the real terms increase in farm incomes was 19 per cent. and it was therefore not appropriate to increase the payments. This year, we estimate that there has been a fall in real terms in farm incomes, which overtakes the level of the payments.

I wanted to do something helpful, and I found the way in which the hon. Gentleman announced his opposition somewhat curmudgeonly. He should have said, "Look, we have been pushing you for this for some time and we are pleased that you have done it." It is sad that the Opposition's welcomes, which have become almost Spanish in their brevity, should be succeeded by a whole series of attacks on everything that the Government do.

The hon. Gentleman made a curious comment about bovine spongiform encephalopathy. I do not think that anyone else in Britain would share the hon. Gentleman's view. Most people accept that the Government have dealt with the matter extremely well. We have put the health of the public first and foremost and we have sought to help the farming community out of a difficult position. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on trying to make bricks out of no straw, but I fear that the bricks that he tried to produce would build no house.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Does my right hon. Friend understand that his statement is warmly welcomed, both in the House and especially in hill areas where the extra support was very necessary? Will he spend a good deal of his time in the next year or so explaining to the British public that if they wish to have high-quality, moderately priced food, on the one hand, and the maintenance of our glorious upland scenery, on the other, there is no better way of investing in those aims than by putting money where my right hon. Friend has put it today?

Mr. Gummer: With his considerable constituency and ministerial experience on this matter, my right hon. Friend has spoken the truth. No payment contributes more to the maintenance of the British countryside than a payment that ensures that we have sheep in our upland areas.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The Minister rightly identified the problems of fallen income last year and limitations on diversification. Is he aware of the impact on upland farmers of interest rates running in their teens and of the fact that the green pound is disadvantaging the farmers as they seek export opportunities? Clearly he is not, or he would not have given the industry this kick in the teeth—a paltry sum to be awarded to one sector and nothing for any of our other hill livestock producers.

How far short of the ceiling allowed by the European Community does the increase that the Minister has announced fall? What steps does he propose to take to seek devaluation of the green pound in the sheep and beef sectors? In the past, the Highlands and Islands have had an enhanced rate for the HLCAs at times. Is that also to be the case under the present review?

Mr. Gummer: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is taking account of the special position of the Highlands and Islands, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be pleased with the results. I am sorry that he should use such emotive language. I can only suggest that his words have less connection with the truth than with his desire to drive a division between himself and those of a different political

[Mr. Gummer]

view. No one else will regard the statement as a kick in the teeth to the farmers. It is what has been asked for, and I am pleased to be able to deliver it.

I fight extremely hard for a change in the green pound rate, which I believe is the most important thing affecting the future of price fixing. I am extremely concerned that Britain should be discriminated against in this way. I am especially concerned that many of our colleagues in the European Community do not want such a change. I am even more concerned by those colleagues who do not believe it necessary, even in 1992. It is an uphill battle, but I am determined to win through because nothing is more important to the future of British farming than a fair deal that will enable us to compete fairly. There must be no distinction or differentation against us by the time we get to the single market. If we can do a great deal this year, I shall be best pleased.

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): May I assure my right hon. Friend that his announcement on sheep will be well received in the western most parts of my constituency and, I suspect, all the way along the marches as well? However, will he clarify the position on cattle, because many of my hill farmers indulge in suckler calf rearing in the hills for pure-bred beef? Does he agree that pure-bred beef from suckler herds is the source of beef that is least exposed to any of the dangers of BSE in that the cattle are fed on hay, silage and grass? Does he further agree that a constant flow of pure-bred beef from the suckler herds can only be good for the beef industry in this country? Finally, if my right hon. Friend is not satisfied, would he care to come to my constituency to talk to the beef suckler herd producers because I am certain that they want the confidence that has been given to the sheep industry?

Mr. Gummer: I am sure that my hon. Friend would want me to remind the House that cattle producers in the less-favoured areas benefit from the 42 per cent. increase in the suckler cow rate. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to say that they are already dealt with under another aspect of the way in which we provide support. That is why I thought that it was rather unfair that the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) did not mention that in his catalogue of woes. If the hon. Gentleman had wanted the public to feel that he was being properly balanced on this matter, I think that he would have mentioned that fact.

I should not like to make a distinction with my hon. Friend about BSE. The fact is that any beef that is bought in this country is entirely safe for human consumption and is very much better than the beef that is bought from many other countries.

Mr. Foulkes: Will the Minister confirm that my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) was being generous to him because the increase has not kept up with the rate of inflation and certainly does not meet the demands of the farmers? Will he answer my hon. Friend's question about hill cattle? Why has no announcement been made on hill cattle, which are important in my constituency and in the constituencies of many of my hon. Friends? Finally, does the Minister accept that his whole statement has been sullied by the overlay of his unique combination of impudence and arrogance?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman is an expert in both those subjects, as the House no doubt remembers. I wonder why the hon. Gentleman did not ask for a cut in the HLCAs last year when there had been a 19 per cent. increase in real terms in the incomes of the farmers concerned. He did not ask for a cut because he knew that the rates are not fixed on a year-by-year basis. They are fixed properly to compensate for people's needs at any particular time. The hon. Gentleman is in his usual position of always asking for more money without mentioning the bill that has to be paid by the taxpayer if that extra money is to be spent. The cattle producers in the LFAs have not had a similar or parallel increase because we thought that, in view of the 42 per cent. increase in the suckler cow rate, it was more important to concentrate our aid on the sheep sector.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the House welcomes his firm stance in European negotiations in recent weeks? Does he also accept that there will continue to be grave anxiety about the future of hill livestock farming in the uplands of Britain? Will he take this opportunity to re-emphasise the Government's commitment to maintain the value of support for upland farming in future, pointing out that such support provides the best value for money of any environmental spending?

Mr. Gummer: I thank my hon. Friend. He shows his close understanding of the problem when he emphasises that the future is of the greatest anxiety to the industry. That is why I was surprised that the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), did not emphasise the industry's advantages in having an assurance that the decisions on next year's HLCA payments will be based on the needs of our industry and will not be affected by the changes that the FEOGA funding has brought about. That is an important assessment for the Government to make, so far in advance of deciding the rates. It shows our support for an industry which, above all others, maintains the countryside.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): While one welcomes any statement by Her Majesty's Government that support for hill farmers will be increased, we require clarification. The statement given to us says:

"incomes of livestock producers in our hill and upland areas are forecast to fall in 1989-1990, following an increase in Great Britain in the previous year . . . my colleagues and I are proposing to increase the rate of hill livestock compensatory allowance payable under the 1990 scheme on hardy breed ewes maintained in the severely disadvantaged parts of our LFAs. Subject to parliamentary approval, the rate per hardy breed ewe will be increased by 75p, from £6.75 to £7.50 per animal"—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Member ask a question?

Mr. Taylor: The Minister said that that represented a "significant commitment to the hill and upland areas of the United Kingdom."

In my experience during the past 10 years, the European Community recognises the difference between Great Britain and the United Kingdom. As the Minister referred to Great Britain and the United Kingdom in the same sentence, will he tell the House whether his increase applies to the United Kingdom or only to Great Britain.

Mr. Gummer: It is a United Kingdom increase.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Will my right hon. Friend accept the congratulations of my constituents on his announcement today, which comes at a difficult time for hill farmers, particularly those who farm sheep? Is he aware that the North York Moors national park committee will shortly launch a scheme designed to combine essential support for sheep farming in the LFAs with much-needed environmental protection? Does he agree that the future of our farming industry, supported by taxpayers, can be assured only if we can combine the need to support the farmer with care of the environment? The HLCAs are an important part of that package.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right to underline the close connection between the production of food and the maintenance of a beautiful countryside. The British countryside is as it is because it is farmed. Almost 80 per cent. of Britain's land area is farmed. We must increasingly make sure that farming is done in an environmentally acceptable way. Most farmers already farm in that manner, but some need particular help to continue to do so. The Government are determined to provide that help.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): The Minister rightly praised upland farmers for the way in which they tend our countryside. He then referred to their difficulty in obtaining alternative incomes. Will he consider carefully the possibility of improving access to the countryside by allowing millions of people in our cities who want to walk freely in the countryside to do so and giving farmers compensation for allowing people to walk on their land? Is he aware that the national parks have powers to enter into access agreements, but that, apart from the Peak District national park, they rarely do so? Will he encourage the development of access agreements so that people in the towns can walk in the countryside and people who farm in upland areas receive monetary income from it?

Mr. Gummer: I know that the hon. Gentleman has a close interest in this matter. I spent yesterday in the hillsides of Scotland and the problem there is that increased access, which is now a feature of many parts of Scotland, has a deleterious effect on the ability of farmers to look after their stock and to protect the countryside. It is not always possible to increase access without causing considerable damage. The hon. Gentleman will be aware of that because of the problems encountered in the environmentally sensitive area of the South Downs.

It is not always possible to increase access and to regard it as a means of extra income. I notice that that income will be paid for not by the people who have access but by the taxpayer. There is a certain competition for use of the countryside, and the right balance is always necessary.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Welsh hill farmers will greatly welcome the statement on LFA compensatory amounts and the statement on the green pound? Will he confirm that in future negotiations with continental producers he will ensure that British lamb from LFAs has an open market on the continent?

Mr. Gummer: We must stop any repetition of the situation in which British lamb, which is the best in Europe, was excluded from markets that it had taken over because it was the best. I am pleased to say that, in large measure, our colleagues are accepting British lamb as they should. We shall continue to ensure that that happens. In the negotiations on the green pound I have stated my case extremely strongly, and I shall continue to do so. In the end, however, I must have a majority of the Twelve and a proposition from the Commission.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): Does the Minister agree that we must consider not only the quality of our countryside, but the quality of life of its inhabitants? The fragility of the economic base in many of our rural areas means that support is necessary to retain not only that economic life, but the social and cultural heritage of the countries of the United Kingdom. Will he top up the EC payments on HLCAs to ensure that there is a good level of support for our hill farmers?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman's comments are entirely in line with my thinking, and that is why I have sought hard to look carefully at the disadvantaged areas. There are various ways in which we can help those areas, not least by our environmental payments and by the extensions and improvements that have led to the ESAs. I hope that there will be further extensions in the future. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the ESAs and their subsequent extension will benefit parts of the Principality, as they will the rest of the United Kingdom.

We must ensure that the money goes in the right direction. My announcement today is one way by which we can ensure that, but we shall continue to look for other means of achieving that aim. The hon. Gentleman can be assured that I take a close personal interest in ensuring that the most difficult farming areas of Britain are properly supported and that there is confidence for the future. That is why I made a statement about the parameters of our decisions next year. That statement has not been paralleled previously as it commits us in such a way that previous Governments were not prepared to be committed.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the Scottish hill farmers, the mountain farmers—I have 2,000 sq miles of mountain in my constituency—will welcome his statement. If the environment of the Scotish Highlands is to be properly looked after, the balance to which my right hon. Friend drew attention must continue. The farmers are the best people to look after that balance.

Is my right hon. Friend aware that the problems in the Highlands are largely brought about by uncertainty? Much of what he has said today will remove that uncertainty, including his pledge to look after farmers' interests. His pledges on other matters will go a long way to ridding the public of certain worries that they have had for some time.

Mr. Gummer: I spent yesterday with Lord Sanderson of Bowden, who is the Minister in the Scottish Office responsible for agriculture. On my visit a little north of my hon. Friend's constituency I looked at many of the problems that he has mentioned, and I confirm what he has said.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Does the Minister agree that the oddity of the statement and its timing is contributed to by the fact that we have not had a parallel statement on Scotland, despite the fact that, proportionately, the Scottish interest in this matter is much greater than elsewhere? Does he also agree that he has no right to speak about this as an all-British matter if

[Mr. Brian Wilson]

he is unable to answer the question put by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) about whether the premium within the Highlands and Islands Development Board, currently running at 58p, will be maintained? That information is crucial. Will he kindly get it?

Does the right hon. Gentleman also accept that his reference to the environmental benefits of reducing the headage in many LFAs is by no means undisputed? If one reduces the headage one also decreases the number of people living in many communities dependent upon sheep. There is nothing worse for the environment than for living communities to be killed.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman is perfectly right. That is why I did not say it, did not dream of saying it and would not have said it. I said perfectly clearly that the present system has considerable environmental benefits. We fought hard to ensure that the headage limits of which the hon. Gentleman speaks were not so low as to have the effects that he feared. Because we fought it, the figure rose to 1·4 rather than the much lower one that we had before. I went on to say that I hoped that under our new freedom we would be able to make those payments even more environmentally beneficial. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would support me in that.

This is a United Kingdom statement because the changes I mentioned cover the United Kingdom. The Secretary of State for Scotland was here to listen to the statement. I promise the hon. Gentleman that the points he made have been taken into account, and changes commensurate with them are being made by the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mr. Paul Marland (Gloucestershire, West): I extend a warm welcome to my right hon. Friend's statement. The increase in payments for hardy ewes has two benefits. First, as other Members have said, it will help to ensure a better standard of living for those who live in the hills. Secondly, it will ensure the foundation stock, for which many hardy ewes are used. They are the pure breeds from which commercial herds are developed. For both those reasons, I welcome the first part of the statement.

With regard to the second part of the statement, I am glad that my right hon. Friend will stand against the flock limitation sizes imposed by the Community. I hope that that will be a forerunner and that he will persuade the Treasury to open its purse, be more generous and maintain the payments for all the flocks of this country's farmers.

Mr. Gummer: We are committed to ensuring that when the decisions are made next year they will be made on the basis of the economic position affecting the less-favoured areas and the farmers who receive those payments rather than the impact of the changes in the European Community. Therefore, we make the decision and nobody else.

As for the stock position of the hardy ewes, my hon. Friend is perfectly right: the rest of Britain depends considerably on the quality of stock produced in the upland areas. I pay considerable tribute to those farmers who work in extremely difficult conditions to keep the countryside as we would want it and produce the food that we need.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Why has it taken so long—since last October—for the Government to come forward with this paltry increase which will be greeted with dismay in hill farming communities in Scotland? Can the Minister confirm that the increase of £5 million—from £120 million to £125 million—is an increase of 4 per cent. in public expenditure? That must be a cut in real terms in the livelihood of the hill farmers because of the increasing costs that they face. Will he also confirm that he had it within his power to increase the ceiling from £6·75 to £10 per head? Hill farmers will see this statement as demonstrating only a lukewarm commitment to the continuation of the vital HLCA system of support which provides such an important livelihood to the farming community in Scotland.

Mr. Gummer: That is not the view of the hill farming constituencies. I am sorry that, although the hon. Gentleman has sat through our discussion, he has not appreciated the points that I made.

The reason that the statement could not be made earlier was simply that the Common Market had not made a decision about the HLCAs. I said that I would not make any decison about the British position until I knew what would happen in Britain this year. That was because I needed to fight the European Community's proposition that its new proposals would come into operation this year. I managed to succeed in pushing them off so that they did not come into operation until next year. I then started the negotiations and discussions to prepare for a figure for this year. It took us less time to produce the figures from the starting date than it normally does.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall allow questions to continue for a further five minutes. *[Interruption.]* Order. It is my usual practice to ensure that Back-Bench Members have twice as much time as the Front-Bench spokesmen.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Would it not be usual, after 40 minutes on a statement, for you to remind the House that today is an Opposition day?

Mr. Speaker: I am not responsible for the statement. I do not make such decisions. I always endeavour to give Back-Bench Members twice as much time as the Front-Bench spokesmen on important statements.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): On a point of order Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Points of order take up time, and I shall have to make allowances for that.

Mr. Allen: Is it not a fact that, since live television coverage finished at 4 pm, these proceedings can be wound up quickly?

Mr. Speaker: That has nothing to do with it.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman's point of order need my immediate attention?

Mr. Skinner: Yes.

When you, Mr. Speaker, receive applications for statements from the Government and for private notice

questions from the Opposition, you look at them carefully. Did it cross your mind today that the Opposition's ten-minute Bill in support of the ambulance workers would have been seen on prime time television were it not for the Government's statement?

Mr. Speaker: I do not hear such arguments when Government business follows.

Mr. Alan Amos (Hexham): Does my right hon. Friend share my concern that to the EEC British hill farmers are the forgotten men of agriculture, despite the fact that they produce high-quality meat and look after the environment? Will he accept an invitation to visit my constituency where I can assure him that he will receive every possible support in his continued battle against EEC discrimination against my hill farmers?

Mr. Gummer: I have been to my hon. Friend's constituency before, and I shall be happy to go again. I very much have in mind the farmers who work so diligently in his constituency when I come to fight such battles. We have done much better than people thought that we would, but we have not yet done well enough because we do not wish to have that discrimination. I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees that it is notable that the last few exchanges did not take place when the public could have seen them because they would have been ashamed of people who do not care about hill farming.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that hill farmers have existed recently on incomes well below those of lowland farmers? Since farmers' margins on Dartmoor have become so slender that they are invisible and they are nearly living on fresh air, will my right hon. Friend assure me that he will revise hill livestock compensatory allowances at far more regular intervals?

Mr. Gummer: I am sure that my hon. Friend will be pleased that we have made the changes that we have made today, but I cannot promise to review the allowances more regularly. However, when we review them next we shall do so on the basis of the figures from our own industry and not take into account automatically the changes in FEOGA funding, which would have meant a great deal of discrimination against British farmers.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the importance of this matter to all those concerned about the countryside in our national parks which have just celebrated their 40th anniversary? Is he also aware that farmers in the Exmoor national park in my constituency face not only income difficulties but considerable problems caused by damage from the recent storms? Will he do all that he can to diminish discrimination from the EEC in the support for United Kingdom producers?

Mr. Gummer: Non-discrimination is the fundamental right of all British farmers, because they can compete effectively on equal and fair terms, but they cannot accept a situation in which they receive less for their products than their competitors and those competitors receive support for exporting their products into our markets.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): The farmers of Derbyshire welcome the statement and I welcome the opportunity to say so. Will my right hon. Friend take on board their professional view that sheep are an important part of conservation in the upland areas and that without them there is more likely to be erosion, the growth of bracken, and other unacceptable deterioration?

Mr. Gummer: That is why I sought in my announcement today to help sheep farmers in particular.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): My right hon. Friend's announcement will be greatly welcomed. Is he aware that thousands of people throughout the country walk the uplands and enjoy the countryside? His statement referred to environmental measures to help farmers and those who use the uplands for recreation. Will he say what he has in mind?

Mr. Gummer: We shall be looking at circumstances in which overstocking has the opposite effect to that achieved by the vast majority of sheep farmers, who help the environment, to see whether there are ways in which we can prevent that overstocking.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): Hill farmers in my constituency will warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. I take this opportunity to ask him to consider extending the North Peak environmentally sensitive area to take in the village of Marsden in my constituency, where there is a serious problem with sheep wandering into people's gardens, and in some cases into their homes. Is he aware that provisions within the ESA would give hill farmers an incentive to take 25 per cent. of sheep off the hills during winter, which could be of significant help to the residents of Marsden village?

Mr. Gummer: Obviously there is an interrelationship between HLCA payments and environmentally sensitive areas. I shall examine the point my hon. Friend makes, but I hope that the villagers of Marsden, like so many others in the rest of the country, will note the degree to which the Opposition do not seem to care what happens to hill farmers.

Points of Order

4.17 pm

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In a few moments, we shall be asked to consider a ten-minute Bill tabled by the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook). It is my submission that that Bill should not be proceeded with, for a number of reasons.

If you, Mr. Speaker, consult page 464 of "Erskine May", you will read that the normal rule applying to ten-minute Bills is that

"a private Member may not move for leave to bring in a Bill of which the main object is to create a charge by way of taxation or expenditure."

A footnote explains that, under a ruling made in 1985,

"Even the use of the word 'Finance' in the short title has been refused."

That ruling resulted from a decision made earlier that a ten-minute Bill could not be proceeded with because it sought to raise money.

The word "pay" in the Bill's description could be construed as a form of expenditure. My first reason for objecting to the Bill's consideration relates to its short title, which, because it refers to Ambulance Staff Pay Determination, is not permissible. Secondly, the mention of the appointment of a pay board in the Bill's description again endorses the belief that it seeks the expenditure of revenue by the creation of a pay board, and for that reason the Bill cannot be countenanced.

My third reason concerns the operation of the Bill. I refer right hon. and hon. Members to *Hansard* for 5 March 1929, when there was a debate on a ten-minute Bill whose subject was superannuation. A former hon. Member, a Mr. Kelly, raised that issue because in those days a civil servant who was asked to serve in one of the colonies lost his entitlement to superannuation payments during the time that he was away. Mr. Kelly sought to introduce a ten-minute Bill to correct that situation. On that occasion, Mr. Speaker listened for a few moments, and then said:

"It is the question of the exact operation of the Bill if it becomes an Act of Parliament. Probably he"—

the civil servant in question—

"would be entitled to a larger pension if the Bill passed."

Later he said:

"I could not allow a private Member to bring in a Bill which increases the charge on the Exchequer".—[*Official Report*, 5 March 1929; Vol. 226, c. 218.]

The Bill about which we may shortly hear would, by inference, commit the House to expenditure by setting up a pay board and, because the description of the measure refers to annual increases in ambulance staff pay, would more or less commit us to increases in staff pay. I submit, therefore, that, under the precedent which I have cited, the Bill cannot be proceeded with.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. An important matter has been raised with me—*[Interruption.]*—and I trust that hon. Members will allow me to deal with it. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) for having given me notice of his intention to raise it because that has enabled me to look up the precedents, as he has done.

I am satisfied that the main purpose of the Bill about which we are to hear is the appointment of a board. However, the hon. Member is correct in saying that, if leave is given for the introduction of the proposed Bill, its text should not have as its main object the creation of a charge. The Public Bill Office may be relied on to ensure that that will not be the case. [HON. MEMBERS: "On a point of order."] Order. I cannot see how there can be anything further to that point of order, with which I have dealt.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. After most of us have left the House and have been long forgotten—that is, if any of us have been noticed in the meantime—*[Interruption.]* You, Mr. Speaker, will be remembered. I am not seeking to ingratiate myself. I am not an ingratiating sort of person. You will be remembered, Mr. Speaker, as the Back-Benchers' Speaker, the tribune of the Back Bencher. You will also rightly be remembered for being concerned about the dignity of the House. Governments and Oppositions are powerful machines, but from time to time they are a little clumsy and allow issues to pass by. On such occasions, it is the Back Bencher who can sometimes have the opportunity to bring forward vital issues. One need only mention——

Mr. Speaker: Order. What is the issue that the hon. Member is raising?

Mr. Marlow: The issue before us is the question of the ten-minute rule Bill, the jewel in the crown of the Back Bencher's armoury. For most of the time, life for a Back Bencher is splendid, but is dependent on chance, others and the ballot. The ten-minute Bill allows the humble Back Bencher who is persistent the opportunity in prime time to bring an important measure before the House of Commons. That right has traditionally been reserved for the Back Bencher. An arduous process is involved——

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Member is seeking to allege that members of the Opposition are not Back Benchers, that is not correct.

Mr. Marlow: I was saying, Mr. Speaker, that it is an arduous process. The hon. Member concerned must go to an office, a garret, an attic above the Chamber and spend a sleepless night tossing and turning about among yellowing folios, concerned lest he might lose his opportunity with a ten-minute Bill and another hon. Member might—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think there is any matter of order in the point that the hon. Member is now raising. The same proeedures must be carried out whether hon. Members sit on the Government or Opposition side. I think we had better get on.

Mr. Roger King: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: Order There can be no further point of order on the issue. I have given the hon. Member a considered ruling.

Ambulance Staff Pay Determination

4.23 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide for the appointment of a pay board to supervise a pay mechanism for annual increases in ambulance staff pay; and for connected purposes.

This afternoon, if it chooses, the House can divide on the Bill, but the public have already given their verdict on who has won the debate on the ambulance dispute. Across Britain—in opinion polls, in petitions, in donations and in today's rallies—the public have demonstrated how they wish the House to vote. If only the majority party would listen to the public. If those taking part in today's rallies had been in eastern Europe, Conservative Members would regard them as heroes for expressing their views.

The members of the public who attended those rallies were prompted by two motives. The first was to show support for the ambulance crews on whose skills in saving lives they depend in an emergency—skills that we all saw in action only last week, when crews who had not been paid since before Christmas turned out to tend the casualties of the gale-force storms. Let me warn Conservative Members, however, that a second motive also drove so many members of the public to take part in the demonstrations: impatience with a Government who had begun the dispute too afraid to go to arbitration, and who are now too stubborn to sit around the table and negotiate with staff unless those staff surrender first.

That impatience is now mixed with incomprehension at the fact that, throughout the five months of the dispute, the Secretary of State has not once sat down with the staff side in an effort to find a solution. Today's demonstration will have been worth while if it persuades him to take 15 minutes out of his time to do that now.

The dispute is now in its 20th week. There are different ways of measuring the cost of such a prolonged dispute. There is, for instance, the cost of human suffering—the suffering of accident victims who have been left longer in pain and distress before being attended to by staff without adequate training; the suffering of elderly and infirm patients who have been denied treatment at the day care centres that they have been unable to reach since September. It does not help those people for us to argue about who is to blame for the dispute. The only question that will help them is: who will solve the dispute?

There are, of course, other ways of measuring the cost. There is the price that has been paid in the morale of ambulance staff, who have seen their work devalued and their commitment exploited. Among the casualties of the dispute are the ambulance staff who have left the service and will not return when it is over. Among them is Malcolm Woollard, who last year received the "Ambulance Person of the Year" award.

Mr. Woollard is known to Conservative Members, because six years ago he worked for 17 hours on the shift that was called to the Grand hotel in Brighton. At the time he did not feel that his work was properly valued, because he had had the opportunity of an exchange of views with the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who has just addressed the Chamber at such length. On that occasion the right hon. Gentleman spoke more crisply, saying to Mr. Woollard:

"At least it makes a change from standing around at the county show."

In the second month of the dispute, Mr. Woollard left the ambulance service for a job that pays him 50 per cent. more for working fewer hours. The longer that the dispute is allowed to continue, the greater will be the loss of skilled staff, and the lower will be the morale of those who remain.

It is also possible, however, to put a cash figure on the cost of the dispute. When we debated it three weeks ago, I put the total bill for police and Army cover at £10 million. It is now clear that my estimate was too cautious. It is evident from figures that I have since obtained that the cost of cover by the police alone now exceeds £13 million, while the bill for Army cover must now be well over £5 million. The Health Service is now paying the police and the Army £2 million a week to do a job that ambulance staff can do better. There is a cruel irony in that figure: £2 million is exactly 1 per cent. of the total ambulance pay bill.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Nothing out of order has occurred.

Mr. King: A speech on a ten-minute Bill is supposed to describe the workings of the Bill, not a lot of emotion.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) is in order.

Mr. Cook: As I was saying, £2 million is exactly 1 per cent. of the total pay bill. In other words, in the time since the House last debated the dispute—three weeks ago—the Government have spent on makeshift cover as much as it would take to improve the offer by the amount that might bring back full cover. If the money to settle the dispute is there, why is it not used to settle it rather than to prolong it?

The object of the Bill is to extend to ambulance staff the same pay mechanism as is currently enjoyed by people in the other emergency services. The Secretary of State has been unable to sell to the constituents of any hon. Member the notion that ambulance staff are not entitled to the same treatment as people in the other emergency services because only one in 10 of their calls is an emergency. In the recent debate the Secretary of State, to confirm that claim, referred me to figures collected in York. I have taken his advice: I have looked up the York figures. Having done so, I have to tell the Secretary of State that those figures do not support his claim that only one in 10 of ambulance calls is an emergency. On the contrary, the figures show emergency patients, on the basis of the Secretary of State's own estimate, as representing one in five of all patients collected by the ambulance service, and, in terms of all mileage covered by the ambulance service, emergency calls take up not one in 10, or one in five, but more than one in four of all ambulance miles.

It is now clear that people in the ambulance service spend an even higher proportion of their time on emergencies than people in the other two emergency services. Therefore, there can be no reasonable grounds for denying them the same pay mechanism as is available to the people in the other two services. As someone once said,

"All three deserve to have their pay negotiations put outside the arena of industrial dispute by being given firm and automatic linkage to national price or wage rises."

That someone was, of course, the Prime Minister, on whose behalf a letter in those terms was sent to two

[Mr. Cook]

ambulance men who had written to her. She was right then to recognise the logic of their case; she is wrong today in refusing to admit that the same logic still stands.

The Bill would give effect to that commitment by the Prime Minister. It would provide the pay mechanism that we know is supported by 40 out of 45 chief ambulance officers—the same local management to which the Secretary of State keeps promising local flexibility. It would give ambulance staff a guarantee that they would receive a fair award. More important, it would give public and patients a guarantee that this vital emergency service need never again be disrupted by dispute.

Today, the voice of the ambulance staff has been heard in rallies in every major town. That voice cannot be heard in this Chamber, so I shall let it speak for itself in the words of an ambulance man from Cheshire who wrote to me to describe the emergency work that deserves this pay mechanism. He said:

"I have been assaulted, more than once, but once sufficiently to be paid a sum of Criminal Injuries Compensation; I have disarmed a youth of a razor blade with which he had slashed himself and his girl-friend; I have made my way across roofs in pouring rain to reach an injured person; . . . I watched a baby burn to death in a motorway crash and still had to go on functioning to tend the other injured, including the mother.

I don't care whether you think my job is dangerous. I only think it is important and valuable to the community, and I will go on doing it whether they give me 11·4 per cent. or 6·5 per cent. or nothing at all."

That ambulance man does not deserve nothing at all; that ambulance man deserves a just settlement and a fair pay mechanism. On this day when the public have demonstrated their support for the ambulance men's claim, I challenge Conservative Members if they dare to mark it by voting down a Bill that would provide a just settlement.

4.34 pm

Sir George Young (Ealing, Acton) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman seek to oppose the Bill?

Sir George Young: Mr. Speaker——

Hon. Members: Shame.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) was heard in silence.

Sir George Young: All Members of the House will want this industrial dispute brought to an early close. All Members have elderly or ill constituents who have been affected by the disruption over the past 20 weeks. Many of us are worried about the impact of the dispute on the volunteers who are trying to keep the service going and we are worried about the impact of the dispute on the families of the ambulance staff.

There is another matter on which I hope that we are all agreed. I should like to place on record my appreciation for the skills, courage and commitment of the ambulance men. That is not in dispute this afternoon. What is in dispute is the best way of recognising those qualities, which are shared by others in the NHS who work shoulder to shoulder with the ambulance men and who also display skills, courage and commitment. The solutions that the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) has put forward to the House will not heal the divisions in the NHS as he suggests that they would. They will simply sow new divisions in the NHS to replace any that he may have resolved.

The Opposition have repeatedly maintained that industrial disputes are best settled by employers and unions sitting around a table. They have often maintained that Parliament has no useful role to play by passing legislation. Today they have stood on their head—they now think that legislation will resolve the industrial dispute. It is wrong to raise the hopes of the ambulance men and their families, the ill and the general public by implying that the Bill holds the key to peace in the NHS.

Let me explain why. Pay review boards, as proposed by the hon. Member for Livingston, have been set up to settle the pay and conditions of professional staff who, first and foremost, have pledged renunciation of industrial action. That is why the Government gave the nurses a pay review board—something denied to them by the Labour party. In the dispute, the Confederation of Health Service Employees and the National Union of Public Employees —the unions representing the staff—have never suggested that they are prepared to forgo industrial action. They have not put that on the table because they cannot deliver it. Given the history of industrial disputes in which those two unions have been involved—in 1978-79, 1982-83, 1988 and the current year—it would be naive to believe that those two unions would ever forgo the strike weapon. Therefore, the first condition for a pay review board is not met. There is no equity in offering 22,000 people who have chosen to take industrial action arrangements that are confined to groups that do not strike.

The message that the House should send out today is that those who are involved in the dispute should return to the negotiating table. As we heard during Question Time, 84 per cent. of NHS staff settled their pay last year without recourse to industrial action—840,000 workers settled at less than 7 per cent. and 500,000 nurses received a 6·8 per cent. increase. Against that background, how does one begin to justify substantially higher pay rises for another group in the NHS? The offer on the table already gives salary increases of between 9 and 16 per cent. over the next 18 months, depending on location and on the extent of paramedical training. By the end of last month, the back pay available to those in dispute already totalled between £680 and £1,450. In London, the new rates offer between 10·9 and 16·3 per cent. and increases of 22 per cent. in overtime rates. In addition to those increases, there are, on the table, flexible local arrangements to help recruitment and to reward local productivity and other service improvements as well as a joint review of the 1986 salaries structure and a national framework for staff with intermediate medical skills.

With that on the table, and against the background of the settlements that I listed, I see nothing dishonourable in the unions saying, "Yes, we would like to return to the negotiating table. We would like to talk in particular about local bargaining"—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask hon. Members to stop the running commentary.

Sir George Young: I see nothing dishonourable in the unions saying that, and that they are interested especially in talking about local bargaining, which gives the

opportunity for yet higher offers. That is the way forward, unlike this exercise in political opportunism, which seeks to raise the temperature when it should be lowered.

The Labour party never offered arbitration to NHS workers in dispute. It never offered a pay mechanism for ambulance staff. It did not even pay the ambulance staff as well as they are paid now, even before the present offer. For those reasons, I urge the House to oppose the Bill.

Question put, pursuant to Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in Bills and nomination of Select Committees at commencement of public business):—

The House divided: Ayes 187, Noes 268.

Division No. 55] **[4.39 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudd, David
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew F. Bennett and
Mr. David Winnick.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan

Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nicholas Bennett and
Mr. Tim Devlin.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Against the background of which you are aware, may I ask whether there has been any request from the Department of Energy to explain the eyebrow-raising matter of the sponsorship of a senior civil servant, Mr. Bernard Ingham, in very extraordinary circumstances by British Nuclear Fuels, in the light of the answer that was given yesterday?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman raised that matter yesterday and I did look into it. I understand that he has received a letter from the Secretary of State.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I draw your attention to the title of today's ten-minute Bill. You will note that the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) asked leave to bring in a Bill specifically

"for the appointment of a pay board to supervise a pay mechanism for annual increases in ambulance staff pay".

I draw your attention, Mr. Speaker, first, to "Erskine May", page 464—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Is this not a re-run of what the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) has already said? I have ruled about that.

Mr. Brown: My point of order has nothing whatever to do with that raised by my hon. Friend. My point of order relates to something that occurred during the speech of the hon. Member for Livingston, which happens, by coincidence, to appear on the same page, page 464.

I draw your attention, Mr. Speaker, to the fact that "Erskine May" states, in the third paragraph on that page,

"After a brief explanatory statement of the objects of the bill"—

and then there is a footnote, No. 5, which reads:

"The mover should explain what the bill will do".

There is then a further reference to a House of Commons debate in 1987. You gave the following ruling after the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) had presented the National Health Service (Provision of Services) Bill:

"in making an application to bring in a Bill, it is necessary to describe what the Bill contains."—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1987; Vol. 124, c. 1112.]

I draw your attention again, Mr. Speaker, to the fact that there were no details in the hon. Gentleman's application as to how the pay board was to be constituted, how it was to be supervised, who was to appoint it and to whom it should be accountable. I submit that that was a gross abuse of the procedure for presenting a ten-minute Bill.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I listened with care to what the hon. Member said and I gave a considered ruling, as I had had notice of his hon. Friend's point of order. I have

nothing further to add to that. In any event, the matter is now irrelevant, because leave has not been given to bring in the Bill.

Mr. Graham Riddick (Colne Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can you assure me that if I queue up for hours and hours to get the right to present a ten-minute Bill, it will not then be hijacked by a Cabinet Minister and presented by that Minister?

Mr. Speaker: I hope that it will not be. I shall be on the hon. Gentleman's side.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I ask you to look at what happened during the ten-minute Bill, particularly the raising of a point of order in the middle of the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook)? It is a new development, as far as I am aware, for points of order to be allowed in the middle of a speech on a ten-minute Bill. It was not a genuine point of order; it was done because the points being made by my hon. Friend were effective and not liked by Conservative Members.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This takes time out of the Opposition's debate.

When a point of order is raised, it is necessary that the Chair hears what it is. If it needs immediate attention, the occupant of the Chair must deal with it. That was not so today and I ruled it out of order.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): On a mercifully brief point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am sure that many hon. Members on both sides of the House feel that there is something undignified about somebody with the awesome responsibilities of the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) having to spend the night tossing and turning in the Public Bill Office. My point, which you may want to discuss through the usual channels, is that Standing Order No. 19 says that you have the power to permit, if you think fit, a brief explanatory statement from an hon. Member who makes an application to bring in a ten-minute Bill. May I put it to you, as the Back Benchers' tribune and on behalf of all Back Benchers, that in future you use your discretion only when it is a Back Bencher, and not a Front Bencher, who is trying to use this great privilege of the House?

Mr. Speaker: The limit for a ten-minute Bill is 10 minutes.

Orders of the Day

OPPOSITION DAY

[4TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Poverty

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

As we have had a late start on this motion, I appeal to the House for brief speeches from the Front and the Back Benches.

4.57 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I beg to move,

That this House, noting that there are now some 3 million more people forced to live on or below the poverty line than in 1979, noting that total tax cuts over the last decade have been more than paid for by benefit cuts in excess of 20 billion pounds imposed on those on lowest incomes, especially pensioners, and noting that the Government's deliberate increase in inequality has not promoted economic efficiency but trapped millions of low-income individuals deeper in poverty, calls upon the Government to provide incentives for all to achieve pathways out of poverty and to gain the fair share in rising living standards that is offered elsewhere in Europe.

It would be easy to make the case that the number of people forced to live in poverty on supplementary benefit —now income support—has risen by over 50 per cent. in the last decade to more than 9 million people today, and that there are now some 2·5 million people living below the level of income that Parliament has laid down as the minimum on which anyone should live.

It would be easy to make the case that the worst-off in our society have seen their living standards fall sharply over this decade by comparison with those in work. It would be easy to make the case, too, not only that the rich have been made richer by this Government but that it has been done by making the poor much poorer. The savings that the Government have made at the expense of pensioners by cutting them out of rising living standards —savings to the Government, but cuts, of course, to pensioners—which over the decade now amount to over £20 billion, more than cover the total cost of all the Government's tax cuts since 1979.

It would be easy to make that case, because it is all true and widely known to be true. That is precisely why I shall not rehearse it in detail. Instead, I intend to take the Government's own declared philosophy in its own right, and to assess that against reality, as far as possible through the eyes of those at whom it is directed. On that basis I shall then press three serious charges of which, even in their own terms, the Government are guilty.

The Prime Minister's view on all this is clear and unequivocal. She told the House—this almost takes one's breath away but these are her words:

"people who are living in need are fully and properly provided for."—[*Official Report*, 22 December 1983; Vol. 51, c. 561.]

Let us test that against the facts. The report of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, published this month, on social fund applicants includes this example:

"Young man, tetraplegic, rehoused in flat following a year in hospital and two and a half years in residential care.

[Mr. Michael Meacher]

Refused grant for fridge to reduce need to shop, because there was no indication that 'without a grant you would have to enter residential institutional care'."

I shall give one more example from another NACAB report published three months ago:

"A CAB in Yorks/Humberside reported a client who first contacted them seven days after his bridging allowance had run out. He had an offer of a job, but it was not due to start for a week and would then be paid a week in arrears. By the time he was paid, he would have been three weeks with no money. DSS refused a crisis loan and told him to go to a soup kitchen. He was unable to take the job due to his deteriorating physical state and revisited the CAB a couple of weeks later. By this time he was starving, physically weak and unable to keep down a hot drink. The client's mother is dead and his father is terminally ill."

So he had no one to turn to but the DSS, and the DSS turned him away.

The Prime Minister's belligerent pretentions brook no doubts. In her letter just before Christmas chastising church leaders for attacking the Government's record on poverty—which I note they did effectively again yesterday—she went even further:

"Over the last decade living standards have increased at all points of income distribution—and that includes the poorest."

If that is so, one wonders how she knows, since her own Government have suppressed all the relevant evidence. They have abolished the Royal Commission on income and wealth, curtailed the general household survey, abolished the Supplementary Benefits Commission which regularly published relevant information, made more changes in unemployment statistics than there are holes in a colander, removed from "Social Trends" the material on the link between unemployment and ill health, and blocked the publication of the Black report on health and social class.

How then does the Prime Minister know? We could do with a little glasnost, since the political concealment of the truth is highly reminiscent of pre-Gorbachev Soviet censorship. There can be no better indicator of official shamefacedness. Is that the reason why we have had no official statistics on low-income families for the last five years?

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): My hon. Friend has given two examples. May I give another example from my constituency? I have a constituent called Melvin Wall who two years ago had his toes removed. He received mobility allowance. Later, one leg was removed below the knee. Then the other leg was removed below the knee. His mobility allowance was stopped after only two years. The junior Minister has the case in his in-tray, and we may get a response at some stage. What happens is that occasionally there is a trawl to try to remove people from the payments system. Obviously Melvin Wall was caught up in that.

Mr. Meacher: It is a pity that the Prime Minister is not here, because it would be nice to know how she thinks that that person who is in need is fully and effectively provided for. My hon. Friend has illustrated one case from thousands around the country which show the complete indifference and lack of concern about need in Britain today.

What we know shows that the Prime Minister is downright wrong. The latest information from official sources shows that the number of people below pension age living on or below the supplementary benefit level more than doubled, to 6·5 million, between 1979 and 1985. The Government's explanation is that the rise in the real value of supplementary benefit, which was about 1 per cent., accounted for half the huge increase. That gives the whole game away. Even if we accept the Government's explanation, which I do not, the fact remains that the other half of the increase, nearly 2 million, is implicitly admitted by the Government to be due to a rise in absolute poverty.

My real charge against the Government is not merely that there has unquestionably been a substantial increase in poverty in the 1980s, but that the Government's policy for redressing poverty is completely discredited. The Government claimed that, if entrepreneurs were motivated with big incentives, the trickle-down effect would ensure that some of the gains went to low-income families. What the Government never admitted was that the big incentives were to be paid for by squeezing the very people on low incomes who were supposed to be the beneficiaries of the policy. Indeed, the Government have done what no other Government, even previous Tory Governments, ever did before: they have pushed whole groups of people below a poverty line which was always accepted by all previous Governments as the minimum for healthy physical survival.

People who get loans from the social fund are forced to repay them out of basic income support. Where, as in most places, the poll tax levy is higher than the Government's supposed national average, individuals on the lowest incomes will have to pay out of income support the amount by which the levy exceeds the 20 per cent. allowance. People living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation now have to pay amenity charges out of income support for facilities such as hot water or breakfast, which they often do not get.

Let me quote just one example of the trend, which is far from untypical. A single girl, aged 17, was placed in bed-and-breakfast accommodation by a local authority because she was regarded as a vulnerable single person. Her basic income support was assessed at £18·72 from which £4·87 was deducted for repayment of a social fund loan. She actually received £13·85 in income support. Out of that she was required to pay £6 a week for heating, breakfast and other services, even if those were not available. Her actual living income was therefore £7·85 a week.

My first charge is about the Prime Minister's boast, as she expressed it again in the House in 1988:

"Everyone in the nation has benefited from the increased prosperity—everyone."—[*Official Report*, 17 May 1988; Vol. 133, c. 801.]

Not only is that boast completely phoney, as millions could tell her, but she has reduced even the little share that they already had. If the Prime Minister would only get out of her bullet-proof limousine and visit her subjects occasionally, if she would only take a short walk from here to cardboard city on the South Bank, or perhaps go on the Underground for a change, the truth would stare her in the face.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Prime Minister could do nothing better than to read an excellent new report from the Church, "Living Faith in the City", which says:

"Too much emphasis is being placed on individualism and not enough on collective obligation"?

The Prime Minister could read that report with great interest and benefit from it. It cites some statistics:

"The official General Household Survey shows that in 1986 1 million households in Britain (5 per cent.) had a gross weekly income of £40 or less and 3¼million households (18 per cent.) had a gross weekly income of £60 or less."

I suggest that the Prime Minister has a go at supporting a family on that sort of income.

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend makes an effective point. A former Conservative MP boasted that he could exist for a week on supplementary benefit, as it then was. He did so brazenly in front of the television cameras, but he could not get through to the end of the week. He was a fit young man, and people in a much frailer state of health have to endure that standard of living for months, if not years, on end.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Does my hon. Friend agree that matters can be even worse than that for an individual living on supplementary benefit? If he takes out a social fund loan, money will be taken away from him in repayments, and the poll tax may be deducted from his benefit as well. Such people will have to subsist on a pittance.

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend eloquently makes a point that I have touched on, and anticipated other questions to which I shall come.

My second charge is that the Prime Minister has consistently talked about the incentive society with open opportunities for all, yet her policies have effectively shut out a quarter of the nation. That matters as remedying poverty is not primarily a matter of improving benefits but of giving people the chance to earn their own living. A major feature of British society today is the fast-growing number of marginalised poor people living alongside others who are increasingly affluent and consumer-orientated and unable to share in any growing prosperity. In their experience, this is not "opportunities Britain" but "obstacle course Britain".

Lone parents, of whom there are now more than 1 million in Britain, three quarters of them previously married, illustrate that point poignantly. I shall cite one example:

"for the past two years Mrs. Barnes has been out of work, living off the £33.28 weekly that is left in benefit after her mortgage has been paid . . . determined to do the best for herself"

and her son, aged eight,

"she has taken a job as a home help for Kent County Council, helping old people and the disabled with shopping, cleaning and cooking . . . As yet, she is not sure whether she will be left with more or less money out of her earnings of £2·83 per hour, once the mortgage of £171 per month is paid because Family Credit, the benefit that is supposed to make it worthwhile for the low-paid to remain in work"

does not, of course, take account of mortgage payments.

"Either way, it will be a matter of a few pounds which effectively means she is working for almost nothing . . . Money is not the fundamental problem which forces Mrs. Barnes into the underclass. It is the lack of child care after school and during school holidays which prevents her from earning"

her living and becoming independent.

Mrs. Barnes's case illustrates the mortgage trap, but there are two further ways in which Government policy has made it more difficult for lone parents to get work. First, there is the child care trap. While the earnings disregard was raised in 1988 from £12 to £15 a week, no account is taken of work expenses, and that effectively traps those unable to get free child care. In addition, there is the benefits trap. Low-income families lost their entitlement to free school meals in the Fowler review, and that means that it is more difficult for lone parents, especially those with more than one school-age child, to go out to work. With sharper clawbacks, too, for the rate of loss of housing benefit, it is not surprising that fewer lone parents have a part-time job now than before the Government's social security review.

Then there is the debt trap, in which persistent very low incomes force people into the arms of the social fund—with all the consequences to which my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) referred—or even into the hands of loan sharks. That drives people deeper into poverty and makes the recovery of economic self-reliance much more difficult.

Many other people are discriminated against by the Government's rules. Two months ago, the Secretary of State introduced a £43-a-week means test on unemployment benefit. A part-time worker who works one day or more a week will now lose a whole week's benefit. I submit to the right hon. Gentleman that that is a serious disincentive to people taking up part-time work.

Perhaps the worst way in which the Government are blocking the way out of dependency is the double bind in which they have placed 16 to 19-year-olds over work and accommodation. In a report issued two months ago, the Association of Chief Officers of Probation cited one example from its case notes:

"a 17-year-old girl, in care since she was four . . . was supposed to be repaying a social fund loan as well as a fine, but had received no benefit since she left YTS."

She was

"'homeless and without any income, in danger of prostitution and drug abuse, very vulnerable.' The likely outcome was 'starvation and reoffending'. She had damaged a telephone to get into police cell for food and shelter."

What is needed, and what the Labour party proposes, is a recasting of public services so that they become fully accessible as pathways out of poverty. High-quality training needs to be more widely available, particularly for women re-entering the labour market after caring for dependants, for 16 to 19-year-olds and for the long-term unemployed, if they are to gain entrance to the enterprise culture. Disabled people need improved local services, such as appropriate transport and community care, adaptation for access to buildings and skills and benefits that make part-time work worth while for the partially incapacitated.

We would also abolish the unfair and discriminatory tax that is currently levied on the imputed value of workplace nurseries, which, despite being such a limitation, raise only about £1 million a year in revenue. We deplore and would reverse the worsening of the social wage in recent years, our poor public transport, the lack of home helps and other community services and damp and unfit housing—all of which not only lower the quality of life but stifle initiatives to gain and hold employment. Only then will we begin to transform excluded Britain into an enabling society.

My third charge against the Prime Minister is that she is letting this country fall further and further behind Europe, in basic social rights as in so many other ways. I am well aware that there is rather a sterile debate about whether poverty is absolute or relative, but there can be no argument about the need for us to achieve, if not exceed,

[Mr. Meacher]

common standards in Europe, and it is undeniable that in the 1980s our record became much worse in comparison with that of the rest of Europe.

Take pensions. The latest figures from Eurolink Age suggest that, relative to earnings—and that is the right comparison—the basic state pension is only half that of other major EEC countries. On average, a single person in Britain now receives a pension that represents only 46 per cent. of his previous net earnings. A person in an equivalent position in Italy gets a pension that is 81 per cent. of his previous net earnings. In Germany the figure is 82 per cent., in France it is 92 per cent., and in the Netherlands it is 93 per cent.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: Of course it is true——

Mr. Devlin *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: I may be anticipating what the hon. Gentleman is about to say, but perhaps he will just let me make this point.

Of course, it is true that many pensioners in Britain have an occupational pension also, but it is equally true that for many people that pension is very small. The basic pension represents the safety net provision for older people throughout Europe, and Britain's low level of provision really does matter because we have the third largest number of elderly people in the EEC and one of the largest populations of old elderly, many of whom have no extra pension.

Mr. Devlin: I was interested to hear what the hon. Gentleman said about comparisons with pensions in Europe, because my constituents raise that point with me all the time. However, I wonder how the hon. Gentleman responds to this point. Britain is the only country in the European Community that offers all its pensioners a guaranteed state minimum pension. It is also the only country that gives all women a pension, regardless of whether they have worked. It is all very well to say that pensioners in France receive 80 per cent. of their previous net earnings, but that means that some people have extremely low incomes because, not having earned a great deal during their lives, they do not get a great deal of pension.

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point, which is a surprising one to come from a Conservative Member. The guaranteed state minimum pension was, of course, put in place by the Labour Government in the 1970s. I remind him that not only SERPS, which is excellent and which I am convinced is the best pension scheme available as a top-up to the basic pension, but our guaranteed minimum pension for occupational pensions is underwritten by the state. It was a Labour Government who did that, and since 1979 the Conservative Government have been doing their best to unravel it. It was a Labour Government who ensured that women would be able to receive a full-rate SERPS pension on the basis of 20 years' work, so that women who had brought up a family and could work for only 20 years would not be disadvantaged in any way.

I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that those are very real advantages, but I should like him to address his remarks to his right hon. Friends on the Government Front Bench, who have been doing their best to undermine that part of their inheritance from the previous Labour Government.

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton) *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: I thought that that might bring the right hon. Gentleman to his feet.

Mr. Newton: Only briefly, to observe as mildly as I can that I do not think that the hon. Gentleman has addressed the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) put to him, which was that, against the comparisons that the hon. Gentleman has sought to make with Europe, people in Europe who are low paid almost certainly do less well than their counterparts here, and married women in Europe, not being entitled to a pension on their husband's contributions as they are here, may well end up without any pension. The hon. Gentleman should take those points into account in his comparisons.

Mr. Meacher: I am the first to admit that it is difficult to make comparisons with Europe, not only on pensions, but on other aspects of social welfare, and any comparison must be significantly qualified. However, as the right hon. Gentleman regularly talks about "the average" in our debates—indeed, that is probably the fairest way of making comparisons—I remind him that I had been considering the pension that is available to a person on average earnings, and that that consideration leads to the picture that I presented.

Mr. Devlin *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: No, I shall not give way again. The hon. Gentleman will be able to make his own speech and I have been speaking for some time now——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Giving Meacherisms.

Mr. Meacher: Well, I shall try to draw to a close now.

I now turn to child care provision. Family benefits for a couple with three children under 12 now amount to £21·75 per week in Britain. In France they are double that, at £43·30 per week. British families are the worst off among the major EEC industrial nations, with only Portugal, Ireland, Spain and Greece paying less in family benefits.

I now take low wages as an example, because low pay is such a potent cause of poverty. The minimum rate set by the wages councils in Britain, which cover one tenth of the work force, is £338 per month. In Germany it is nearly double that, at £653 per month. Again, Britain is behind all the main EEC industrial nations and ranks firmly in the second league, along with Greece, Spain and Portugal.

All those facts speak for themselves. It is clear in my mind that the Prime Minister's rooted objection to the European social charter stems much less from any belief that it will undermine economic efficiency than from her recognition that, if implemented, it would expose her deplorable and shameful social record.

The social charter is not about a drain on market forces. It is about providing a launching pad so that people can participate in and contribute to the society around them.

It is the Prime Minister's wilful obstinacy which makes her demand compliance with the enterprise culture, and which refuses to acknowledge that her own policies block people, however willing, from participating fully in society.

I conclude with the story of Adrian Loveless, which has already been raised with the Secretary of State in correspondence by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo). Adrian Loveless is an unemployed photographer whose wife Hilary had a bit of a windfall when her ex-business partner sent her $2,000 out of the blue. A condition of the enterprise allowance scheme is that the person concerned must put up £1,000 in capital himself or herself. They therefore decided to put that money into the enterprise allowance scheme.

To make ends meet, Adrian was told that he would receive £40 in enterprise allowance, and that he could claim family credit. He was also told that he would lose his children's entitlement to free school meals. However, he was not told that his housing benefit would also be lost or reduced because he would be claiming family credit. He applied for family credit on 7 August last year, but it was refused. Mr. Loveless appealed and a claimant adviser told him to withdrawn the appeal and to claim again. The new application was also turned down. Adrian asked for help from the social fund, but was refused because he had capital. His housing benefit was cut off because the local authority assumed that he was receiving £60 in family credit. At this stage, the free school meals were withdrawn.

Adrian Loveless commented later:

"Since the summer I have lived in a Catch 22 situation . . . My family credit was withdrawn.

I couldn't get income support because I was working for more than 24 hours. Things were impossibly tight, but I couldn't get a crisis loan because we were not destitute.

We have had to spend the 2,000 dollars to keep alive, so now I haven't got the money for the EAS.

On Tuesday 17 October, all our money had gone. All we had was the child allowance. It amounted to £29 for six of us."

So much for the Prime Minister's enterprise culture. It is because there are millions of people across the country like Adrian Loveless, who are frustrated, embittered and deprived, that we shall press our motion tonight.

3.27 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"notes with approval the Government's plans to increase substantially spending on social security in the coming financial year bringing the total to an unprecedented £55·6 billion reflecting further growth on top of the 36 per cent. real terms increase which has taken place since 1978-79; and commends it for introducing a reformed structure of benefits enabling these massive resources to be targeted more effectively on those in need thereby ensuring that, from April this year some 1·5 million families with three million children will again have their income-related benefits increased in real terms bringing the amount of extra help provided for them to over £350 million in real terms since April 1988, for improving incentives by virtually eliminating marginal deduction rates in excess of 100 per cent., thus ensuring that working families keep more of the money they earn, and for providing an improved, more accurate and speedier service to the public."

I do not propose to comment on some of the anecdotal cases that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) raised. Obviously we have had difficulty with some of the cases that have been raised by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, and where it is possible to identify the cases or where we have been given identifying details, I shall, of course, look at them. I shall specifically look at the last case that the hon. Gentleman mentioned about which he said that one of his hon. Friends has written to me. I shall make sure that that case is fully and faithfully looked into with a view to seeing whether improvements could and should be made in the working of the benefit system. I can give the hon. Gentleman that undertaking, but beyond that I am sure that he will understand that it would be wrong for me to seek to make off-the-cuff comments about individual cases.

I had some difficulty in relating what the hon. Gentleman said about millions of people being in the position that he described to what most people would perceive as being the broad reality. I remind him that the real take-home pay of married men in this country has risen by about a third in nearly 10 years and that in the past year alone the real take-home pay of a man on average male earnings has increased by about £20 per week, including the effect of cuts in national insurance contributions. In addition, we have had the longest period of falling unemployment since the war. Employment is at the highest ever level and the work force in employment has risen for some six years and has increased by more than 2·25 million. I do not make those points simply to dismiss what the hon. Member for Oldham, West said.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Newton: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, we have been asked to make brief speeches, in view of the curtailment of the debate. While I do not rule out giving way, I should like to complete my point.

I do not seek to dismiss out of hand every point that the hon. Member for Oldham, West made. He put his case in what I regard as a characteristically overheated and exaggerated way which did not give a true picture of the social and economic realities of Britain. One of the important and encouraging developments of the past 10 years, which have been marked by a rapid rise in prosperity brought about by economic growth and productivity, is that prosperity is increasingly more widespread. There is a better regional spread of prosperity. There has also been an encouraging resurgence of many inner-city areas. That was acknowledged by the church men who produced their report yesterday. All those improvements rest on a significantly better economic performance in the past decade than in the two previous decades.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Newton: I have already said that I shall be hesitant about giving way. The House knows that I usually give way readily. In these circumstances, I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) and then to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn).

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will my right hon. Friend add to his catalogue of ways in which we have done exceptionally well the fact that separate taxation for women, from April, will be of enormous benefit to pensioners? Women will be able to receive tax relief on their pension, which they cannot do at present.

Mr. Newton: That is one of the many instances where changes in taxation, which the hon. Member for Oldham,

[Mr. Newton]

West vilifies—to use a strong word—are by no means confined to helping those whom he chooses to describe as rich.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Secretary of State take his mind back to his remarks about unemployment levels? He claims that the Government have presided over the longest continuous period of falling unemployment. I remind him that 1·2 million people were unemployed in 1979, that the Government managed to increase the number of registered unemployed to 3·3 million and that, on their own adulterated figures, there are still almost 2 million unemployed. That is still far higher than when the Government came into office in 1979, and it is one of the highest figures for industrial countries in Western Europe. Is he proud of that?

Mr. Newton: I am proud that the Government have tackled some of Britain's long-running, underlying economic problems, in particular our relatively low rates of growth of productivity and of the economy as a whole, in comparison with other countries. We have tackled those problems far more effectively than many of our predecessors. As a consequence, we probably have the best record in Europe for creating new jobs and for the number of jobs that we provide for our work force. Our improved economic performance and the wealth that it has created for the whole country has enabled us to put steadily increasing amounts into many important forms of social provision, not least social security.

One fact that should be firmly registered in this debate is that expenditure on social security will exceed £55 billion next year. That is £1 billion a week, or more than £20 every week for every man, woman and child. It is almost £40 billion more than in 1979 and, as the public expenditure White Paper published today states, will be further increased to over £63 billion in 1992-93.

The plans that we published in more detail today imply a growth rate in spending on social security of an average of 4 per cent. a year for the next three years over and above the assumed increase in prices. That is on top of a 36 per cent.—more than a third—increase in real terms since 1978-79. That record and those plans are not those of a Government who, as the hon. Gentleman seeks to suggest, seek to undermine the welfare state. It is the record of a Government who recognise that a growing economy is the prerequisite for improved social provision.

Mr John Battle (Leeds, West): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Newton: As the hon. Gentleman takes a careful interest in these debates, I shall give way.

Mr. Battle: The Secretary of State referred earlier to average wages. Does he accept that one of the primary causes of poverty in our society is low pay, often for temporary or part-time work? Many people in inner-city areas and in my constituency earn less than half of the average take-home pay of £258 a week. Why do the Government consistently refuse to accept the Council of Europe decency threshold as a means of taking people on low pay out of poverty? That would provide an accurate assessment of poverty in our society.

Mr. Newton: I make two points in response to the hon. Gentleman. First, any assessment would require a national minimum wage. Some people, including perhaps the hon. Gentleman, support that, but most people accept that one of the first results would be fewer jobs. That would not benefit the people that he seeks to help.

Secondly, the problem of people who find that they would be only a little better off by working usually arises primarily, not solely, out of family responsibilities. The hon. Gentleman and, to be fair, the hon. Member for Oldham, West are rightly worried about that problem. Family responsibilities are taken into account in the social security system, particularly through family credit, but they are not taken into account in the wage system. In any society it would be difficult to achieve—this is more than a debating point—a wage system that avoided the need for the type of help that we seek to give to low-income families through family credit.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): What about a national minimum wage?

Mr Newton: A national minimum wage would not overcome that problem. It is difficult to see how it could do so. If a national minimum wage were set, for example, at the level required to overcome the need for family credit

Mr. Meacher: No one suggests that we eliminate family credit by that means.

Mr. Newton: Exactly. The hon. Gentleman knows that any attempt to do so would cause a dramatic rise in unemployment because it would price many people out of work.

Ms. Short: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Newton: I will give way because the hon. Lady is a Front-Bench spokesman. However, I hope that you will understand, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I seek henceforth to respond to Mr. Speaker's plea for brief speeches.

Ms. Short: How does every other country in the European Community manage to have a national minimum wage while the British economy cannot?

Mr. Newton: It may have something to do with the fact that we have had such a successful record in generating new employment. The hon. Lady will find that we have a good record in generating new jobs and, for example, on the level of employment among married women. Another reason may be that we have not set a national minimum wage.

I hope that I have made it clear that I do not suggest that some people do not have needs for which we wish to do more. I simply wish to bring some balance to the framework of the debate after the hon. Gentleman's speech. If I were in a more aggressive frame of mind—I rarely am—I might say that I saw little reason to accept lectures from a former social security Minister in a Government who twice failed to pay the Christmas bonus to the pensioners. *[Interruption.]* I appreciate that the Opposition Front-Bench team do not like being reminded of these facts, but I am entitled to point them out, as I have done on a number of occasions, and to remind the hon. Member for Oldham, West—he is always good natured when I do so—that it is not so many years since he, as a

social security Minister, was shouted down by a trade-union organised pensioners' rally when he tried to defend the Government's record.

Mr. Meacher *rose*——

Mr. Newton: I can hardly resist the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Meacher: It is pathetic that the only riposte the right hon. Gentleman can make is to draw attention to the one occasion when the Christmas bonus was not paid——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: It happened twice.

Mr. Meacher: The important consideration—and the right hon. Gentleman, given his profound knowledge of the social security system, knows this perfectly well—is the percentage real increase in pensioners' income during the lifetime of the Labour Government. The basic pension increased by 20 per cent., even after taking account of the failure to pay the two Christmas bonuses. Under the Conservative Government, the safety net provision has increased by 1 or 2 per cent. only. The basic pension provision was 10 times better under Labour.

Mr. Newton: I am not prepared to accept the hon. Gentleman's strictures, especially as he seems unable to remember that the Government of which he was a member failed twice, not once, to pay the Christmas bonus. He also conveniently forgets the manipulation of the uprating technique in the mid-1970s. That technique took about £1 billion in today's money from pensioners.

I am led to remind the hon. Gentleman of what must be uncomfortable and displeasing facts because of what underlay the events of that time. I know the hon. Gentleman well enough to know that he would have been unwilling to go into Government with the aim of not paying the Christmas bonus or of undertaking the various other measures adopted by the then Labour Government. We know why it happened. The Labour Government's spending ambitions and promises so far outran the capacity of the economy to produce the necessary resources that the International Monetary Fund stepped in. In effect, it told the Labour Government not to pay the Christmas bonus and to get on with cutting expenditure in various ways. Against the background of that record, it is legitimate for me to say that I am at least sceptical about the receipt of the type of lecture the hon. Gentleman sought to give us this afternoon.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West is aware—he has not sought to dispute the fact seriously—that we have faithfully adhered to our obligation and commitment to maintain the value of the retirement pension in line with the increase in prices. As I have already emphasised endlessly, we have sought successfully to pursue policies to create a stable and increasingly prosperous economic environment in which the value of pensioners' income from other sources can grow. Although the hon. Gentleman may believe that I am repeating a point he has heard before, in the context of what he said about state pensions I must remind him forcefully that of particular importance is what has happened to pensioners' incomes as a whole, from all sources. One should not focus on one particular source. The hon. Gentleman is aware of the facts as they have been adverted to in the House on a number of occasions.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): We hear about them every week.

Mr. Newton: I make no apology for referring to them every week as the facts are good and they are too little noticed either by Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen or by people elsewhere.

Between 1979 and 1986, the average total net income of pensioners increased by 22 per cent. in real terms. The proportion of pensioners in the lowest fifth of national income distribution fell from 38 per cent. to 24 per cent. To hear the hon. Gentleman talk, one would think it had risen. The proportion of pensioners whose only income is from state benefits fell from 24 per cent. to under 20 per cent., but those pensioners whose only income is still from state benefits have enjoyed a 25 per cent. increase in their income.

The hon. Members for Oldham, West and for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) know that the critical ingredients in that improvement are——

Ms. Short: SERPS.

Mr. Newton: No. It is the growth in occupational pensions and, above all, the fall in the rate of inflation. That has meant that pensioners' incomes from their savings and the returns from them have doubled.

Between 1979 and 1986, pensioners saw a 64 per cent. real increase in their incomes from savings. That compared with the position under the Labour Government when their income from savings fell by 16 per cent.

We have always recognised that those trends that are helpful to and welcomed by pensioners as a whole do not mean that all pensioners have enjoyed the same increase. I do not seek to minimise that fact in any way. Not all pensioners have occupational pensions or savings; increasingly, younger pensioners have such savings. We have, however, concentrated additional resources on raising the income support premiums, as we did in October. We have also increased the help given through housing benefit to the older or more disabled pensioner who is less likely to have the advantage of an occupational pension or a savings income, which help so many others. In all, those measures and other improvements have led to a real increase of 22 per cent. in spending on benefits for the elderly since 1979. I do not believe that anyone can suggest other than that that represents a strong commitment to help those who need help.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West also spoke about the disabled. Since they were debated at some length in the House less than a week ago, I shall make only a brief reference to them. I must remind the House that social security expenditure on the long-term sick and disabled has virtually doubled since 1979, to a total of more than £8 billion a year. That represents a huge increase in the coverage of all the main disability benefits. In 1979, fewer than 100,000 people were in receipt of mobility allowance, but now more than 600,000 people are in receipt of it.

Ms. Short: That is all to do with take-up. It has nothing to do with the Government.

Mr. Newton: I am afraid that I must remind the hon. Lady of something else of which she is obviously unaware. In 1979, we inherited from the Labour Government a snail's-pace implementation of the mobility allowance. We specifically speeded up the implementation of that allowance and we have contributed to the growth in the number of those in receipt of it.

Ms. Short: Surely the increased spending on people with disabilities is due to an enormous increase in the take-up of rights created by the Labour Government and not because of new rights created by the Conservative Government.

Mr. Newton: No, that is not true. The hon. Lady should listen for 10 seconds instead of popping up and down constantly as I might enlighten her.

I accept that mobility allowance was introduced by the Labour Government, but it was implemented at a slow pace and, from 1979, we accelerated its implementation. The numbers in receipt of attendance allowance have risen from about 250,000 to 800,000 people. In the past 10 years take-up of that allowance has trebled. That benefit was not introduced by the Labour Government; it was introduced by a former right hon. Friend of mine, Lord Joseph, in the 1970s.

Similarly, when the hon. Lady makes that point, she should remember that invalid care allowance—which has risen in coverage from only 5,000 in 1979 to 110,000 now—was confined by the Labour Government so that married women could not have it. Its extension to married women—which has mostly caused the huge increase in coverage—was carried through and paid for by this Government. That was against a restriction specifically imposed by the previous Government.

I am sure that the House is well aware that we have recently come forward with another wide range of plans of various kinds to improve still further benefits for disabled people, give additional help especially to those who are disabled at birth or early in life, improve the coverage of help with the costs of disability and do more to help those disabled people who can and wish to work.

I shall touch on some of the matters raised by the hon. Member for Oldham, West, including low-income families with children. As the House knows, last April we used the flexibility of the new social security system to give more help to low-income families, over and above what was needed to keep pace with inflation. In October, I announced that from April 1990 we shall do so again to help the families who most need it. We shall give increases in the family premium, income support and other benefits, and a particular increase for those working families on family credit. As a result of those policies, 1·5 million families, with 3 million children—roughly a quarter of the nation's children—will have their income-related benefits increased in real terms, bringing the amount of extra help provided for them to more than £350 million in real terms since April 1988.

Our efforts have been directed not only at improving the help that we give to those who clearly need it, but helping those who wish to reduce or end their dependence on the benefits system. The hon. Member for Oldham, West focused on this. We are tackling some of the traps and disincentives which undoubtedly exist. That has been done in a variety of ways within the basic structure—most notably in recent months by abolishing the pensioners earnings rule. The proposals which I included in my uprating statement also increase the amount of earnings that people can have without losing their invalid care allowance, increase the amount of earnings which people can have in certain circumstances—the so-called therapeutic earnings limit for those disabled people getting invalidity benefit or severe disablement allowance. They also contain measures to encourage and help disabled people seeking to take employment rehabilitation courses.

The hon. Gentleman touched on the fact that I have proposed a substantial improvement in the earnings disregard for lone parents in respect of housing benefit. That will particularly help lone parents who are working but do not receive income support.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Newton: Yes, but this will have to be the last time.

Mr. Latham: When my right hon. talks about thresholds, will he bear in mind the capital threshold disregard? That is particularly important for pensioners with small occupational pensions who will not receive community charge rebates because of the capital figure.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend will know that the capital limits in respect of what will now be community charge rebate, but until now has been rate rebate, were improved shortly after April 1988. That was a welcome move. He may not know that we recently introduced a small improvement in the capital rules connected with people receiving help from the social fund. Both moves show our awareness of the point made by my hon. Friend.

In the wake of all the interventions in my speech, and in the interest of keeping my speech to a manageable length, I shall briefly make two further points. I have talked about the improvements in the earnings disregard and other rules which seek to help people who wish to work within the present system. A major strategic structural improvement has been made with considerable success which is directed at that very problem—the introduction of family credit. That takes about twice as much money to 50 per cent. more families than were being helped by its predecessor.

We also plan to build on our strategic aim of doing more to help those who would like to work with our recent proposal for a disability employment credit. We shall work that out in detail with a view to introducing it in April 1992. That is aimed at a matter that has long been the subject of discussion in British politics—the need for a partial incapacity benefit to reduce the number of disabled people who feel themselves, rightly or wrongly, trapped on benefit by the present system, but who can and would like to work, at least to some extent.

There is an issue which has had considerable discussion both inside and outside the House in recent months which is connected with lone parents. While the sort of improvements which I have mentioned in relation to both family credit and earnings disregard can undoubtedly make a useful contribution to easing some of the difficulties, it is common ground—although the hon. Gentleman did not say a great deal about this—that we all wish significantly more to be done to collect maintenance from absent parents when it should be paid.

At present, for only a quarter of lone parent families on income support does the absent parent pay any maintenance. That is fairly widely regarded as unfair to the taxpayer. Just as important, it is clearly unfair to the children in the family and, not least, to the lone parent because maintenance income provides a good foundation on which to build for a lone parent seeking to move from claiming benefit to work. As the House knows, we are

working towards bringing forward later this year proposals related to this matter, taking into account recent overseas experience, for example, in Australia, the United States and New Zealand, where there have been significant improvements in the way in which maintenance is both assessed and collected.

The House will not expect me to predict now what those proposals will be but will wish me to confirm that to help us in carrying that work forward my Department, together with the Lord Chancellor's Department, the Home Office, the Scottish Office and the Lord Advocate's Department, has commissioned a survey from a sizeable sample of courts and local DSS offices. That will give us better information on the sums of maintenance which are awarded and collected by the courts and local offices and about the amounts of maintenance paid to those on benefit. It will also give us more information about the means of absent parents and, thus, assist us in determining what maintenance payments we can reasonably expect from a different system.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, despite the Prime Minister's statement and what he has said today, during the past 10 years the number of people involved in collecting money from absent parents has declined dramatically? Unless those people are replaced, the chances of getting money from absent parents will be nil.

Mr. Newton: My hon. Friend leads me to my concluding point. He may have slightly misunderstood what I sought to say. At present, there is a set of rules within the DSS for seeking to get maintenance for those on income support—which I am about to mention. They have not been as effectively used as they should have been during the past 10 years. I agree with my hon. Friend about that.

The issue which I raised a moment or two ago, which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister raised a week or two ago and which led me to refer to experience in other countries including Australia, New Zealand and the United States, runs wider and is not simply concerned with DSS matters. That was why our work involves the Lord Chancellor's Department, the Home Office and others.

I agree entirely with my hon. Friend that there is clearly scope in the existing systems operated by the Department of Social Security for improving the way in which maintenance is collected. Steps have already been taken by my predecessor, as he made clear to the House a year or more ago, to improve things. Whereas in 1988-89 we recovered about £155 million from liable relatives, we are aiming in 1989-90 to increase that to £180 million, and it looks as though that aim will be achieved.

Next year we are changing our procedures in ways which we expect to take that figure to more than £200 million, including strengthening the basis on which an absent parent's ability to pay maintenance is assessed by our local officers. The present assessment rests on leaving a margin of 25 per cent. of net earnings over and above the appropriate income support level plus full housing costs. We propose to reduce that figure to 15 per cent., although, as always in our present system, any failure to reach a reasonable agreement would mean that a final decision would depend not on the DSS but on the courts.

The action that we are taking in that area, together with the help that I described earlier for pensioners, disabled people and low income families with children, and our record of increased expenditure on social security which underlies what we have been able to do, show the Opposition's motion to be the nonsense that it is and which the House will judge it to be when it votes.

6 pm

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): No objective person would seek to deny the Secretary of State's description of the growing prosperity and rising living standards in Britain over the past decade, but amidst those rising standards there is, unhappily, also a rising and perhaps largely ignored level of poverty, to which public opinion and the Government should be awakened. We must at least assume that in a democracy public opinion will have some influence on Government, even though their conduct of the ambulance drivers' dispute does not give us much hope.

Because this is an important issue, I am glad to have associated myself with a campaign which was launched just before Christmas by an interdenominational group of churches called Church Action on Poverty. In its publication it quotes the figures issued by the Government in 1985 which clearly show that some 9 million of our fellow citizens are living at or below the official supplementary benefit levels—a 50 per cent. increase since 1979.

To a large extent, the explanation for that is the dramatic rise in unemployment that we saw in the middle of the decade, and that is also part of the explanation for the greatly increased Government expenditure on social security, a figure that the Secretary of State gave us. But those are explanations rather than excuses, and it should be a matter of concern to what is basically a prosperous country that we have that substantial level of poverty in our midst.

Some of it is the result of direct policy changes by the Government. For example, the result of changes in the tax and benefit systems combined is that the bottom 60 per cent. of earners have had their incomes cut by £6·6 billion since 1979, while the top 10 per cent. have had an overall increase of £5·6 billion. There has been a deliberate shift in the redistribution of weekly and monthly wealth in Britain.

Similarly, the impact of the poll tax has yet to be understood by those who represent constituencies where the poll tax has not yet come into operation. Most hon. Members I see present have not yet had experience of this, but I speak as a Scottish Member. Research undertaken by the local government information unit demonstrates that the poll tax will add to the trend that I have already described, resulting from the changes in tax and benefit policies. Of the poorest tenth, some 83 per cent. will lose out by the introduction of the poll tax compared with the old rating system, while 71 per cent. of the richest tenth will gain. That is an additional factor that is yet to have an impact on most of the United Kingdom's economy in the current year.

There is a new level of poverty on which no one has touched and on which I do not propose to dwell—I am not sure that poverty is precisely the right word—created as a result of the Government's policy, which my party fully supported, to sell council houses. The impact of huge interest rates and mortgage increases means that many people are now struggling to pay their mortgages. The latest figure that I have shows that, in the middle of last

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year, some 45,000 home buyers in Britain were more than six months in arrears with their mortgage payments. That has caused great stress to many of our fellow citizens.

The existence of poverty on that substantial scale in Britain cannot be explained away by a mixture of bad luck and personal weakness. It is caused by the economic and political processes which direct our society. It is caused largely by Government policy and we must be concerned that a country that is capable of generating so much wealth is also capable of generating so much division between rich and poor in our society.

About 18 months ago in Canada, I listened with interest and amusement to a lecture by the American Liberal economist, J. K. Galbraith. His description of the experience in the United States applies to Britain. He said:

"We have had, in these last years, large reductions in the effective rates of the income tax on the very rich. And also a powerful crusade against the welfare services to the poor. The rich, it is held, need incentive to greater economic effort; the poor need release from the debilitating effect of welfare . . . The rich have not been working because they have too little money; the poor have not been working because they have too much."

A great deal of that philosophy has been around in economic and political circles over the past decade. But the underclass that has been created and isolated from the rest of society by its poverty is, in the main, composed of people who do not work. A few, admittedly, may be workshy, but most cannot work because they live in the wrong areas, have no usable skills, are too old or have children or relatives for whom they have to care.

In some of the big cities that I have visited during the past decade, which other hon. Members represent—parts of Liverpool and Birmingham—most notably the cities that have suffered major industrial decline, there are communities of mass poverty of those who do not work. There is one difference between them and the poverty that afflicted the Victorian generation: they have before them night after night the vision of the other society on their television screens. That is one reason why there is a direct correlation between the areas of deprivation and the rising crime rate, particularly the rising rate of crime against property. The contrast is obvious between their life experience and the picture that they see presented to them not only in television programmes but in the acquisitive, attractive nature of television commercials.

Poverty is not limited to the much publicised inner cities. I congratulate the Opposition on choosing this subject for debate. The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) gave one or two examples from newspaper cuttings, still valid for all that, but which enabled the Secretary of State to say that the Ministry should be sent names, details and facts. I want to give the House five snapshots of actual cases that I have dealt with in my constituency over the past two years. The first is related to the poll tax.

A young man aged under 25, whose needs under the Government's new policy are assessed as less than those of other human beings, came to see me. He was doing something of which the Government approve—he was on a Government training scheme. His income was £44 a week and he had received a poll tax demand for £17 a month. The first thing that I did was to check with the local authority that his rebate had been properly calculated, and it had. I wrote to the Secretary of State—this is my response to his concluding remark—asking how he expected a man on £44 a week to pay £17 a month poll tax. His reply was that the rebate was a matter for the local authority to determine. That is the truth, but it is not the whole truth. The local authority can only determine the rebate on the scales laid down by the Secretary of State's Department. I repeat the question: how can one expect a person on an income of £44 per week to pay poll tax of £17 a month?

My second snapshot is of an elderly widow in Lauderdale on an income of £44 per week combined pension and income supplement. Because of changes to the rate rebate system the year before the introduction of poll tax, she received a rates demand for £75 on the house that she rents from her late husband's employer. She asked me how she was expected to pay that bill on her income. Again I checked that the amount being demanded of her was correct, and it was.

The lady also showed me her bank book, with details of her life savings, saying, "You must understand that if I pay that £75 now out of those savings, and something the same next year, and then poll tax the year after that, soon I shall have nothing left to see me decently into my box". That is the reality of life for many people—not just in the inner-city areas but in small towns and villages throughout the country.

My third snapshot concerns a single man living in Galashiels, who had been unemployed for two years. His income of £33·40 was subject to a deduction of £5 as repayment for a social fund loan. He asked me how he was expected, from an income of £28 a week, to feed and clothe himself, and to keep warm. I replied that I could not answer his question.

My fourth snapshot is of a couple from Innerleithen, with a weekly pension of £80, who, despite both being ill and requiring medicine, were refused free prescriptions. Again, I checked that that refusal was correct. The husband wrote to me that he was informing his doctor that, when the present round of prescriptions came to an end, he was taking no more medicine because he could not afford it, and that he and his wife had the greater priority of keeping themselves warm.

The Government's attitude to prescription, dental and eye test charges is fundamentally wrong. In response to a survey published a week or two ago showing that the number of people submitting themselves for eye tests has fallen by 36 per cent. in the nine months since charges were first introduced, the Secretary of State for Health was reported in *The Daily Telegraph* as saying:

"Clearly, the market has not had time to settle, but I am sure that most people are not going to be deterred from visiting their optician because of the requirement to pay a relatively modest charge."

That attitude is all right for a Cabinet Minister on a salary of £50,000 per year or more, because of course a charge of £10 or £12 is relatively modest to him. But it is not a modest charge to the kind of people I have been describing and who visit my constituency clinic; nor is it a modest charge if one is an ambulance driver. When the Government bandy about phrases such as "a relatively modest charge", they are being very insensitive.

My last snapshot is of a widow in Selkirk who wrote that, because of the prospective pension increase in April, she would lose £1 of income support, which I also checked. She wrote to me that she was worried sick. I shall read a brief extract from her letter:

"I wrote to Mrs. Thatcher about two years ago about the cost of the television licence for the elderly, as there are a lot who find it very difficult. I myself have gone back to black and white. Her answer was that we could afford it quite well. I would like her to live for one year completely and utterly on the pension and have rent, poll tax, heating, etc. to pay from it. She would give up long before the year was out."

That backs up what the hon. Member for Oldham, West said about a former Member of Parliament who attempted the same thing.

I conclude with two suggestions. The first is a technical one. The Government ought to look at the proposal from the working party under the chairmanship of my noble Friend Baroness Seear for the integration of the tax and benefits system and for the introduction of a low-income benefit that would guarantee a minimum income regardless of the individual's circumstances, including whether or not he was in work. That solution should be carefully and immediately examined.

My second suggestion is for a change of attitude by the Government. I have not forgotten the Prime Minister's remark:

"No one would have remembered the good samaritan if he had only good intentions—he had money as well."

She ignores the fact that the good samaritan had concern for the misfortune of someone from a completely different background. This country has the money, but we lack the will to change. Young people of 24 are able to leave university and immediately obtain jobs in the City at a salary of £25,000 a year. Good luck to them—but do we not have a common conscience about the less well-off? The present system has created a submerged population—an underclass living in poverty and despair. It is the responsibility of the whole of the community, and especially of this Parliament and of the present Government.

6.15 pm

Sir George Young (Ealing, Acton): The right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir. D. Steel) will forgive me if I do not pursue the moving stories that he told the House. I shall not do so, because the debate began at three minutes to 5 o'clock and must end at 7 o'clock. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State sat down at 6 o'clock, with more than half the time available for the debate having been occupied by the speeches of the two Front Bench spokesmen. Allowing one quarter of an hour for wind-up speeches, seven Back Benchers are left competing for the remaining 40 minutes.

The specific point I want to make concerns the capital cut-off for benefit eligibility, which is currently £8,000. The most difficult question for any Conservative Member to answer is why people who were prudent during their working lives and who put aside money for their retirement are effectively penalised by the social security system—whereas others who were not so prudent and enjoyed a higher standard of living during their working lives are entitled to income support, housing benefit, and other rebates.

We try to answer that question the best way that we can, but the truth is that there is some disincentive to save and some incentive to reduce capital. That aspect was mentioned also by my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham) in an intervention. I hope that my right hon. Friend will reconsider the capital cut-off limit, because if it is raised it will blunt the cutting edge of the criticisms of the system that are made repeatedly and are deeply felt by those who were prudent enough to put money aside.

My first general point is that the nature of poverty has changed, so the way that we tackle it must change as well. In the old days, the poor were born poor, grew up poor, and died poor—and their children were poor as well.

Ms. Short: Which days were those?

Sir George Young: I hope that the hon. Lady will remain silent.

The general approach in those days was to raise incomes. Today, poverty is more closely related to changes in life style, retirement, widowhood, disablement, lone parenthood, AIDS, and young people leaving home. The Finer report on single-parent families and the poverty that confronts them makes it clear that poverty is simply a phase. If it is the case that poverty is linked to changes in one's life style or life cycle, it follows that one must focus measures to tackle it on the general circumstances that I have described. The benefits system must examine those life cycle changes of retirement and bereavement, and of the husband leaving the family, and try to focus help on those specific changes, rather than raise universal benefits all round—although that was the right approach to poverty when the situation was very different from that of today.

The Government are adopting that approach by focusing extra help on the very elderly and on very poor pensioners, and by taking a more rational approach to the disabled and to lone parents. That approach, which I warmly welcome, must be pursued further when looking at the young who have left home. I hope that the Departments of Social Security and of the Environment will take a fresh look at the young homeless, who are the most blatant example of today's poor.

My second general point is that one can plot the income changes of the typical married couple. They often start life together with two incomes, but that falls to one income when they start a family. Subsequently, when the family has grown up, it reverts to one and a half or sometimes two incomes. One can thereby plot the changes in income.

One can also plot the changes in commitments—typically, a mortgage and the cost of bringing up children. If one plots the income flow of a family against its commitments, one finds that its income is at its lowest at the point when its commitments are at their highest. With only one wage earner, the mortgage takes a disproportionate portion of income, and there is the responsibility of child rearing.

We should put some work into seeing whether we can rearrange the flow of income available to families in a way that more rationally matches their commitments, so that they do not find at the age of 45 or 50, when the responsibility of child rearing is over and the mortgage is paid off, that they have surplus cash which they desperately needed when they were younger. I leave that thought with the Minister in the hope that we shall find a way round that mismatch of resources against commitments.

Related to that is the resource that many people have when they retire—a house that is worth a substantial sum—whereas those living in it may be on low incomes. Having encouraged people to turn income into capital throughout their lives by encouraging them to purchase

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homes, we should do more to encourage them to change the capital back into income when they retire, when they need the income and when it is often a waste of resources for them to pass the capital on to their children, who are often enjoying higher living standards than they are.

We need only look at the increase in expenditure on benefits—20 per cent. more in real terms since the Conservatives came to power—the increase in the value of benefits and the number of new benefits to see that the case for resisting the Opposition's charge and supporting the Government amendment is extremely strong.

6.21 pm

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): It is absolutely unbelievable that we should be told that poverty is the result of changed life styles or circumstances, and that it could be alleviated by helping those who have nothing to manage nothing more sensibly so that they can get out of the poverty trap.

To suggest that that can be done demonstrates how the Government seek to put a human face on the scandal of their actions against poor and low-paid members of the community. *The Guardian* was right last month to say that the social fund must be regarded as the most shocking and cynical piece of so-called welfare machinery ever to have been put in place.

The strategy of the Government is to try to make the poor vanish. The Secretary of State should be called to account for presiding over his Department at a time of moral dereliction in what is happening to our people and over what the Government claim their intentions to be. The reality of what is going on in vast numbers of people's lives is positively surreal.

It is surreal to tell women on benefit, pensioners and single parents who are struggling to make their meagre incomes pay increased charges, such as the poll tax and rent increases, that the answer to their problem is to manage their incomes more sensibly.

It is surreal to tell unemployed women who enter training schemes in an effort to return to the paid labour market that the money they receive by way of grant must be directly deducted from their income support. It means them struggling to make ends meet at the same time as they are trying to be trained.

It is surreal for the Government to claim that it is right to freeze child benefit, and then to say that they are interested in the fate of women as they try to return to the paid labour market. Even those women in Avon who manage to return to work earn only 64 per cent. of the pay given to men in the same labour market.

I will give a few examples of case work, of which there are many hundreds, because they are the sort of cases about which I frequently write to the Minister. These examples show not only how people are unable to escape poverty but how they are being drawn positively into the poverty trap by the Government's meanness.

I cite the case of a couple who found themselves homeless and had to enter bed-and-breakfast accommodation. That cost them £112 a week. Their total income, including housing benefit, was £111. In other words, they did not have enough to pay for their bed-and-breakfast accommodation, let alone live. That is how surreal are the intentions of the Government.

Tell young people trapped in board-and-lodging accommodation how to manage on the £5 to £17 a week that they have left after they have paid their lodgings. Can the Government persuade them that their policies are designed to get them out of the poverty trap? The Government are confining them to the poverty trap.

Imagine the plight of people who are anxious to return to work but who need clothes or equipment to enable them to enter the paid labour market. Such people are now denied grant with which to buy specialist clothing or equipment. The Government do not understand what the poverty trap is about.

I invite the Government to explain their policies to a constituent of mine whose wife is suffering from Huntington's chorea. He gave up work to look after her some years ago. Her condition has deteriorated to such an extent that she has had to be admitted to a specialist private nursing home. No other nursing home would accept her. The cost of that nursing is £320 a week. The total amount that that family can claim from the Government is £275 a week, so there is a difference of £45 which that unemployed family must find each week. That husband and his 13-year-old daughter are trapped in a vicious poverty cycle. Would the Government tell them that they are being extravagant in their budgeting?

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): I have drawn the attention of the Minister to the plight of a constituent of mine, although I understand that there has been a change in the circumstances of the case since I raised the matter with him.

My constituent removed from institutional care his severely handicapped adult brother, having decided to look after him personally. I accept that he had no legal responsibility to do that. He did it out of love and family loyalty, thereby saving the state a great deal of money. He is given by the grateful state an income of £34·90. The severely handicapped brother is dependent entirely on benefit. Between them they have an income of about £100 a week.

Would the Minister care for a severely mentally handicapped brother, if he had one, for £34·90 a week? Would he be grateful if he was then told by the Governmeent, "There will be another premium of £10 a week. You are lucky to be living under a Tory Government"? I intervene to tell that story because it is the sort of case to which my hon. Friend is referring so eloquently.

Ms. Primarolo: I entirely agree. That is yet another illustration of the fact that the Government's rhetoric is completely divorced from any understanding of what is happening in people's lives.

A constituent has written to me complaining about the Government's strategy to help disabled people to retrain or return to full-time education. If someone is given a place on a full-time course, he is no longer regarded as ill, and therefore cannot qualify for any form of benefit. Education and training attract various kinds of maintenance funding, but that funding does not take account of the special living costs of the chronically ill and their families.

The Government's famous report on the disabled, which has just been published, admits that the majority of disabled adults live in family units containing low earners trapped in poverty. If they have jobs, those jobs are poorly

paid. The study carried out by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys does not make it clear whether low pay follows from disability or whether those in low-paid occupations are more likely to become disabled. The truth is probably a combination of the two: class inequality and the oppression of the poor combine to produce patterns of inequality and disadvantage. The Government are reinforcing those patterns, not challenging them, and they should be ashamed of themselves.

6.31 pm

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): I shall be as brief as I can, but I must say at the outset that it is entirely unfair for Opposition Members to speak for so long and to allow such long interventions from other Opposition Members who have no intention of speaking. [HON. MEMBERS: "Get a move on."] The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) also took far too long to open the debate.

Yesterday a report was published by the Church of England attacking what it called the "injustice of urban poverty". The report observed:

"It is the corporate responsibility of the community to reflect the justice of God and it is the responsibility of the Church to remind the body politic of its obligation to do so, not simply in a carping, critical sense, but also in positive recognition".

Introducing the report, Bishop Butler of Willesden said that

"he did not believe the situation to be as grave as four years ago, when the Faith in the Cities report was published, because the problems were now high on the Government's agenda."

That is in today's edition of *The Daily Telegraph*.

I came to the House in June 1987. On 12 September 1987, the Prime Minister visited my constituency to launch the inner-city programme from Teesside: £160 million was to be invested in Teesside, and in each of the other five second-generation urban development corporations. Since then, there has been a third generation, and a crop of mini-urban development corporations has ensued.

Most of the poverty about which Opposition Members profess to be so upset is to be found in our inner-city areas. The purpose of the inner-cities initiative was to invest in those deprived areas—such as the northern and eastern corners of my constituency, which are now covered by the Teesside development corporation. At the same time, the Government introduced major reforms in the social security system—changes in the employment benefits and regulations—and began to invest huge sums in inner-city housing.

In today's edition of *The Daily Telegraph*, next to the report of the Church of England's new initiative, is an article headed "£190 million extra to rescue decaying estates". The result of those endeavours has been a significant reduction in unemployment throughout the land. In my constituency, it is down from 7,109 to 4,956, a fall of 44 per cent. Across the country, there was a fall of 25 per cent. in the inner cities last year. Government spending of £3·5 billion on the inner cities has been matched by spending of £55·6 billion on the social security budget as a whole, a real-terms increase of 36 per cent. since 1979.

Earlier in the debate, we heard some talk from the Liberal party—the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) is not here now—about the measurement of poverty. I think that all hon. Members would find that task difficult. Certainly a number of people—even in my constituency, in the inner part of Teesside—are, by any standards, living in poverty, and many are still living on benefits or low incomes. About one third of the population either receive income support, or have incomes only 40 per cent. above the income support rate. The problem is, however—as I would have said to the right hon. Member if he were here—that, if that is taken as the poverty line, every time benefits are increased to combat poverty the number of people below the line increases.

According to the Labour party, however, the measurement of poverty must be relative rather than absolute. In 1976, the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme), then Minister of State for Social Services, said:

"Poverty is a relative matter, and the Government do not accept that a simple poverty line can be drawn."—[*Official Report*, 26 October 1976; Vol. 918, c. 255.]

New Society also condemned the concept of absolute poverty in 1986.

Taking the relative view of poverty, Labour politicians now claim that the rich are getting richer and the poor getting poorer; yet if we examine income levels, we find that in real terms they have grown at all levels. Nevertheless, let me say a word of caution to the Government. Between 1979 and 1985, the incomes of the poorest tenth of households rose by approximately 6 per cent. in real terms, and the average increase for the whole population was 9 per cent. In terms of living standards, however, the picture may be somewhat different—and here I sound a note of caution to Opposition Members before they condemn us for that earlier statistic.

Between 1981 and 1985, the poorest 10 per cent. improved their living standards by 8·3 per cent., while the figure for the whole population was only 6·4 per cent. In the north of England, where I come from, massive strides have been made. Although income levels are generally lower than in the south-east, living standards are generally higher: 10 years ago, hardly any households possessed videos, microwave ovens or home computers, whereas today one household in five has a home computer, one in three has a microwave and half have videos. Share ownership in the region has reached 13 per cent.

That picture of rising living standards across the board has passed a few people by. The Labour party need not crow as I acknowledge that, for I am every bit as concerned as other hon. Members to remedy the problem. People on half average earnings have experienced a significant increase in their take-home pay under the Conservative Government; under Labour, it was actually cut.

Perhaps the solution is to integrate jobcentres with unemployment offices and to place them as near to their client population as possible; that is the solution that I propose for Thornaby, in my constituency. Certainly we can have nothing but praise for the inner-cities initiative, which is transforming our region and the rougher parts of other regions and cities.

In my region, two issues concern me particularly: the plight of the elderly and the condition of the housing stock. As I said in an earlier intervention, I hear a good deal from pensioners about how little they have on which to live, and I have considerable sympathy for some. On average, however, pensioners' total net income grew by 23 per cent. above inflation between 1979 and 1986—twice as fast as

[Mr. Tim Devlin]

the growth in the incomes of the mass of the population, and by as much each year as in all five years of the last Labour Government.

Pensioners tell me that they cannot keep up with price rises, and that I cannot tell them how well off they are. I would not pretend for a moment that they are wealthy; next April, however, the single person's pension will increase to £46·90, and the couple's pension to £75·10. Moreover, 70 per cent. of those who are now retiring have some form of occupational pension. In October, the Government announced a package of measures costing £200 million a year to give additional help to pensioners on income support and housing benefit.

During the speech of the hon. Member for Oldham, West, we debated very briefly the position in Europe. He conceded that his point about the better-off pensioners of Europe was not quite as well-founded as he had thought. Let me quote for his benefit the words of Dorothy Rhodes, the president of Pensioners' Voice:

"We have talked about the percentages of pensions in Europe, and I have been one who has spoken loudly in support of parity with Europe, but during the past year I have been to Pensioners Congresses in Italy and Greece and, having spoken at length to those who actually receive the Euro pensions . . . and discovered that in many cases the actual cash received in relation to the cost of living is often lower than in the UK, I am revising my opinion; for in no way can our Federation ask for an equality that would disadvantage our own people."

Of particular note is the extra carers' allowance for those looking after people who are ill and the earnings limit for those on invalid care allowance, which will be increased by 66 per cent. This, I believe, will go some way to offset the impact of what has been called the granny tax —the provision whereby no reduction in community charge is available for elderly relatives living at home. In my view, that point also needs some further attention from the Government.

I was going to say something about housing stock in the north of England, but I shall leave that for a housing debate. What I can say is that the Opposition have sought to mislead the House, and I urge hon. Members to support the amendment.

6.41 pm

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): In the limited time available, it will be difficult to answer some of the grossly misleading statements that have been made by the Secretary of State and by other hon. Members speaking in support of the Government. I know that the Secretary of State is a very intelligent man, so I assume that what he did was absolutely deliberate. That makes it less honourable than the course taken by some of his hon. Friends, who read Central Office handouts and believe all the fabricated statistics that are fed out. Indeed, I have a copy of such a handout, so I recognise large parts of the speech that the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) has just made.

The Secretary of State claimed that we have had unusually high economic growth under this Government. That is absolutely false. I have here a table showing economic growth since 1948—year by year, cumulatively, and in graph form. The table shows that under this Government the average economic growth has been 2·2 per cent.—less than the growth under many previous Governments. What the Government say about there having been an economic miracle is just not true. It is false, deceitful, and dishonest. These statistics from the House of Commons Library, which we all accept, show it to be so. I do not know why, in a debate on poverty, the Secretary of State should claim to have had such enormous economic growth. If he lives in our society, he must know that many people are now really struggling. Indeed, if we had had the economic miracle that the Secretary of State claims we have had, it would be even more shameful that that should be so.

The Secretary of State went on to claim that all is well, and that the Government have been deeply generous and caring. It is not so. Our country is more deeply divided and more unequal than it has been at any time since the second world war, and the people who live in the country understand that. In response to every poll and every survey of British social attitudes, they say that Britain is now too deeply divided, that they are against that, and that they want to see the division and the inequality reversed.

We have too many pensioners struggling to make their money last week by week. I meet many of them at my advice bureaux and as I go around Birmingham. People come up to me on the street and say, "I have managed all these years, but I am finding it really difficult now." Do the Secretary of State and his hon. Friends live in the society that we live in? Do they talk to people who have to live on state benefits? They say that twice the Labour Government failed to pay the Christmas bonus, yet they have deliberately changed the uprating of pensions so that a single pensioner gets £13 less every week, and a couple £20-odd less. Are they not ashamed to play those games? The Secretary of State should be ashamed of himself.

This is not a game about Christmas bonuses of long ago, before people like me were elected to this House. If bonuses were cancelled, that is regrettable, but a reduction of £13 or £20 a week for people who are finding life difficult —people, indeed, who cannot manage—is an absolute outrage. But the Government did this deliberately. The funds were available, but money has been taken away from the worst-off pensioners in order to give tax cuts to the richest people. And the Secretary of State belongs to a Government who have done that deliberately.

We have a record number of people on low pay. The Government have introduced a whole series of measures deliberately to encourage people to do low-paid work. They have even given employers subsidies conditional on wages being low. If there were more time, I could go through the list of measures. Indeed, the Government have deliberately incited low-paid work. They have pushed many citizens who want the pride and dignity of work into living in poverty and having to claim benefits. People do not like it, and it is economically inefficient. It means that we, the taxpayers—and increasingly the bulk of tax is paid by lower paid workers—are subsidising the most inefficient employers—employers who pay low wages, who do not train, who do not invest, and who have a high rate of labour turnover. It is unjust, it is unequal, it deprives people of the dignity of going to work, and it is economically inefficient. It is not the way to build a modern, high-pay, high-skill economy. It is a disaster for the lives of people, and it is a disaster for the British economy.

We are told that, suddenly, the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State are concerned about lone parents. That is difficult to believe. Big poverty traps have been built for

lone parents by the cumulative effect of this Government's benefit changes. We have a higher proportion of lone parents relying on benefits than ever before. The Government have deliberately brought that about. They are eroding the value of child benefit—the one non-means-tested benefit that helps people such as lone parents to climb off benefits and into work. They are forced to rely on means-tested benefit.

What other change have the Government made? It used to be possible for a lone parent working part time to claim benefit to top up income and to have the cost of child care taken into account—a step out of one parenthood into part-time work, hopefully enabling the parent, as the children get older, to move into full-time work and independence, and not to have to rely on benefit. But the Government have abolished that. They have made that impossible. They have created poverty traps, forcing lone parents into reliance on benefits. So I fear that all this talk of encouraging fathers to maintain their children—and, of course, I agree completely with that principle—is not about caring for those children or those families; it is about saving even more money on the benefit bill. It is as cynical as that. That is the Government's intention.

These problems of inequality and poverty are not an accident; they are the deliberate result of Government policy. One of the major objectives of Government policy was to increase incentives. They said so very clearly. This meant that the rich could keep more of their income, and those less well off—always a contradiction that we pointed out—had to be squeezed harder, had to be given an incentive to work harder in order to become better off. The Government set about systematically changing the benefit and taxation system in order to move money from those with less to those with more. The figures are absolutely clear. I have quoted them before, but it is important to the House and to the country to base debates such as this on the truth rather than on fabricated statistics that seek deliberately to mislead. Let me quote from Hills—and I invite any hon. Member to crawl over these statistics in detail. Since 1979

"the cuts in direct taxes have been entirely paid for by cuts in the generosity of benefits. . . . Overall, the bottom 60 per cent. of the income distribution has lost, while the top 30 per cent. —especially the top 10 per cent.—has gained . . . The losses for the bottom 50 per cent. average out at nearly £8·50 per family . . . while the top 10 per cent. have gained nearly £40 per family. Overall, the bottom half of the population has lost £6·6 billion"—

£6·6 billion has been deliberately taken away from them, producing the kind of poverty problems about which we have been talking.—

"of which £5·6 billion has gone to the top 10 per cent.; indeed, £4·8 billion has gone to the top 5 per cent."

As the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) said, the poll tax will make the position much worse. The statistics will become even more gross.

Let us not pretend that any Conservative Member thinks that any of the poverty in this country is regrettable. Britain is the 15th richest country in the world. If we want to be fair, we have the capacity to ensure that all our people are cared for and can live a decent life in a fair society. The Government have deliberately made things more unequal, taken money away from pensioners and encouraged low pay; then they have pretended that that is not so. I have no respect for that attitude.

The Government stood for monetarism, or Thatcherism, which meant increased inequality which they claimed would increase incentives, plus the mumbo-jumbo, which has been proved false, about M0, M3 and the medium-term financial strategy, which now happily has been forgotten with the resignation of the former Chancellor. The Secretary of State should be honest and speak the truth. He is part of a Government who have deliberately made many of our people much poorer and who have increased poverty to give enormous tax handouts to some of the richest people. The right hon. Gentleman is responsible for that policy. The British people do not like it, and we do not like it, which is why we are increasingly confident that we will soon have a Labour Government. We will implement the policies in our policy review, creating fairness and pathways out of poverty. That will mean a better Britain and a fairer future.

Mr. Corbyn: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Tonight, 11,000 people will sleep on the streets of London in cardboard boxes around the National theatre. Is it in order for the House to confine a debate on the crisis of poverty and homelessness to rather less than two hours in order to spend three hours discussing football? I am sure that you agree, Sir, that the House should find ways to spend more time discussing the crisis of poverty rather than the issue of football which, although significant, has no importance compared with the poverty of the people of Britain.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): That is a matter for the House, not the Chair. I am aware that the hon. Member is one of a number of Members who hoped to speak but so far have been disappointed.

6.52 pm

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Nicholas Scott): The subjects for debate and the time allocated to them on Opposition days are matters for the Opposition Front Bench. If the Opposition shared the view of the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), they could have spent a whole day on this subject, and we would have welcomed it.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): If Labour Members are so concerned, why are there only 11 Labour Back Benchers in the Chamber?

Mr. Scott: The Labour party must answer that. Labour has ordered the priorities; we are simply responding to them.

On Second Reading of the Social Security Bill, I said that, as society changes, social security systems must change to reflect those changes. It is no secret that we believe that, in the immediate past, today and in the future, the overall aim should be increasingly to target—I prefer the word "focus"—extra resources on those who really need the most help. To do that, we undertake a range of monitoring exercises to establish the facts, rather than listen to the type of rhetoric that we have heard from the Opposition today.

We have monitored the system carefully and have made adjustments, as anyone who looks at it in a fair-minded way would have to recognise. We conduct research, collect statistics, analyse the cases of Members of Parliament and look at an endless flow of articles, books, programmes and

[Mr. Scott]

so on—and, not least, we listen to the House on this issue. *[Interruption.]* We fine-tune the system. We try to establish those parts of the social security system where the shoe pinches unduly and make adjustments to it. We have helped families on low incomes, whether in or out of work. We have adjusted the system to concentrate extra help on the poorest elderly and disabled pensioners. We have changed the capital limit on housing benefit. We have done a number of things because we have listened to debates in the House and evidence from outside and have been prepared to fine-tune the system.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Scott: I have had to endure an intervention on a point of order from the hon. Member for Islington, North, but I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Field: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. Everyone is pleased at the small changes that the Government have made. The Opposition repeatedly make the case that the basic benefits are inadequate. Will the Government act on that matter?

Mr. Scott: In real terms, benefits have been improved —perhaps just a little—under the Government. *[Interruption.]* All right, but benefits are certainly better than they were under the Labour Government. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, coverage has increased massively, which means that those on benefit as a whole have had a substantial increase in resources under this Government.

We have listened carefully to the more dispassionate and constructive contributions to the debate. We will obviously weigh all the evidence and the contributions in the balance when we decide priorities. The further that those on the Opposition Front Bench get from having experienced the responsibilities of government, the more they come to fall under the magic wand syndrome—the idea that, somehow, when Labour Members return to office, they will be able to find resources to make improvements across a range of issues. Now that Labour Members are perhaps approaching the halfway mark in their period of opposition, they are even further away from reality than normal. There are no magic wands in government. Government is about priorities and hard choices. We have made those choices, and will continue to do so, based on real priorities which we have established.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) asked about the publication of official statistics on living standards over the past five years and asked when we expected to publish the next edition. We will publish them in the near future, but the Social Services Select Committee has asked us to study the possibilities of considering at the same time publishing comparative data on earlier years, and we are looking into those possibilities. We certainly have no intention of delaying publication of the series on average household incomes.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West made comparisons between EC countries which were highly misleading. There are significant differences in the structures of pensions throughout the European Community, as he well knows. In theory, it may appear that other states' retirement pensions are higher than ours, but in practice few people may qualify and many may be paid well below the standard, let alone the maximum, rates.

A point was made in an intervention about unemployment. I rebut the idea that our performance has fallen below European standards. At 5·8 per cent. United Kingdom unemployment is well below the EC average —below the rates in France, the Netherlands, Spain and Italy—and over the past two years the unemployment rate has fallen faster in the United Kingdom than in any other major industrial country. The largest falls in unemployment have been in the north, Wales and Scotland.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Scott: I will not give way.

No one denies that poverty exists. It has existed under Labour and Conservative Governments. The important point is that we seek to see that poverty is alleviated to the maximum possible degree. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) said, people at all income levels are far better off. By definition, there was more poverty under the last Labour Government than under the present Conservative Government. The Labour Government had a chronic inability to run a successful economy, so they were unable to fulfil their laudable objectives. The Labour party is good on rhetoric, but pretty poor on achievement. Like the late Iain Macleod, I believe that a successful competitive economy is the engine of a compassionate society. More people have benefited because of our economic success.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 212, Noes 287.

Division No. 56] **[7 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*	Cartwright, John
Allen, Graham	Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Alton, David	Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Clay, Bob
Armstrong, Hilary	Clelland, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	Cohen, Harry
Ashton, Joe	Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Corbett, Robin
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*	Corbyn, Jeremy
Barron, Kevin	Cousins, Jim
Battle, John	Crowther, Stan
Beckett, Margaret	Cryer, Bob
Beggs, Roy	Cummings, John
Beith, A. J.	Cunliffe, Lawrence
Bell, Stuart	Cunningham, Dr John
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Dalyell, Tam
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*	Darling, Alistair
Bermingham, Gerald	Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Bidwell, Sydney	Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Blair, Tony	Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Blunkett, David	Dewar, Donald
Boateng, Paul	Dixon, Don
Boyes, Roland	Dobson, Frank
Bradley, Keith	Doran, Frank
Bray, Dr Jeremy	Douglas, Dick
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*	Duffy, A. E. P.
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*	Dunnachie, Jimmy
Buchan, Norman	Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Caborn, Richard	Eadie, Alexander
Callaghan, Jim	Eastham, Ken
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*	Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*	Fatchett, Derek
Campbell-Savours, D. N.	Fearn, Ronald
Canavan, Dennis	Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*

Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. John McFall.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David

McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Irvine Patnick and
Mr. Stephen Dorrell.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House notes with approval the Government's plans to increase substantially spending on social security in the coming financial year bringing the total to an unprecedented £55·6 billion reflecting further growth on top of the 36 per cent. real terms increase which has taken place since 1978-79; and commends it for introducing a reformed structure of benefits enabling these massive resources to be targeted more effectively on those in need thereby ensuring that, from April this year some 1·5 million families with three million children will again have their income-related benefits increased in real terms bringing the amount of extra help provided for them to over £350 million in real terms since April 1988, for improving work incentives by virtually eliminating marginal deduction rates in excess of 100 per cent., thus ensuring that working families keep more of the money they earn, and for providing an improved, more accurate and speedier service to the public.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should like to raise a point of order on the five-page written answer which was given by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces today to the hon. Member for Arundel (Mr. Marshall). This answer is establishing an inquiry, under Mr. Calcutt, into the reasons for the termination of the employment of Mr. Colin Wallace. In particular, the answer admits that Ministers caused inaccurate statements to be made to the House; that is to say, they misled the House.

But the appeal is to be limited to the handling of an inquiry. Why is Mr. Colin Wallace, who is apparently now being believed on this issue, not going to be allowed to have his views expressed on other matters? We believe that this is of such importance that a five-page written answer is not satisfactory as far as the House is concerned. We therefore ask, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the Leader of the House take the appropriate steps tomorrow to ensure that a statement is made, not by the Minister of State, but by the Secretary of State for Defence, about this very pressing matter, which requires the attention and scrutiny of the House as a whole.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Geoffrey Howe): I have listened carefully to the point made by the hon. Gentleman and understand why he has raised it in this way. If I may, I will arrange for the matter to be considered through the usual channels in the light of the request that he has made; the House will be informed tomorrow in one way or another what our response is.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I first welcome the positive response of the Leader of the House? To suggest that this matter be discussed through the usual channels is fine, but I want to press him a little more to say that he will ensure in one way or another that there is a full oral statement to the House of Commons about this very important matter at the earliest possible opportunity.

Mr. Cecil Franks (Barrow and Furness): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of which I gave you notice earlier. It concerns a report on Independent Television News at 5.40 this afternoon concerning the debate in the House on the ten-minute Bill. Independent Television News reported the speech of the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), and I have no criticism of that. It then moved to show a panned view of the House from the cameras opposite showing the Government Front Bench, with the following newscaster's comment over the view:

"The Government did not bother to reply."

It is the convention of the House, known to every hon. Member and equally well known to every member of the press lobby, that the Government do not speak during a ten-minute Bill.

I seek your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a private Member—I know that other private Members feel exactly as I do—on how I and other private Members may deal with this point. I refer you to "Erskine May", page 121, "Constructive Contempts", and will quote the relevant parts:

"Reflections on either House"——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I must interrupt the hon. Gentleman. If, as I think, he is now talking about a possible contempt of the House, or a matter of privilege, he must raise that in writing with Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Franks: Can I see your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and ask you to consider the matter? Can you advise me at this stage whether this is a fit and proper matter for private Members of the House to refer to the Select Committee on broadcasting? To my mind, and to the minds of many other Members of the House, this is a gross distortion of procedure.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has now answered his own point. If he feels that there has been a breach of the conventions, he is absolutely right to refer it to the appropriate Select Committee.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): Further to the earlier point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, can I ask the Leader of the House to ensure not only that a statement is made but that consideration is given overnight by the Government to ensuring that the terms of reference of any inquiry are adequate to deal with what is arguably one of the most serious constitutional crises we have had in recent years? It is something that affects not just one or two individuals but a former Government, and casts a great deal of unfavourable light on an entire Government Department. For that reason, and for the sake of the standing of the House, can the Leader of the House ensure that a full and adequate statement is made explaining precisely what is intended?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that the House will feel that this matter has been ventilated now and, furthermore, that the Leader of the House has given an assurance on the matter. I hope, therefore, that the House will feel that, as we are cutting into an important debate in Opposition time, we should let the matter rest there and get on with that debate.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks), Mr. Deputy Speaker, about the television broadcast at 5.40 pm, is it not the case that the Independent Broadcasting Authority has a duty to ensure that ITN has a balanced view of what happens in the House? The fact is that neither the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) nor the Division figures were given in the report. The implication was that there was no opposition to the speech of the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I think the hon. Gentleman will realise that that is not a matter for the Chair. If he feels that there has been a breach, it is open to him to refer the matter to the Select Committee on broadcasting.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill), Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could the letter of 30 January that I received from the Minister of State for the Armed Forces on the subject of Colin Wallace be considered? Could one other matter be considered—namely, what we, as Members of Parliament on either side of the House, have to do to get things examined properly? At unconscionable length and far too often for the patience of many of my colleagues, some of us have gone back and back and back to the issue of Colin Wallace. Now we find that a statement is made:

> "I greatly regret that the fact that relevant records were not brought to Ministers' attention has in recent years caused inaccurate statements to be made to the House and in both ministerial and official correspondence."

After all that has been said, what about the treatment of the House of Commons?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: These are not matters for the Chair. The hon. Gentleman must use his well-known ingenuity to raise the matter.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not want to detain the House, but the issues raised go beyond a disciplinary question in the Ministry of Defence. What Colin Wallace said he did, and what he did, was to publish disinformation about Members of the House. I have in my possession leaflets published by his organisation involving certainly my right hon. Friends the Members for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) and for Salford, East (Mr. Orme), and myself. Therefore, this cannot just be a question of a Ministry of Defence disciplinary inquiry.

If false information was authorised by the Ministry of Defence, designed to damage the reputations of people who were Members of Parliament—the fact that they were Ministers at the time is almost secondary—then, overnight, Mr. Speaker should consider the implications for the House as a whole before the statement is made, so that the interest of the House in the matter can be taken into account. The House is concerned quite as much as the Ministry of Defence, which did this man a grave injustice.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will the Leader of the House, when a statement is being made, consider setting up a Select Committee on Northern Ireland so that there may be proper scrutiny in the House of the affairs of Northern Ireland? You, Sir, and hon. Members will realise now some of the difficulties that we have in scrutinising business.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope the House will feel that the matter has been ventilated. The Leader of the House has already responded. I understood the shadow Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), to accept the assurance.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: When I have called the right hon. Gentleman, I hope that we can get on with the next debate.

Mr. Rees: Further to the point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Leader of the House has responded, and I hope that there will be a statement tomorrow. As I think the written answer reveals, I was consulted because I was a Minister at the time. I have no complaint about that. Certainly, as will be revealed, these things were not given ministerial approval. There are various documents. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) has one. I have a document from an American thanking me for donations to the Provisional IRA.

There was a dirty tricks set-up outside what is in the parliamentary answer. I have raised this because I want the Leader of the House to know that we do not want to

[Mr. Rees]

consider just the Ministry of Defence aspect, which is important. There is more to the matter than that. I hope that by tomorrow afternoon he will have considered it so that we can raise all these issues and not just the narrow point.

Football Grounds (Safety)

7.23 pm

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): I beg to move,

That this House welcomes the thorough and thoughtful report made by Lord Justice Taylor into the causes of the Hillsborough disaster and regards its proposals as the basis for major improvements in the organisation of Association Football; endorses his outright rejection of the football identity card scheme and regrets the time and money which has been wasted on a scheme generally accepted as likely to increase rather than reduce the risk of disorder and injury at football grounds; and calls upon the Government to introduce the changes in the criminal law which the report recommends, to initiate discussions with football clubs and football supporters about the cost and advisability of all-seat grounds for every league club and to reduce the pools betting duty to its pre-1982 level, thereby releasing money which would be available for many of the improvements in safety and facilities in football grounds recommended by Lord Justice Taylor.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Hattersley: I shall not spend much time on the unlamented football identity card scheme. The debate is about improving safety at football grounds and the conditions in which football is watched. As Lord Justice Taylor makes clear, the identity card scheme, far from assisting to achieve those objectives, would have made football grounds more dangerous and more disorderly.

There are only two things that need to be said by way of requiem about the identity card proposal. First, it was a diversion which delayed real progress towards improvement over two years. Second, by advocating the scheme, the Government, as well as showing how little they understood about football, demonstrated their scant concern for the people who live and work in the immediate vicinity of football grounds. We know that identity card schemes, had they even reduced hooliganism inside football grounds, which in itself is debatable, as Lord Justice Taylor said, would have made hooliganism a feature immediately outside football grounds. To compound that mistake, the Home Secretary, in a long statement yesterday, had absolutely nothing to say about safety and civil order outside and around football grounds. Yet the safety and well-being of the shops and houses in those areas should be an essential part of any new deal for football.

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): The right hon. Gentleman has talked about shops and houses near football grounds. He seems to forget that a successful membership scheme in my constituency has resulted in peace around the football ground on Saturday afternoons. It has been welcomed by residents, shopkeepers and pub landlords in the town and has had a contrary effect to the effect about which the right hon. Gentleman is trying to mislead the House.

Mr. Hattersley: I have heard the hon. Gentleman make that point often; but does he not know the nature of the Luton scheme, or does he choose to misinterpret it? The Luton scheme is intended to, and does, keep supporters out of the ground altogether. That was never the intention of anything that even the Government suggested. The hon.

Gentleman cannot compare the Luton scheme with any scheme which might apply to the whole Football League. He does his case no service by attempting to do so.

Our support for the changes in the criminal law which Lord Justice Taylor recommends is based on our desire to see improvements in the conduct inside football grounds and our determination to ensure that people with shops and houses in the areas around football grounds should be able to live in peace on Saturday afternoons and Wednesday evenings. Were the Home Secretary to introduce the changes in the law which the Taylor report proposes, we would support them. We would support a more vigorous use of exclusion orders to ensure that hooligans were kept away from the game. We urge the Home Secretary to remind magistrates, who have not made use of that power as extensively as they might, that it is available to them.

We support the extension of attendance orders, which could prevent convicted hooligans from even approaching a football ground on a Saturday afternoon, by requiring them to perform community service on match days. We urge the Home Secretary to make available sufficient attendance centres to give real force to such punishment. We support the proposal that racial and obscene chanting should become a criminal offence. We understand perfectly well, as the report makes clear, that in some circumstances such behaviour is already a prosecutable offence, but Lord Justice Taylor is right to say that making it a specific offence in and around football grounds will concentrate the minds of those who might indulge in such behavious and the minds of those who want to arrest and prosecute them.

I hope that, when the Home Secretary has completed his passages of ritual abuse, he will make it clear whether the Government are as positive as the Opposition in their support for those Taylor proposals.

Yesterday the right hon. and learned Gentleman was equivocal about the need for the new powers and evasive about the Government's attitude to them so I asked him directly, "Will he, or will he not, implement those parts of the report which not only take direct action against hooliganism inside grounds, but provide protection to families who live near football clubs?" I repeat and emphasise that were the right hon. and learned Gentleman to introduce such legislation he would certainly have our wholehearted support.

As well as omitting any reference to the problems outside grounds, the Home Secretary had nothing to say yesterday about those aspects of crowd control, encouraged over the years by the Government, which, as Lord Justice Taylor said, are a stimulus, rather than a deterrent, to brutal behaviour. Opposition Members warned the Government about the problems of high and spiked perimeter fences. I now ask the Home Secretary whether he supports Lord Taylor's call for their removal. Opposition Members warned against supporters being treated like prisoners and locked into grounds until it was thought convenient for them to leave. Will the Home Secretary endorse our view that to treat supporters like savages is to encourage them to behave like savages? For that matter, we asked for legislation against ticket touts; Lord Justice Taylor makes the same demand. Will the Home Secretary now act on that proposal? Until now, the right hon. and learned Gentleman has been prepared fully to endorse only one item in the Taylor report.

Everybody agrees that there is a desperate need for an improvement in the organisation of association football and the standards and conditions of the grounds at which it is played. Today we must decide whether the Government wish to assist in making that progress or whether they wish simply to strike another tough posture to cover their embarrassment over the identity card fiasco. Yesterday, to the surprise, I think, of some Conservative Back Benchers as well to Opposition Members' surprise, he made a statement that was wholly at odds with the established philosophy of the Government and the new Tory party. A Government who normally condemn intervention in any form and who regard regulation as always damaging and usually distasteful announced that they proposed to intervene to regulate and control our national game as the game is not controlled or regulated in any other western country. I hope that the Home Secretary —I know him to be a philosopher—will describe the principles behind that sudden change of heart and his new enthusiasm for regulation and intervention.

Of course we all agree that the Government are right and that the Government have a right—indeed, they have a duty—to intervene to ensure the safety of football grounds. It is also the Government's right—indeed, the Government's duty—to regulate to ensure that football matches are conducted in a way that is acceptable to the population in general. I want to make absolutely clear my position on the way in which the Government should discharge that duty. For my part, enthusiast for the game though I am, I should be prepared to watch football clubs go bankrupt and the game change out of all recognition if that was the only way of protecting life, avoiding injury and preventing hooliganism. Over the years, the debate has been too much concerned with the problems internal to football and not sufficiently concerned with football's place in society.

I do not believe, however, that those proper objectives, which I hope the Home Secretary seeks—the protection of life, the avoidance of injury and the prevention of hooliganism—will be best achieved by the Government's simply announcing that all football grounds must replace their terraces with seats in 10 years' time and that first and second division clubs must do so by 1994. The problem is far more complex than that; there is much more to be done than that; and much greater understanding is needed than that implies.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Will my hon. Friend accept it from me that one of the problems to be dealt with is that third and fourth division clubs can certainly not afford the move to all-seater stadiums, even over nine years? The only way of solving the problem is for local authorities to be given a share of the pools funds levies to build multi-purpose stadiums for soccer, hockey, summer athletics and a wide range of other sports, as is done in every other civilised country.

Mr. Hattersley: I want to deal in a moment with the financing of all the improvements that we all want to be made. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) says that some third and fourth division clubs may go out of business if they are not given proper financial assistance in introducing all-seater stadiums. I disagree with him in one particular: I fear that some second, and perhaps even first, division clubs will go out of business. I know that the Minister for Sport has a tenuous

[Mr. Hattersley]

relationship with Millwall football club in his constituency. [HON. MEMBERS: "Charlton."] All right, just outside his constituency. I know that he has a relationship with that club. Millwall told me that he had written asking whether he might visit the club in the following season, and that it had replied that the fixture list for the following season had not yet been published and it was not sure which division it would be in anyway. Perhaps the Minister for Sport would care to ask Millwall how it will fare in the conversion to all-seater stadiums. There are clubs in the first division—Wimbledon may be one and Millwall may be another—that may find themselves in mortal difficulty by 1994 unless some specific assistance is given in providing them with the facilities that they need.

I repeat what I said yesterday: I am in favour of replacing the terraces by seats. The argument concerns the way in which that should be done. The Government delude themselves if they think that, by simply announcing that it is a statutory obligation that must be observed by an arbitrary date, they will have solved all the problems of football. Let me give an example, which the Home Secretary found it difficult to comprehend yesterday in the brief time that was available to me to explain to him the realities of the situation. Whether the Home Secretary likes it or not, and whether I like it or not—and, heaven knows, I have no wish to stand on the terraces any more; I want to watch football from the comfort of a seat—

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Chris Patten): Bourgeois deviation.

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): Nothing is too good for the working class lad.

Mr. Hattersley: Absolutely.

I am passionately enthusiastic about seats being available for everyone who wants them. But whether the Home Secretary likes it or not, whether he finds it deviant or not, and whether it is to my liking or not, a substantial number of law-abiding supporters prefer to stand and, whether the Home Secretary understands that or not, that will cause him great problems in 1994 unless he is prepared to accommodate them. Queen's Park Rangers replaced part of its terraces with seats and then had to replace the seats with terraces because the supporters chose not to sit down but to stand in aisles and gangways, and that is a much more dangerous business than standing on terraces.

Mr. Denis Howell (Birmingham, Small Heath): So did Coventry.

Mr. Hattersley: As my right hon. Friend reminds me, so did Coventry.

I hope that I shall not be breaching any confidence if I tell the House that, as we left the Chamber yesterday, I asked the Home Secretary, "Is it really right that football supporters can stand up as long as they stand up in front of a seat?" The Home Secretary, with his usual charm, said, "Don't be stupid. Of course it is."

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Waddington): I am sure that I did not say anything of the sort, but if I had said it, it would have been entirely accurate. The right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that the proposal made by Taylor is that the licensing authority will, by stages, eventually prevent clubs from inviting people into areas where there are no seats. It has absolutely nothing to do with the obligations of those who are admitted to those areas, and the right hon. Gentleman must face up to that. Yesterday he made the nonsensical proposition that what Taylor proposed would involve making it a criminal offence for anyone to stand up in the stand. I have never heard such arrant nonsense in all my life.

Mr. Hattersley: I assure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the Home Secretary and I are not in collusion as a two-man comedy act. I had no idea that he would answer in that way.

However, the right hon. and learned Gentleman has confirmed my point. Nobody is suggesting that Taylor would make it a criminal offence to stand up—*[Interruption.]* Well, I am suggesting that Taylor will not make it a criminal offence to stand up. However, unless the Home Secretary behaves sensibly, in some grounds people will stand up in front of the seats in large numbers. If the Home Secretary would be so good as to consult the various police organisations, he would discover that the police regard standing in seated areas as a far greater threat to safety, to order and to the good conduct of the game than standing on the terraces. It is no good the Home Secretary brushing these facts of life aside, because if he turns round he will see that those of his hon. Friends who have some acquaintance with football are confirming that these are real problems. I draw them to the right hon. and learned Gentleman's attention only because I want them solved.

If the Home Secretary hopes to overcome those real problems, which until today it appears that he did not know existed, he will have to take the game with him rather than attempt to impose his and the Government's will on the game.

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North): The problems to which the right hon. Gentleman refers go right to the heart of the issue. He is seeking to defend the right of people to stand on the terraces. If he has read the opening chapters of the Taylor report, I cannot believe that he does not realise that, as Taylor states, this is the ninth report on crowd safety and that it is adherence to the culture that he is talking about that has eventually caused the disasters that we have seen. Taking all the factors that he has described into account, I cannot believe that he regards what he has said as the right answer. How can the right hon. Gentleman disagree with the weight of evidence after so many disasters and so many other reports?

Mr. Hattersley: If the hon. Gentleman will do me the courtesy of reading what I have said in *Hansard* when he gets it tomorrow, he will find that all I have done up to now is to draw the Home Secretary's attention to a problem that he will face if he proceeds in this way——

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. I intervene only because of the intervention that has just been made by the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) and the hon. Gentleman's erroneous suggestion. The disaster at Hillsborough on 15 April was not caused because sufficient seats were not available in the stadium or because the club had not invested in proper facilities. As everyone knows, and as Taylor has confirmed, it was caused because of the total inadequacies of the planning and organisation at that

game, the lack of co-ordination, the inadequacy of the access, and the penning and the fencing at the Leppings lane end. I do not want any hon. Member ever to repeat again in the House that the disaster had anything to do with whether there were or were not seats.

Mr. Hattersley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that correction. He has enabled me to move on to my next point and to tell the House that, as I have already spoken for almost a quarter of an hour—thanks to interventions—I must now make progress so that other hon. Members can speak in this short debate.

I said a moment ago, and I repeat, that if progress is to be made towards all-seater stadiums—as we have now come to call them, although it is a new term that is not usually applied to football—the Government will have to take the game with them rather than attempt to impose their will upon it.

The Taylor report, concentrating as it did on the way in which supporters have been treated over the years, could be the basis for real co-operation between supporters, the clubs and the Government. What concerns me and my hon. Friends is not so much the Government obtaining the acquiescence of directors, who will come up smiling whatever happens, but that the Government should work in a way that the supporters know is intended to help to preserve their interests, their clubs and their ability to work with the clubs for better football.

It is important that the opportunity that Taylor provides is not missed by arbitrary and authoritarian action. That requires the Government to draw a distinction between the majority of law-abiding supporters, who want to do no more than watch the game in comfort and peace, and the minority of hooligans who must be rooted out. That distinction is not drawn by the Home Secretary telling the football authorities that he knows how the game should be organised and that he intends to impose his will upon them.

I want to try to illustrate the difference between us by telling the Home Secretary about a question that was put to me on Sunday. I shall give my answer, and I hope that the Home Secretary will give his. Yesterday my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), who is wholly consistent in his belief in regulation and intervention, supported the Home Secretary in his insistence on compulsory seating. My hon. Friend no doubt welcomes the recent convert to central planning who is now sitting on the Treasury Bench. My hon. Friend said that his view on seating was shared by his two local clubs, Liverpool and Everton. I fear that my hon. Friend was wrong in both particulars and, indeed, the clubs have informed me of that today.

As I said, I want to pass on to the Home Secretary the question that I was asked by the chairman of Everton on Sunday afternoon to which I shall give my answer and I hope that the Home Secretary will give his. The chairman of Everton said that his ground was notably peaceful and that there had never been a suggestion that his spectators' safety was at risk. He said that his facilities were good, at least by the modest standards of British football. He went on to ask why, in my opinion, he should be required to reduce the number of standing places and to increase the number of seats at the ground when his supporters did not wish him to do so. I not only want the Home Secretary to provide his answer to that question; I hope—indeed, I warn him—that he had better reply without his usual rudeness because the chairman of Everton is also the chairman of the Merseyside Conservative Association.

I now offer my answer to the chairman's question. I believe that the successful conversion of football grounds into 100 per cent. seating is, in the long run, right and irresistible. I believe that we should encourage a speeding up of that process, but I also believe that nothing but harm can come from arbitrary and authoritarian edicts that will simply offend supporters and destroy a vital part of the game.

I hope that the Home Secretary understands that many law-abiding football supporters feel that the whole game is being condemned out of hand. We should be on their side in the campaign to improve facilities, yet they feel that fashionable opinion is against them. I take my example from the Taylor report itself. In dealing with the occasional practice of running on to pitches, Lord Justice Taylor said that it was important to distinguish between "malicious intent" and "exuberance". It was Lord Justice Taylor, not I, who used the term "joie de vivre", a phrase that is rarely heard at Hillsborough football ground. One newspaper commentator asked me this morning how I expected the police to distinguish between "joie de vivre" and malicious pitch invasion. Fortunately, in paragraph 301 Lord Justice Taylor provides his own distinction, suggesting that in association football running on to the pitch is malicious invasion, whereas at rugby union football it is "joie de vivre".

I want to tell the Home Secretary what I wish he knew—that the issue of seats cannot be separated from the question of football finance, not least if grounds are to install the facilities that Lord Justice Taylor rightly says are civilising influences on supporters. Much nonsense is still talked about sources of possible revenue. The Home Secretary compounded that yesterday by talking about the "football industry" and "commercial concerns". Dozens of clubs run at a trading loss and are kept in business only by supporters' raffles and contributions from directors. They are not commercial concerns, at least in one definition of the term. For them, the sources of revenue that the Government so glibly describe are simply not available. Manchester United, Tottenham Hotspur, Arsenal, Liverpool and Everton can negotiate lucrative sponsorship deals but such deals are not available to third and fourth division clubs, many of whom have warned the Government during the past 24 hours that, unless an agreement is negotiated, what the Government intend to impose on them will force them into bankruptcy and closure.

Football clubs are often focal points for desirable community activity. During the past five years, we have all said that we want football clubs to do more for the community in which they exist. The hon. Members for Ipswich (Mr. Irvine), for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones) and for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) must decide whether they are prepared to risk their clubs going bankrupt and ceasing to make a contribution to the life of their communities. It is no good the Government claiming that the vast sums of money now spent on transfer fees could or should be made available for other purposes.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): I am interested in what my right hon. Friend says. He said earlier that he was not against the idea of all-seater stadiums, to use the Government's terminology, but that such provision would

[Mr. Eric S. Heffer]

have to be made over a period of time and with Government assistance. Why do we not concentrate on that instead of arguing about whether the principle is right or wrong? If Mr. Carter believes that Everton should not have an all-seater stadium—that is not what the directors have told me—that is fair enough. That is his view, but he is as wrong in it as he is in supporting the Conservative party. I wish to make it clear that I believe that the idea of all-seater football grounds is important and right. It will take time. Let us concentrate on persuading the Government to provide the money for it.

Mr. Hattersley: My hon. Friend will recall that John Stuart Mill said that if the practice is wrong, the principle is no good. If that is good enough for John Stuart Mill, it should be good enough for my hon. Friend and me. I am trying to examine whether it is possible to apply the principle that the Government suggest in the timescale that they recommend. In my view, the amount of money available makes that difficult and doubtful. I repeat that the transfer market does not provide money. It is a complicated system of barter in which, most often, players, rather than money, change hands. Clubs cannot go to Wimpey, Laing or Bovis and say, "Build us an all-seater stadium and we shall pay the bill with a striker, a central defender and a reserve goalkeeper." The few clubs that make money out of transfers are mainly third and fourth division clubs which are struggling for survival. They find young players and sell them to the first division to clear their debts. A levy on them would simply make their survival even more unlikely.

For the wealthy clubs, the problem is different. It is best illustrated by a statement made by Arsenal yesterday afternoon. The club said that installing seats would involve considerable capital costs and the maximum gate would be severely reduced. As a result, the minimum entrance price would go up from £5 to £12. For the past five years, the argument about football has centred on the need once again to make it a family game—a husband and wife taking their two children to the game for an afternoon's entertainment. If unfunded, unsubsidised compulsory seating is enforced, it will cost a family of four almost £50 to go to a football match.

Mr. John Lee (Pendle): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: No. I must go on because I have taken so much time.

It is worth noting that if the proposed price increases were made, precious few ambulance workers could take their families to football this coming Saturday. Football in Britain, like American football in the United States of America, would be beyond the means of a large part of the population.

Mr. Lee: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: No; I must press on.

The Government must help with the cost of introducing 100 per cent. seating. I know that that proposal horrifies the Home Secretary. Will he tell us the principle on which the Government justify subsidising the Royal Opera house in Covent Garden, which amounts to £50 per seat per performance, while rejecting assistance for football? Knowing the Home Secretary's propensity for misrepresentation, I inform him that I am strongly in favour of assistance to the arts.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, when the Conservative party conference is held at Blackpool, the cost of policing to prevent hooliganism or terrorism is paid by Lancashire county council? It costs £2·7 million for the week. The council has protested strongly that the Government should pay. Why does the Conservative party not pay for the policing of its conference in the same way as it demands that football should do?

Mr. Hattersley: We can take it a stage further. Last week the Derbyshire constabulary told Derby County that it could not provide policing for a match last Wednesday evening. Derby was told that, if it insisted on playing that night, the police would allow the game to go ahead only if it provided the entire cost of policing inside and outside the ground.

Mr. Lee *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: My information is that Derby County paid the entire cost of policing the match. I hope that the Lancashire constabulary will follow that excellent precedent and do exactly the same when the Conservative party conference is next held in Blackpool.

I am strongly in favour of assistance to the arts. I should like them to receive more assistance than at present. To believe in that principle requires in logic the acceptance that other activities also deserve Government aid. During the lifetime of the Government, the tax burden on football has increased. Pools profits are now taxed, not at 40 per cent. but at 42·5 per cent. Were we to return to the 1979 level of taxation, pools promoters' net income would increase by £18 million. Yesterday, they told me and my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) that if the old rate were renewed, every penny that they received would be passed on to the game. Tonight we call on the Chancellor of the Exchequer to accept that offer.

If the Government are serious in their wish to see football grounds improved, we call upon them to increase tax allowances for investment in stands and other facilities to make our football grounds more civilised. We ask the Home Secretary to approach the problem in a spirit of co-operation and possible compromise. I do not doubt that the best headlines could be obtained by denouncing football in the terms that he employed yesterday. I accept that, as the identity card scheme has been abandoned, a show of force is necessary to ensure that the retreat does not look like the rout that it is. However, there is still time for him to do his best for football. He must call all the parties together and decide on the basis of the Taylor report how real improvements can be made and financed. It is above all for that initiative that we shall vote tonight.

7.57 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Waddington): Yesterday I made a statement about the Taylor report, and I had the opportunity then to express my sympathy for the relatives and friends of those who died and for those who suffered injury at Hillsborough. To voice that sympathy again is not out of place, but I am sure that the bereaved would agree with me

that the best service that we can now perform for the dead is to bend all our efforts towards preventing a similar tragedy in the future.

What happened at Hillsborough on 15 April last year must not finish as just another entry in the list of major tragedies which have afflicted football over the years. It must mark a new beginning for football in this country. The tragedy would never have occurred had the lessons from the past been learned and properly applied. This time they must be learned, and if they are, the loss of life will not have been entirely in vain.

Yesterday I had the chance to thank Lord Justice Taylor for his report. I would also like to thank his assessors, Mr. Brian Johnson, the chief constable of Lancashire, and Professor Leonard Maunder, who is professor of mechanical engineering at the university of Newcastle upon Tyne. Their special knowledge and experience were obviously invaluable.

I stated plainly yesterday the Government's response to the report, our determination to see a great change in the way in which the game is managed and a vast improvement in the way in which clubs treat their customers. I shall return to those matters shortly, but I have to say now that the Opposition's response to the challenge of Taylor has been nothing short of pathetic. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members should listen carefully.

The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) does not, of course, think that there is any such thing as football hooliganism.

Mr. Denis Howell: I am grateful to the Home Secretary for returning to this matter. Yesterday, when he made his grotesque misrepresentation of my position, I had not had the chance to consult *Hansard*. I have now done so, however, and I said that there was no such thing as football hooliganism, but that there was criminality in society of which it was a part. That the Home Secretary misquoted me, of all people, on football hooliganism proves that he is in a blue funk because of the rout that Taylor has imposed upon him.

Mr. Waddington: I have a great respect for the right hon. Gentleman, but he has misquoted himself, as he has not got it right even now. He will have to live with the words he used. Let me remind the House of what they were:

"I do not believe there is any such thing as football hooliganism. There is criminality in society and there is violence"

Those were the right hon. Gentleman's words.

Mr. Denis Howell: Stop twisting them round.

Mr. Waddington: If the right hon. Gentleman does not know the meaning of the English language and if he cannot read the words recorded in *Hansard*, it is a poor thing.

The right hon. Member for Small Heath does not seem to think that there is much of a problem with British football as, on the same occasion, he voiced his pride in the fact that the Labour party had not supported measures to curb drinking in grounds. Let me quote the exact words as they appear in *Hansard* and we shall see whether he likes them:

"The Opposition have never supported the proposal that drinks should not be sold inside grounds"—*[Official Report*, 27 June 1989; Vol. 155, c. 861, 916.]

He might like to compare that with what Lord Justice Taylor says in his report. As the right hon. Gentleman does not think there is anything wrong—

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North) *rose*—

Mr. Waddington: First I shall deal with the right hon. Member for Small Heath, then his right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) and then the hon. Gentleman can intervene.

Because the right hon. Member for Small Heath does not think there is anything wrong, it is scarcely surprising that he has not been exactly fertile with new ideas as to how to put things right.

Mr. Denis Howell: I am again obliged to the Home Secretary for giving way. I must draw his attention to the fact that what we believe is that it makes much more sense to close the pubs outside grounds and to stop the sale of drink in supermarkets than to do so inside grounds, where it is impossible to get drink anyway. That is the nature of the problem. The Government have not dealt with alcoholism and drunkenness outside football grounds.

Mr. Waddington: That is all lovely blustering stuff, but the trouble is that it does not equate with a single word of Lord Justice Taylor's report.

Mr. Wilson *rose*——

Mr. Waddington: I shall give way in a little while, but the hon. Gentleman should not get too involved with matters that are not his direct concern.

Mr. Heffer: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sorry to intervene, but I had hoped that tonight's debate would be a serious one about the issues involved. I had also hoped that we would not necessarily become involved in great party conflict. Ninety-five people died —that is what I am thinking about—some of whom I knew. Can we not get back to a proper discussion as to the best way in which to deal with this matter rather than continuing this unfortunate conflict, which is doing us no good?

Mr. Waddington: It is of the utmost importance that we should examine with the utmost seriousness what the Opposition are now saying about Lord Justice Taylor's report.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook, unlike his right hon. Friend the Member for Small Heath, knows that there is a lot wrong with the football industry. Yesterday, despite that knowledge, he announced that he did not agree with the central proposals in Lord Justice Taylor's report. He said that he disagreed with the first proposal of that report and today he has reinforced that rejection. He has entirely ignored what was said in that report about the attitude of FIFA and the fact that Lord Justice Taylor points out that the football authorities have always said that they would think it right to follow resolutions carried by FIFA.

The right hon. Gentleman has also ignored paragraph 61 of the report, which states:

"There is no panacea which will achieve total safety and cure all problems of behaviour and crowd control. But I am satisfied that seating does more to achieve those objectives than any other single measure."

He has also entirely ignored Lord Justice Taylor's conclusions and the recommendation in paragraph 90:

[Mr. Waddington]

"I therefore conclude and recommend that designated grounds under the 1975 Act should be required in due course to be converted to all-seating. I do so for the compelling reasons of safety and control already set out; also, so far as association football is concerned, because the present trend at home and abroad and the rules of the world and European football authorities make the move to all-seating irresistible."

Mr. Hattersley: I am sure that the right hon. and learned Gentleman and I might have an interesting semantic argument about this. I described the move to all-seater stadiums as inevitable, as distinct from irresistible. I urged the Government to do all it could to speed up that process, but by the agreement of the clubs. *[Interruption.]* That is exactly what I said a few moments ago. It is not my fault if the Home Secretary wrote his speech before he heard mine. Given that the Home Secretary has dealt extensively with one of the Taylor proposals, will he answer my question as to whether the Government propose to implement the others? We have said that we would, but will the Government give the lead?

Mr. Waddington: The right hon. Gentleman should not be so swift to intervene without recalling the allegation I made against him and the recommendation made by Lord Justice Taylor. That recommendation is not that a move to all-seater stadiums should be brought about by agreement; the recommendation is that that move should be required. That is what the right hon. Gentleman will not face up to. Yesterday, he was cross because I was short in my reply to him. He was cross because I pointed to the absurdity and triviality of the point that he took up yesterday and again today—that somehow or other, people who stood up in a seated area would be guilty of a criminal offence.

Mr. Hattersley: No, no.

Mr. Waddington: Yesterday he squirmed; now he shouts, "No, no." I refer the right hon. Gentleman to what he said yesterday, as he obviously has a short memory. He said:

"If he persists"—

he was referring to me—

"in making football grounds all-seater stadiums by law, is it his intention to make it illegal for a spectator to stand . . . ?"

—[*Official Report*, 29 January 1990; Vol. 166, c. 23.]

Well, really—if the nonsensical response to Lord Justice Taylor's proposal is not that criminal offences should be imposed on spectators, but that clubs should be subject to safety certificates which do not allow them to offer standing accommodation, one despairs.

If the right hon. Gentleman is the authentic voice of the Labour party, the world can see it as a party for which no problem is so grave that it cannot be dodged, no challenge so demanding that it cannot be shirked, no obligation so solemn that it cannot be ducked. To it, a membership scheme is poison, better stadiums a curse, vociferous inactivity sublime. The nation has heard Labour's response to the challenge of Hillsborough.

Having rejected the fundamental proposal in the report, the Opposition have the sheer effrontery to table a motion welcoming the report. Having been completely supine and negative during the past years—when we have been struggling with the problem of football hooliganism—the Opposition have the brazenness to criticise us for trying to do something.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): In view of the trivia which we are hearing from the Front Bench spokesmen, can I be assured that none of this will apply to Scotland, and that we will get a separate statement? I have some misgivings about the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland because he is not present, but I want an assurance that none of these trivia will apply to Scotland. Although football is a national—and, I accept, a United Kingdom—game, none of this absolute irrelevance should be allowed to continue and if it does so will you, Mr. Speaker, show the Home Secretary the red card?

Mr. Waddington: I am proud of the fact that, when others were not prepared to do a thing, we rose to the challenge. Our actions have not been in vain: part I of the Football Spectators Act 1989, as the House knows, will play a vital part in implementing the Taylor recommendations.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) put it to the Home Secretary that there were other recommendations in the Taylor report. I wish to draw the right hon. and learned Gentleman on the matter of spiked fences and cages. He will recall that, in the immediate aftermath of Hillsborough, one of the most distressing factors was the photographs of fans cruelly crushed against the fences and cages. I know that there will be some disagreement in the House about what Lord Justice Taylor has said about this matter. Will the Home Secretary give an indication of the Government's intentions on this issue?

Mr. Waddington: I can give the hon. Gentleman more than just an indication. I said without any reservation that those recommendations were acceptable the Government; the hon. Gentleman will find that set out in the schedule which, as I said, was put in the Vote Office yesterday.

The Opposition motion asks us to introduce the changes in the criminal law recommended by Lord Justice Taylor. I have already said that we will consider the matter urgently, but before a final decision is made some consideration must be given to the possible difficulties of enforcement of the proposed new offences and the extent to which the mischief at which they would be aimed is covered by existing offences in, for instance, the Public Order Act 1986.

The Opposition ask us to initiate discussions with the football authorities and clubs about the cost and advisability of all-seat grounds. Advisability? Lord Justice Taylor makes the advisability crystal clear. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook is merely issuing an invitation to clubs to argue the toss about whether they even now need take any action—an invitation to them either to shirk their responsibilities entirely or to hold out the begging bowl to the taxpayer, asking him to foot the bill for the decent facilities which the clubs should have provided years ago. This, I am sure that the House will agree, is not the time for talk—it is the time for action.

Mr. Wilson: I am genuinely anxious to try to clarify what has become a ludicrous debating point between the Front Bench spokesmen about all-seater stadiums. As I understand it, the Front Bench spokesmen from both sides seem to agree that we should move towards this. However, the idea that there is nothing in that worth talking to clubs

about is ludicrous. Will the Home Secretary contemplate the example of Ibrox stadium in Glasgow, which is recognised in the Taylor report as one of the finest grounds in the country. It was turned into such a ground largely because of a previous disaster and report. Inside that excellent stadium there is a well-defined area in which it is possible to stand. Would the Home Secretary accept that that is not to the detriment of the ground's safety, does not in any way diminish the excellence of the facilities and should be compatible with what emerges from the Taylor report?

Mr. Waddington: We simply cannot get away from the fact that the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook has rejected Taylor—there is no doubt about that. He said quite firmly that he disagreed with the central recommendation of the Taylor report that grounds should be required by law to be all seater. He has completely rejected that and hon. Members will be able to read what he said in *Hansard* tomorrow and can read today what he said in a question to me yesterday.

The Opposition also call for a reduction on pools betting duty. I am not suggesting that there may not be a case for more money to go into the game from the pools promoters. However, a change in the tax which would undoubtedly benefit the promoters would not necessarily benefit football. Instead, the Opposition should consider how much better use could be made of £18 million from television, £8 million from the pools promoters each year and £75 million promised by the Football Trust over the next 10 years. If we add up just those sources of income, we arrive at a grand total of £309 million available to the industry between now and 1999. That is twice as much as the highest estimate that I have seen of the cost of providing all-seated accommodation.

What I think is so wrong about the Opposition's attitude is that in the motion they send the football authorities precisely the wrong message. Instead of telling them that if they are going to invite people into their grounds it is their duty to see that their grounds are safe, they coo words of comfort. They say, "You need not bother too much about your responsibilities. If we get back, we will make the taxpayer cough up."

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-West): It cannot just be the distinction between seats and standing that determines the quality of a ground and its safety. A disaster took place in a stadium in Bradford. Safety depends on the quality and arrangement of the seats and the quality of the standing provisions. Can we get into a debate of the Taylor report in which we start to say what the quality and provisions of a ground should be?

Mr. Waddington: I can only repeat that Lord Justice Taylor says that all-seated accommodation is not just a bright idea which has come into his head, but FIFA has accepted that that is a desirable standard at which to aim. Therefore, it is not surprising that Lord Justice Taylor came to the conclusion that, as the football authorities said that they thought it right to observe the resolutions passed by FIFA, the authorities have accepted that they should move towards all-seater stadiums.

Mr. Ashton *rose*——

Mr. Waddington: I shall give way for the last time.

Mr. Ashton: Is the Home Secretary aware that Wembley will soon be an all-seater stadium? If he talks to them he will find that what scares the authorities at Wembley is the thought of the IRA planting a bomb. If the bomb went off and started a panic, an all-seater stadium would take longer to evacuate. That could make it 10 times worse than if people were to run on to the pitch from the terraces.

Mr. Waddington: The hon. Gentleman will no doubt have his chance to speak. We cannot get away from the fact that Lord Justice Taylor made a careful examination of the matter and came to a very different conclusion from that being voiced by the hon. Gentleman and had an entirely different view from that of the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook.

I shall not repeat today Lord Justice Taylor's indictment of the way in which the industry has been run. But, in fairness, I should say that, unlike the Opposition, many in the industry are now acknowledging that something must be done and that they must move to all-seat stadiums. We proposed that course immediately after Hillsborough, and we shall now press ahead.

It has been said that the move towards all-seated accommodation will force clubs to turn away spectators. I can only invite those who are worried about that to read the report. Many clubs already have more seated accommodation than the total number of spectators who usually attend their grounds, and a gradual reduction in standing capacity each year will not affect them for a time, if at all.

Some say that an end to the terraces will change the atmosphere of the game, but Lord Justice Taylor obviously thinks, and I agree, that it will be a change for the better. He points to experience in Scotland and says that he is satisfied that in England and Wales, as in Scotland and abroad, spectators will soon become accustomed to sitting, and like it.

Mr. Burt: The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) referred to Ibrox park. Paragraph 76 says:

"At Ibrox Park . . . the seated areas are the most popular and tickets for them sell in preference to those for standing. Significantly, trouble from misbehaviour and physical injuries have been reduced since most of the crowd became seated. Such trouble and accidental injuries as still occur are primarily in the remaining standing areas. It is planned to convert them to seating in the near future."

Therefore, even Ibrox park will become an all-seat stadium. That is the answer to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Waddington: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the fact that all the arguments advanced and accepted by Lord Justice Taylor are arguments for the proposition that all-seat stadiums will not only help to civilise the game and get rid of hooliganism, but will contribute more to safety than any other step that could be taken.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South) *rose*——

Mr. Waddington: I shall give way for the last time. I must get on.

Mr. Porter: There is little disagreement as to whether all-seat stadiums will be desirable, irresistible, or whatever the other word was. The argument is about who will pay for them. I like football as much as anybody else, but if my right hon. and learned Friend is willing to listen to the Opposition's strictures on the spending of taxpayers' money, he should remember that there is rugby union and

[Mr. Porter]

the national stadium at Twickenham, there is rugby league all over the place and it is growing, and there might even be a tiddlywink stadium in Barnsley. I know not where it will end. Surely we should be concentrating on where the money will come from to do that which is desirable and fair.

Mr. Waddington: One cannot get away from the fact that, under our law, those who invite people on to their premises for reward must make their premises safe. It would be wrong for us to send out any sort of message from this place that the duty to make those premises safe rests on anyone other than the football clubs.

Let me deal now with Lord Justice Taylor's detailed recommendations about safety. The House knows that we accept them, and hon. Members have now had the opportunity to read the schedule that I have placed in the Vote Office. The licensing authority which will bring about all-seat stadiums in the way that I have described will be there to review and to keep under scrutiny the way in which local authorities carry out their safety functions.

There are a number of specific recommendations for the amendment of the green guide. That, as hon. Members will know, is a document published by the Home Office and the Scottish Office that owes its origins to the technical working party set up by Lord Wheatley in the course of preparing his report on crowd safety at sports grounds, which was published in 1972.

That document will now be revised in the light of the Taylor recommendations, but I should say, in justice to those who have been responsible for it over the years, that it has stood the test of time remarkably well, and it is difficult not to conclude that, if its guidance had been properly followed and applied at Hillsborough, and more recently at Middlesbrough, neither accident would have happened.

I should say a word about the role of the police in ensuring safety and effective crowd control. A key issue here is the liaison between the clubs and the police. There must be no opportunity for each to stand aside thinking that the other is in charge, and Lord Justice Taylor's recommendation that there should be a written statement of the respective functions of club and police for crowd safety and control is one that I can readily endorse.

I also welcome Lord Justice Taylor's recommendation that clubs should recruit and train sufficient fit, active and robust stewards, not least because the more capable the stewards, the less clubs will need to call for special police services, thus releasing police officers for duties outside the ground not necessarily connected with football—a benefit to the public generally.

For those reasons, and because it is right in principle, I support the report's recommendation that police authorities should ensure that charges made to clubs for policing inside grounds are realistic.

Lord Justice Taylor has much to say about hooliganism. Like many before him, he has concluded that no single measure will defeat football hooliganism, and even a package of measures will take time to have effect.

In recent years, the Government have been attacking the problem on many fronts. We have taken action against alcohol abuse in the Sporting Events (Control of Alcohol etc.) Act 1985 and we have introduced in section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 a new offence of disorderly behaviour. The police have developed their tactics by making effective use of closed-circuit television at grounds and by increasing the gathering and use of intelligence on hard-core hooligans. At the end of 1989, we established the national football intelligence unit, which has already made a good start in compiling and collating centrally intelligence on the most serious and persistent football hooligans.

As the House knows, part II of the Football Spectators Act 1989 gives the court powers to impose restriction orders on those convicted of football-related offences. Those subject to restriction orders will be prevented from travelling to key matches abroad. Its provisions will have a salutary effect on those hooligans whose disgraceful behaviour abroad has so blackened the reputation of football. We plan to implement part II as soon as practical arrangements can be made and the remaining parliamentary procedures have been completed.

I said yesterday that, following bilateral agreements with other countries, our courts will be able to impose restriction orders on offenders convicted abroad of corresponding football-related offences. We are giving priority to concluding an agreement with the Italian authorities. We aim to have those arrangements in place before the World cup. I expect the provisions of part II to have a useful deterrent effect on the behaviour of football spectators abroad.

I made it clear yesterday that the fact that we are not establishing a football membership authority does not mean that there will be any let-up in the fight against hooliganism. I have outlined the action that we are to take.

The vast majority of people who go to watch football matches, even in the appallingly squalid conditions that exist at some major grounds, are decent, well-behaved people, neither drunken louts nor hooligans. It is high time that more consideration was given to their interests, to their safety, to their enjoyment of their sport. If, by the measures proposed, we can enhance both their enjoyment and the reputation of the game, our efforts will have been well worth while.

8.29 pm

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): All who love our national game owe a great deal to Lord Justice Taylor for making such a comprehensive, reasonable and thought-provoking report. My right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) acknowledged that in his constructive and reasonable speech. By contrast, the Home Secretary missed an important opportunity to set the agenda for a sensible debate on football's future. I hope to follow my right hon. Friend's example.

Lord Justice Taylor's report should be studied closely by those connected with football at every level, whether they be directors of illustrous clubs, administrators and officials, or supporters. We shall do Lord Justice Taylor a great disservice if we throw away the opportunity that his report presents for conducting a fundamental, far-reaching and frank reappraisal of all aspects of the game. If Taylor teaches us anything it is the folly of hasty or half-hearted measures. As Lord Justice Taylor points out,

"Patchy and piecemeal approaches are themselves a great threat to safety."

A lengthy and honest debate on the issues that Taylor raises is urgently needed. The issues are not simply a matter of right or wrong, black or white, them and us.

They are complex and require detailed discussion. The report should be seen primarily as a catalyst for debate, not a tablet of stone.

In that debate, we must all recognise that we have something to learn from each other. It is foolish and churlish of the Government not to recognise the dangerous inadequacies of their proposal for a football identity card scheme that the report highlights. Rather than stubbornly closing their minds to arguments that they find unpalatable, the Government would do better to recognise the serious misgivings that Lord Justice Taylor expresses which led him to conclude that it would

"Actually increase trouble outside grounds."

Equally, those responsible for running our national game must take the opportunity to examine frankly and honestly the state of British football as it enters the 1990s. The report contains many criticisms of football as experienced by genuine and regular supporters, and it is time for those criticisms to be addressed. The Government should scrap completely the Football Spectators Act 1989 and present instead a Green Paper as the basis for informed and detailed discussion of every aspect of the national game. It should deal with the problems of hooliganism, safety and standards. The Government should commit themselves to a genuine debate and not a blind, prejudiced debate, and then introduce legislation that would command the support of the House. That debate should involve right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House, football authorities, and football supporters.

We must all acknowledge that there is no simple answer, no single transferable solution that can be applied to all football clubs, regardless of their status or position. We should applaud Taylor for recognising that and for his insight. We must accept that clubs need time and breathing space to assess the valuable work that went into the report and to consider the best way forward for football. I suggest that the proposals to phase out completely standing accommodation on football terraces for spectators who prefer to stand should be reconsidered.

Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe (Leigh): The Home Secretary stated that no positive contribution was made to the debate by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry), who is chairman of the all-party football group, spoke of the phasing in or phasing out of certain facilities. As an officer of the all-party rugby league group, I echo the concern that has been expressed about the imposition, virtually by law, of the all-seater stadium. It is not that we dispute the principle, but I have a list of all rugby league grounds showing that the average attendance figure is 3,500 to 4,000 per week. League grounds are now classified in the same way as football grounds. Would my hon. Friend accept a three-tier system——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Interventions must be brief.

Mr. Pendry: My hon. Friend has made his point. My point was that Lord Justice Taylor himself recognises the desirability of retaining

"the traditional culture derived from the close contact of the terraces".

I remember the experience, as a young boy at St. James's park, Newcastle, of being passed down over the heads of the crowd. That unique atmosphere and comradely spirit still exist today.

When my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook responded to yesterday's statement, he pointed out that a direct link between the abolition of standing areas and improved safety has yet to be established. The 1986 Popplewell inquiry into the Bradford disaster acknowledged the difficulty confronting spectators in evacuating seated accommodation even in the most favourable circumstances. Taylor states that the extension of seating to all parts of the ground would almost certainly lead to an increase in admission charges to those accustomed to watching their favourite game from the terraces.

Increased cost is not only a problem for the individual fan, because almost all those connected with the game who have considered the expense of converting stadiums to all-seater accommodation have concluded that in most cases the cost will be prohibitive and may lead to closure in some instances. The hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans), who knows something about football, yesterday, on television, described that plan as totally non-viable.

The report estimates that the cost of conversion will be about £130 million and admits that money from the Pools Promoters Association and any tax concessions given by the Government would be woefully inadequate to meet that expense. The report concludes that, in the absence of Government recognition of football as a communal activity and not simply as a commercial venture,

"the bulk of the finances for ground improvement must be raised by the clubs themselves."

Where is that money to come from? Now that the spurious arguments about the so-called apparent wealth of clubs on the basis of the total circulation of money in the transfer market have been exposed—though I do not think that that point has got through to the Home Secretary yet—we are faced with the sober reality that, for all the good work that has gone into producing the report, many of its recommendations will remain pie in the sky unless the Government recognise the need for an urgent injection of cash into the game in the interests of the whole community.

The impression currently given by the Government that they want to abrogate their responsibility to the national game is both disheartening and regrettable. The House can contrast their approach with that of the Italian Government, who recently invested £260 million in improving the standard of grounds. That is a somewhat smaller figure than that which the Government take from the game in taxing football pools.

A fundamental rethink is required of football funding in this country. If I am critical of Taylor, it is only because he did not do justice to the range of possible options for funding. In particular, he seems not to appreciate the considerable benefits that might accrue from the creation of a football levy board accountable to a Minister. The Minister would have responsibility for appointing the board's chairman, and its representatives would be drawn from the Football League, Football Association, Professional Footballers Association and Football Trust, who have done so much in making a valuable contribution to solving many of the problems that confront the game.

[Mr. Pendry]

When such a proposal was made in a private Member's Bill that I tabled in 1986, it received all-party support. My right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell), my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), and the hon. Members for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) and for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) all supported that Bill. Such a board would have powers to influence not only the injection of cash into the game but the possible acquisition of land for development by the football authorities. It would be the ideal vehicle for equipping football for the 21st century.

Although the current attitude of the Football Association and Football League is somewhat negative, as is reflected in the report, that has not always been the case. I have the minutes of a meeting in 1982 at which representatives of the Football Association and Football League all expressed their enthusiasm for the establishment of a football levy board. Given the obvious benefits that it would offer, it is not hard to imagine a revival of the football authorities' full support for it in the future. Such a board would be preferable to the current status quo maintained by certain vested interests.

The Taylor report may have come just in time. It highlights the problems faced by football, of outdated structures, grounds and complacent inertia at all levels, the problems that many of us who truly care about soccer have previously been attempting to highlight and combat.

Hopefully, the report will now stimulate the imagination and inspire the will to succeed. That will is present in football and, if it is given sincere and adequate support by the Government, it will ensure that the great majority of law-abiding supporters will once again enjoy the game they love in comfort and safety.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have before me the names of 17 right hon. and hon. Members who wish to take part in the debate. Less than an hour remains. I hope that we shall have very short speeches.

8.41 pm

Sir Rhodes Boyson (Brent, North): I shall take your guidance on brevity, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I welcome the fact that the idea of football identity cards has been dropped. It means that I can support the Government tonight, because the Home Secretary made a firm statement of action that must be taken. He was absolutely right, so, like a black sheep, I can come home, and the Whip will be pleased to hear that I shall vote for the Government.

A point that concerns me links with the whole question of the Taylor report. Football hooliganism is specific to football, but it is at the same time an outgrowth of a breakdown of law and order in society. We could see it in the permissiveness of the 1960s—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—often supported by Opposition Members; I should make that clear before they agree with me too cheerfully—when a decline in law and order was visible.

That concerns me now, because I see a trend in our schools which will create problems for us in the coming 10 or 20 years. There was a time in our schools—I am thinking in particular of the north, in the real soccer country around Blackburn and in particular near Blackburn Rovers ground—when schoolmasters went out every Saturday morning with their pupils and played soccer against other teams. They learned to play to the whistle, as we called it; the referee was in charge and one appreciated good play on both sides. The good spirit of British soccer grew out of that.

I began to recognise at Highbury Grove—it is more than 16 years since I left there—a decline in school soccer. On the one hand, it was a question of the wife wanting the husband to help with the shopping on Saturday mornings, a growing factor about which one could do little. On the other hand, it happened because of the pressures to earn money elsewhere, plus the problem of travelling greater distances.

Also, we had from the colleges of education at that time people who were not trained to take part in team sports. People came to us with abilities in individual sports. It was said that team sports were competitive, and these schoolmasters said that was wrong. Indeed, those who argued that way had mental levitation rather than physical ability. I recall one such person saying to me that under no circumstances would he have anything to do with team sports. So the idea of playing with, and behaving like, a team—either as a crowd supporter or a member of a team—began to decline.

Since then, we have taken two actions which the Government may regret in the long run. First, we have placed teachers on a 1,265-hour contract covering a year. Instead of it being a profession, we have proletarianised it. Whereas people in other work had the rule book bought out, teachers were given the rule book. In other words, after 1,265 hours they go home. Does Saturday morning football count as part of that number of hours?

That means that in many schools in London—I cannot speak for Lancashire and other areas: other hon. Members can—school soccer has gone. Cricket has gone as well. There are no cricket matches on Saturday mornings at the vast majority of schools in London, and soccer is already disappearing. Towards the end of my time at Highbury Grove, it became clear that we would have to cut down from the 12 teams that we had on Saturday mornings to eight, four or even two.

I believe that a discussion document will be published this summer about bringing outsiders into schools to help on the sports side. That will not do. The masters inside schools must appreciate the game, and we shall have to re-examine a contract that is based on time. After all, people tend to say, "When a certain time arrives, that's it."

We shall also have to review the tightness of the school curriculum. At present, it is too tight. Unless we have a million schoolboys playing soccer every week, with their masters and parents taking a keen interest, so that the real culture of soccer is built up again, we shall simply be indulging in repressive legislation. I agree that such legislation is necessary, but the Department of the Environment, the Home Office and the Department of Education and Science must come together to revive school soccer and cricket. Otherwise, there will be a dearth of those team games in this country.

8.45 pm

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): Because many hon. Members wish to take part in the debate, I shall be very brief indeed. I am glad to have the opportunity to

comment, particularly after the speech of the Home Secretary, which was damaging to his cause and that of the Government in dealing with the whole question. I plead with him to alter the way in which he approaches the matter and, on the next occasion, to come forward in a very different mood indeed.

One would have thought, in view of the defeat that the Government suffered on a major matter connected with this issue, that they would have been slightly chastened in approaching it. They got into some difficulty because they refused to listen to the House of Commons. Time and again, not only my right hon. and hon. Friends but some Conservative Members, such as the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson), pleaded with the Government to listen to those who knew something about football, who had spent all their lives going to football matches, who understood what the situation was and were aware of some of the perils and dangers.

All that was brushed aside, and the responsibility must rest chiefly with the Minister for Sport. But others also have responsibility. The Prime Minister's edict was primarily responsible for the failure of Ministers to listen to the House of Commons. I plead with the Government, even at this late stage, to listen to us on this subject, because they will find that there is more wisdom on the Opposition Benches than on most of their own, although I accept that some Conservative Members contribute to that wisdom.

In particular, I plead with the Home Secretary to listen to what we are saying. My right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) spelled out clearly and eloquently what the issues are. The Government must listen to our comments about the threat to the range of clubs if the whole programme is pushed forward without consideration of the financial implications.

If the whole programme is pushed through in that way, it is likely that some second and third division clubs will be driven out of existence. Indeed, we have been told how, even more seriously, some first division clubs could be threatened. The figures that my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook quoted of the charges to football represent serious issues that must be properly considered.

What does the Home Secretary think will happen to criminality and hooliganism if the Government drive out of existence, in many towns throughout Britain, football teams that have had the allegiance of those who live in their areas for years and generations? What will happen to the youngsters in those places? What will happen if sport is injured in many of the nation's towns and cities?

The Government do not seem to have a glimmer of knowledge about that whole issue. Indeed, the Home Secretary said, in effect, when asked that question, "It has nothing to do with me. If people have a business venture, they are responsible for the conditions in which they ask people to come and participate." I think I see the Home Secretary nodding in assent as I say that. He seems to think that that is the whole story, when it is not.

If the right hon. and learned Gentleman proceeds on his present basis, he will be rejecting the advice—as well as that of the few among his Back Benchers who know something about this matter—of the whole range of Opposition Members who know what they are talking about and who are pleading with him to use this opportunity for something other than a madcap scheme thought up by the Prime Minister as one might think something up to catch the headlines.

Mr. Waddington: I assure the right hon. Gentleman that it is not a madcap scheme thought up by the Prime Minister. It is the proposal in Lord Justice Taylor's report.

Mr. Foot: I am talking about the madcap scheme that was thought up by the Prime Minister and has been rejected by Lord Justice Taylor. If he had been listening to me, even the Home Secretary should have understood the point I was making. He would have understood had he not been so hasty to intervene. I was talking about the madcap scheme, imposed on the House by the Prime Minister, that has now been rejected.

The Home Secretary should now take the opportunity to try to ensure that the fresh proposals that have come from Lord Taylor—my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook put in their correct context the other proposals that have also come forward—and all the other proposals are considered in a different way.

Before that catastrophe, fiasco or however hon. Members wish to describe the Government's previous policy, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) and others had made them an offer time after time in the House. They had said, "We do not believe that any great political advantage is to be gained one way or the other; let us talk, and see whether we can find a common approach to the problem." That offer has been continually rejected. My right hon. Friend extended it again following the Taylor recommendations, and today the Home Secretary has rejected it again.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman is making a great error. It is not as though the Government can boast of great triumphs in this regard; it is not as though they have displayed superior wisdom, and had all their proposals confirmed in an elaborate report conducted by a great judge. Months of the House's time have been wasted by a proposal that the Government should have known was ridiculous from the start.

Lord Justice Taylor has written of the unique position in which he has been placed: for almost the first time in history, a judge has been asked to pass judgment on what the House of Commons is supposed to have decided so solemnly. Before proceeding in such a manner and with such a tone, the Home Secretary should read Lord Justice Taylor's introduction again, and should understand that he had better listen to the views of others before proceeding along the same lines.

Can we not have the system of consultation that my right hon. Friend the Member for Small Heath has proposed? The Home Secretary talks as though "consultation" were a dirty word, but the football authorities will have to implement many of the Bill's provisions in any case. The Home Secretary talks as though this were a weak and shameful proposal. What he is afraid of is having to face the Prime Minister and telling her that he has agreed to some form of consultation. As we all know, the Prime Minister wants to run the House of Commons as Luton football club runs its matches: Luton does not allow the opposition in at all. That is an ideal system. Perhaps that is why the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) was so successful in selling his ridiculous scheme to the Prime Minister: perhaps she would like to apply here and now.

[Mr. Foot]

The Government will not get away with it. The next Government will have a chance to enact much wiser proposals, and it would be far better for the Home Secretary—even on the lowest ground, that of his own party's interest and his own reputation—to respond positively to the speeches made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook this evening and a few weeks ago.

8.52 pm

Mr. Michael Irvine (Ipswich): I was one of the Conservative Members who voted against the Football Spectators Bill, because I opposed the national membership scheme. I am glad that Lord Justice Taylor has rejected that scheme. I voted against it because I considered it to be fundamentally unworkable and, although inspired by the best of motives, not targeted in the right direction. I believe that it would have damaged the finances of football clubs by seriously deterring casual spectators, and that it would have caused safety risks over and above those that already exist.

My opposition to the Bill was not based on the view that everything in football's garden was lovely; I believe that action is needed, and that Lord Justice Taylor's admirable report points the way. He singles out the squalid conditions that prevail in so many football grounds today, and I consider the point fair and relevant. Not only do squalid conditions and poor facilities drive many spectators away, but—as Lord Justice Taylor points out—they tend to brutalise the behaviour of some spectators and degrade that of others. As we know, the vast majority of football spectators are law-abiding people who detest violence and hooliganism, but squalid football grounds tend to worsen the bad behaviour to which the minority already tend. Improving facilities is, in my view, an important way of improving crowd behaviour.

Let me put in a word for my constituency football club, Ipswich Town. As I am going to say some rather nice things about the club, I suppose that I should declare my interest: I am allowed two tickets for the directors' box each season. There is no political element in that; my predecessor, who sat on the Opposition Benches, received the same facility. I readily accept it, and obtain considerable pleasure from it.

Over the past 25 years, Ipswich Town has effectively rebuilt its stadium. What is more, in recent years it has built two large all-seater stands, and it now has one of the best grounds in the country. That is a tribute to the club's foresight, and not unconnected with its excellent reputation in regard to crowd behaviour.

As a long-standing football supporter, I have some reservations—perhaps largely emotional—about the proposal for all-seater stadiums: I have stood on the terraces in my time, and there is no doubt that there is a great atmosphere there. Sadly, that atmosphere is all too often seen by the public as hooligan and over-agressive, but in fact it frequently represents the spirit of comradeship, togetherness and the will for one's team to win, and that spirit is valuable.

I understand the fears of many football supporters who prefer to stand on the terraces and who wish to continue to do so, but we must recognise that safety comes first. If Hillsborough had had an all-seater stadium, I believe that the disaster last spring would not have happened. Lord Justice Taylor's careful arguments in favour of such stadiums must be weighed against emotional considerations: I have certain feelings in my heart against all-seater stadiums but my head may lead me to support the Taylor recommendations.

In proceeding with Lord Justice Taylor's recommendations, the Government must do their utmost to take football with them. By "football" I mean not just the directors of clubs, not just those responsible for administration, but the ordinary football fans. One of the fundamental weaknesses of the membership scheme was that it alienated the law-abiding majority of football fans. Last year I received a vast number of letters about the scheme—more than on any other topic, apart from the National Health Service. I had hundreds of them, and every one was against the scheme. Ex-service men wrote to me saying that it was a gross interference with their liberties.

The scheme lost the support of the ordinary law-abiding football fan. It is most important that the Government regain the support of those people. I am sure that, by their praiseworthy immediate acceptance of Lord Justice Taylor's recommendations against the scheme, they have already gone a long way towards doing so. I hope that they will now work closely with the football authorities. I acknowledge that there must be an element of compulsion, but it is most important that the Government take the football authorities and the footballing public along with them.

Although I am against pouring vast sums of public money into a game that makes a great deal of money, I ask the Government to look at the recommendation—suggestion, perhaps—in paragraph 115 of the report, where Lord Justice Taylor makes the point that at present the payments that result in such profits on the transfer market are allowable revenue expenditure, but that investment in improvements to grounds is not. The Prime Minister made the point that too many clubs are spending too much money on the transfer market, at the expense of investment in the improvement of facilities at their grounds. Implementing the recommendations in the Taylor report will impose financial strains on the clubs. The next few years will be difficult. If the Government were to provide some tax concessions of the kind that I suggested, they would be welcome and would take undue financial pressure off the clubs. But I believe strongly that the movement towards spending money on grounds—improving facilities and increasing the number of seats—will in the long run do the game enormous good. It will attract back to the football grounds many of those fans who have lost touch with the game.

Therefore, I give a broad welcome to the thrust of the report. It will certainly have my support.

9.1 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): Now that Lord Justice Taylor's admirable and trenchant report has been universally accepted, the issue for this debate must be how it is properly to be implemented.

I have noticed with some interest the references to two developments in Scotland—one at Ibrox stadium, the home of Glasgow Rangers; the other at the ground of St. Johnstone in Perth. The implementation of the improvements in those two grounds bears careful

examination. The amount of money spent at Ibrox Park was substantial. Such expenditure was possible only because Rangers football club was associated with a financial company with many interests—indeed, world-wide interests. As a consequence, the finance necessary for improvement was readily available. In the case of St. Johnstone, the change was possible only because one of the major retailers in the United Kingdom identified an opportunity for retail development that involved taking over the existing, sub-standard ground, developing it for retail purposes, and paying for the construction of a new stadium on ground that had been donated. Those are special circumstances, and it is perhaps because of them that both those examples are available to illustrate what can be done. When we look at the problem of the 92 league clubs in England and Wales we may very well find that there are not 92 similar opportunities.

Lord Justice Taylor talks about sponsorship. What has to be remembered about sponsorship is that, these days, companies do not sponsor sport or sporting clubs out of any overwhelming philanthropic desire; they do so because they want a commercial return. If one were to take Lord Justice Taylor's report to a company that could not be assured of regular television coverage and were to say, "Here is the prospectus upon which you are expected to spend large amounts of your money", I suspect that one might get quite a lot of dusty answers.

Reference has been made to transfer fees. Of course, they are grotesque, but no one has attempted to calculate precisely how much money would be available in real terms if, say, 10 per cent. of the real value of transfer fees were to be allocated for ground improvement. The hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Irvine) referred effectively to the possibility of fiscal concessions for ground improvements. Why not? We are dealing with something that will make a contribution not to the commercial viability of the clubs, but to public safety. Is it not reasonable in such circumstances to accept that there is a special case for fiscal concessions for that purpose? No doubt the Football Trust and the Football Ground Improvements Trust will make their contribution. The problem is substantial. If capacity must be cut, the ability to generate revenue is necessarily affected, so clubs will be inhibited from taking out large loans because they cannot generate the revenue to service them.

Mr. Wilson: Does the hon. and learned Gentleman agree that that point is even more true in respect of the proposal that standing attendances at grounds should be cut by 20 per cent. a year in the interim? If there is to be the stick of telling clubs that they must make their grounds all-seater, the need for the carrot of encouraging them to do that by this reduction disappears—if 20 per cent. of the revenue of many clubs is knocked off over the next five years, they will not have the money to invest in all-seater stadiums that they are told that they must invest.

Mr. Campbell: The hon. Gentleman's intervention reinforces the principle that I was endeavouring to explain. My only qualification is that safety must be paramount. If we have learnt anything from Hillsborough, it is surely that.

The conclusion that must be drawn from the Taylor report's financial implications is that there is grave doubt about how much money can be raised and whether sufficient resources can be generated to allow third and fourth division clubs—even by the year 2000—to effect the necessary improvements. If that happens, inevitably some of the 92 clubs in the league will close. The structure of the game will be irreversibly changed and the structure that emerges will be directly related to the way in which money is raised for those improvements and to the amount raised.

I am conscious of the fact that other hon. Members wish to contribute, so I shall pass briefly over the issue of ticket touting and say simply that I am delighted that Lord Justice Taylor has seen fit to isolate that as a potential cause of disturbance and danger. I have twice attempted to introduce private Member's Bills to deal with ticket touting but, so far, they have not commended themselves to the Home Secretary or his predecessor. Ticket touting puts at risk the maintenance of safety and prevention of disorder at football matches. I hope that, for that limited reason at least, the Government will proceed to introduce legislation speedily.

The Taylor recommendations must be implemented. It would do less than justice to the report's comprehensive nature if we did not implement them. It would be an ill-fitting memorial to those who died at Hillsborough and would be little comfort for those who suffered severe injury there. I hope that the Government will feel compelled to proceed in tandem with the football authorities. To legislate from the touch line would be far too easy, and it would undoubtedly ensure that the incorrect result was achieved. A measure of co-operation between the Government and the football authorities to implement these recommendations will bring about the best solution. It is the Government's duty to bring that about and that is why they should enter into dialogue with the football authorities.

9.8 pm

Mr. John Carlisle (Luton, North): The House will be aware that I and other members of the all-party football committee gave evidence to Lord Justice Taylor. At the end of that meeting, I had what was described as a "spat" with his Lordship about his attitude towards the football membership scheme. Regrettably, from my point of view and that of some of my hon. Friends, Lord Justice Taylor was against the scheme and came out against it in his admirable report. That is now water under the bridge, although I believe that the scheme will have to come back again.

It was regrettable that Lord Justice Taylor's conclusion on the membership scheme seemed to be based exclusively on the invitation to tender from the consultants to the Football League and not, as I should have hoped, on the reports in *Hansard*, and on the deliberations on the Floor of the House and in Committee. As the invitation to tender document had not even been agreed with the Department of the Environment, it was less than fortunate that he based much of his evidence about the membership scheme on that particular aspect.

There was an omission from the report which, unfortunately, did not comfort those who live near football grounds, and about which the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) was rightly concerned. It is a serious omission that the report dealt exclusively with football. Perhaps Lord Justice Taylor would say that his remit was to deal with Hillsborough and its effects, and with safety at grounds.

[Mr. John Carlisle]

However, we must all understand that, although about 500,000 go to watch the game on a Saturday afternoon, there are many millions outside the grounds who find the spectacle of people going to games under heavy police escort, often with dogs and horses, and being marched like armies from railway and bus stations to the grounds unedifying, as do those who shop or visit relatives near football grounds. Apart from the obvious importance of safety, our duty is to ensure that scenes such as we all have seen over the past few years—some of us at first hand—around and inside grounds do not occur again.

The Opposition's negative attitude today and yesterday is disappointing. They have for ever taken the view that there is not too much wrong and that matters are improving. It is, of course, a fact that the incidence of hooliganism around football—I prefer to put it that way rather than to talk about "football hooliganism"—has declined, but the reason for that, as even the Opposition would admit, is heavier policing and the decisions being made by various chief constables. That has led to the number of arrests decreasing and a decreasing incidence of trouble.

We applaud that, but we must ask ourselves whether the massive cost of £30 million a year to the tax and rate payers is worth while for what is only a game. It may be the national game, but it is supported by a minority of people. Other sports, such as fishing, attract far wider interest than football does.

The Opposition's continual line seems to be that football is some sort of charity and, as such, taxpayers' money must be thrown at it. However, I am not unsympathetic to some of the points of the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook and others, which were taken up by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

There may be means by which certain amounts—I emphasise that they must be small—could be directed towards the improvement of grounds, in the same way that money comes from the spot-the-ball competition at present. However, it is not the duty of the House to see a problem and to pour vast sums into it. The Opposition, who are in the pockets of the Football League and the Football Association, seem always to take that attitude. [HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."] I do not mean that they are in their pockets financially, but that for the Opposition, the Football League and the Football Association can do almost no wrong, although the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth), who is regrettably not in the Chamber, has other ideas, as can be seen from the early-day motion that he tabled today.

The implication of the Taylor report, which football must face, is that, if all-seater stadiums are to come about, whether by legislation or otherwise, they will cost the clubs an enormous amount—and I admit that. Clubs must ask themselves, as the House must, whether it is worth while at the majority of grounds. That is true of the old Victorian grounds—which are badly sited for modern conditions, which often have terrible access, which are a terrible nuisance to those around and which have aged and crumbling facilities—and even more true of those in the lower divisions. Will it be worth their while to continue in existence on the basis of having all-seater stadiums? Many of them must be asking tonight, as they did when the report was published, whether their very existence is now threatened, as my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) suggested, and has been endorsed by hon. Members.

There is an answer, which Lord Justice Taylor and others before him have put forward and of which I would like to remind the House. It is in paragraph 126, on page 21 of the report, where Lord Justice Taylor talks about ground sharing. The House, and football clubs must understand that this, regrettably for the sentimentalists—there are several in the House, especially among the Opposition—is the only way that many clubs can survive and retain their identity.

It is somewhat ironic that, about a week ago, Mr. Jimmy Hill of the Fulham football club came to the all-party committee and told us in heavily sentimental tones that he wished to see Fulham football club survive, and that it had the support of the local council. Yet, within a matter of days, if not hours, it was announced that the sale was to go ahead and Craven Cottage was to close. That is obviously a cause for great regret, but it is a sign of realism. There is no way that such clubs can afford to put in the necessary number of seats, and it would be impractical for them to do so in current conditions. Ground sharing is inevitable.

It is interesting to see from Lord Justice Taylor's report that Mr. Peter Robinson of the Luton football club, who is well known to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), said that, if his club and Everton were offered a new super-stadium on Merseyside, although the fans would not like it, he for one would be happy to go to that stadium. I suggest to the House that that must be the way; that in cities such as Sheffield, Nottingham, Bristol—and, indeed, London—if clubs are to survive and retain their identity, they will have to consider a communal facility for one, two or possibly three clubs. *[Interruption.]*

The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) asks where Luton will go. We have Watford down the road and Northampton just north of us. We have to encourage the football clubs to take decisions that will certainly be sentimentally unpalatable to them but, realistically, are the only way in which they can survive.

Mr. Ashton *rose*——

Mr. Carlisle: I cannot give way to the hon. Gentleman; he knows the time structure.

The other factor that must be remembered has been mooted on the Floor of the House before. It is that we must look towards super-stadiums. For this, we must have the co-operation of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and those Labour, Conservative and Liberal councillors throughout the country who consistently reject the idea of super-stadiums, and, indeed, of out-of-town stadiums.

Mr. Ashton: Not true.

Mr. Carlisle: The hon. Member says, "Not true," but I have an instance in my own constituency. There is a 365-acre old chalk pit and a new super-stadium was proposed, but every man and woman on the county council rejected it and every villager was up in arms about it on the basis that they did not want it in their back yard.

Mr. Ashton: The world student games are to come to Sheffield in 1991. A municipal stadium has been built for 40,000 people, all sitting down, and the clubs have been asked if they would consider sharing and playing there.

The rent they are asking is £2 million a year, because the new stadium has cost £20 million or thereabouts to build, and the public auditor, whom they have to satisfy, says that a fair rent as a return on capital is £2 million a year. The clubs says they cannot afford it. These are the finances that the hon. Gentleman is talking about.

Mr. Carlisle: I know, and I have spoken to the hon. Gentleman about that instance, but he is faced with the alternative of clubs going out of business, there being only one club in Sheffield and only one in Bristol. He must face the fact that those clubs will go out it they are forced by law to build the suggested number of seats. Also, of course, the clubs have to improve their facilities; they probably have to go for artificial surfaces, which I know are anathema to many people. If they are to become community facilities which I believe they will become, we shall see far fewer grounds—the same number of clubs, I hope, but far fewer grounds. That is the part of Lord Justice Taylor's report which I believe will have to be implemented if the 92 clubs in the Football League are to survive under the conditions he sets.

This is a last chance for football. That has been said in the House so many times, but everyone is screaming again today. Everyone is trying to assist, but we have to be realistic, and so has football. If it is realistic, it has a future. If it is governed by sentiment as it has been in the past, it has no future and it does not deserve one.

9.19 pm

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): It is ironic and sad that it took the deaths of 95 football supporters to bring it home to the Government and to society in general that something had to be done about the game of football.

One weakness of the structure of the football industry —we must remember that, besides being a sport, football is an industry—is that those who go week after week to watch local teams play have had little say in how the game should be organised. Those are the people who pay their money at the turnstiles every week. As a football supporter who has been following one of the best teams in the country for more than 50 years, I agree wholeheartedly that the conditions in many stadiums have led to the problem in many football grounds.

It may not be the only problem, but the treatment of football spectators by clubs is an important element. In many football clubs, a spectator has to be a bully if he wants to go to the toilet: the facilities are so inadequate that people have to push and shove their way in. The same applies to catering arrangements. To get a cup of tea, a meat pie or whatever they fancy at half-time, spectators have to fight their way to the front of the queue. When people are treated in that way, they respond accordingly. That atmosphere must be removed from football if we are to solve the problem.

I do not want football to be sanitised to the extent that all the things that attract the working class to the game are removed. I accept that changes have to take place but I want a greater input by those who go to football matches season after season to support their clubs. Many supporters' clubs are like sweetheart organisations and do not adopt a positive attitude to the well-being of the people they allegedly represent. I am not saying that there are not good supporters' clubs; there are, but many are so involved in their adoration of the management of the clubs that they do not act in the interests of the spectators who attend football matches.

Football has been our national game. Many stadiums were built in the last 100 years. Many are in the wrong places. In Liverpool there are two football grounds, one on either side of a park. If they were being built today, they would not be in the same positions.

The report suggests that there has been far too much neglect by Government and by the football industry. We had had the Bradford disaster and many others, so there was no question of being taken by surprise. Many warnings have been flashed out to the industry and the Government, but no positive steps have been taken to remedy the problems.

I repeat that the football industry must realise that those who pay money to watch football matches have a right to have their voices heard and their views considered more positively than in the past. That will bring about a change in football supporters' behaviour. At the moment, most of the trouble takes place outside grounds and it is for their activities outside grounds that football supporters get a bad name. We must find a solution to that problem.

I attended that match at Hillsborough, and lost a relative there. The events that day, in all their drama, showed beyond a doubt that there is something terribly wrong with what is happening in football. I hope that the Taylor report will show us the way forward and that the acceptable changes will be implemented as soon as possible to the benefit of the game.

9.25 pm

Mr. Denis Howell (Birmingham, Small Heath): Any reply to a debate such as this must start with an expression to Lord Justice Taylor of our great appreciation for the excellent job that he has done on behalf of football.

I am sorry that the Home Secretary is not yet here, because there is only one word to describe his speech. It was a diatribe unworthy of any senior Minister in this or any other Government. The right hon. and learned Gentleman completely misrepresented the report for purely party political ends and to camouflage the disaster that the Government face. That is extremely regrettable.

The problems of football are the problems of society. That is why Lord Justice Taylor was right to call football to account for its stewardship. It is the duty of the Football Association and Football League to provide a leadership that accepts its responsibilities not only for the state of the game but for the role of football in society. All too often, the bodies are seen as warring factions instead of administrators united in a common purpose. Even within the league, we have the spectacle of a conflict between big clubs and small clubs.

All that must change. We must develop a cohesive strategy, such as that called for by hon. Members on both sides of the House, uniting the national leadership of the Football Association and the Football League, involving all the clubs in the county associations and embracing supporters' associations and players' associations, all of which represent the game and represent public opinion.

Miss Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to say something about the way in which the Professional Footballers Association has tried to do something about the behaviour of players? It was

[Miss Kate Hoey]

therefore unfortunate that, because the report was deemed to be purely about safety, that association did not give evidence.

Mr. Howell: Yes, and I am glad to say that Lord Justice Taylor makes the point that what happens on the field is often reflected in what goes on off the field. I pay tribute to Mr. Gordon Taylor, and Mr. Garth Crooks and to the officers of the Professional Footballers Association for their contribution to cleaning up the game, and I wish them further success.

I was on the subject of the responsibilities of the governing bodies. In the United States, those responsibilities are exercised through the establishment of commissioners for each sport. They are independent of sectional interest. Football must move in the same direction—and move fast. I hope that it will do so of its own accord; otherwise, such a solution may have to be imposed upon it. Football must seek the help of all those people of good will in responding to the Taylor report.

That approach is in contrast to the Government's response to the report, which I can only describe as excessively partisan. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said, the Government have scorned the offer of a collective approach that I have made across the Dispatch Box at least four times. Both yesterday and today, the Home Secretary misrepresented Opposition Members, and especially myself, in the most disgraceful manner. We have had an exchange about it——

Mr. Waddington: I was quoting the right hon. Gentleman, not misrepresenting him.

Mr. Howell: No, the Home Secretary was not quoting me. Is the Home Secretary saying that football hooliganism is not a criminal matter, because that is the only logic of the position that he adopted? My approach was much more effective and stern than anything that the right hon. and learned Gentleman said, and it is backed up by what Lord Justice Taylor and Mr. Justice Popplewell have said.

After describing how such people cause havoc in society, paragraph 47 of the Taylor report states:

"They plan their violence as a recreation in itself to which the football is secondary".

That is exactly what I have been saying. It is what both Taylor and Popplewell have said. It is what everybody has said, except the Home Secretary.

I hope that, in future, the Government will proceed along the path of consultation and conciliation and not pursue the confrontation that we have seen so far. Their confrontational approach, which we could describe as "ministerial hooliganism", dominated the Committee stage of the Football Spectators Act 1989. Those of us who served on the Committee know that in the 120 hours that we spent on that legislation, the Minister for Sport did not accept a single amendment from any hon. Member, be it tabled by one of his hon. Friends or an Opposition Member. Those 120 hours were an exercise in pure political prejudice, as the Government attempted to rush through the House a measure dominated by the thoughts of the Prime Minister.

Lord Justice Taylor's report has demolished that arrogance. That is why we have seen this disgraceful performance from the Home Secretary and his colleagues, who are trying to bluster their way through and to camouflage the disaster that they have suffered. As I have said, the Minister for Sport rejected every amendment that was tabled in our 120 hours in Committee and has now had his attitude totally repudiated by Taylor. The only honourable thing for the Minister to do at the end of the debate is to resign his position at once.

We have had another exchange about all-seat stadiums and about what the Home Secretary thought we were saying about people who insisted on standing in seated areas. I remind the Home Secretary that I drew attention to that problem both in Committee and in the House. Indeed, I have given my eye-witness account of the 10,000 Leeds United supporters who were provided with seated areas, but who refused to sit down. What does the Home Secretary say about that? When the right hon. and learned Gentleman was asked yesterday what he would do about that, he said:

"when people go into a seater stand, it will be up to them to decide whether they stand or sit"—[*Official Report*, 29 January 1990; Vol. 166, c. 36.]

That is the Waddington recipe for future disaster. The Home Secretary is saying that people can stand in seated areas, even though we know that it will cause mayhem and friction among the fans behind them.

I should like some answers from the Government. Do they intend to make standing in seated areas a criminal offence, and, if not, how do they intend to deal with the phenomenon that has afflicted Coventry City and Queen's Park Rangers and which some of us have witnessed ourselves? We want an answer to the question, but it is clear that we shall not get one.

I refer now to the problems surrounding the World cup, which is to be held in June. Again, the Government have not referred to that. All that the Home Secretary said yesterday was that the problems of English hooliganism that may emerge in Italy in June will be the responsibility of the Italian Government. The Government expect a foreign Government—[HON. MEMBERS: "He did not say that."] The Home Secretary did say that. He outlined the message to the Italian Government, which was that they could do the dirty work.

The Minister for Sport has been completely unable to take preventive action about the World cup in June, because he has no names of people to disbar. The number of people against whom he could obtain orders to prevent them from attending could not be more minuscule. He has the names of only 15 people who were on the boat, which was in such a state of riot that the skipper had to return to the British port and call for the help of Kent police.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is the right hon. Member fitted with a swivel head? He constantly addresses the Back-Bench Members behind him and not the Chair.

Mr. Speaker: It is not unusual for hon. Members on both sides of the House to turn both to the right and to the left. However, it would be much easier for the House to hear the right hon. Member if he directed his remarks in front of him so that they are picked up by the microphones.

Mr. Howell: I am obliged for that advice. You will understand my difficulty, Mr. Speaker. Naturally, I address those parts of the House where intelligence is to be found.

I wish to make it perfectly clear that we believe in all-seater stadiums. I believe in them. I said so yesterday, when I said that they are inevitable and desirable.

Cost concerns us all. First, I must declare an interest. I am a director of Wembley stadium. We have gone all-seater. We have removed 20,000 standing places and replaced them with 10,000 seats. I am putting into practice the advice of the Taylor report. Wembley has spent £25 million on that exercise of refurbishment and creating seated areas. That is a colossal amount but the cost of a seat at Wembley is the same as the cost of a seat in a fourth division club. That is the point at which we must start when we consider the financial problems.

I can tell the House the cost for each division of the football league to go all-seater. For the first division, it is £8·4 million, or £420,000 per club. For the second division, it is £9·5 million, or £400,000 per club. For the third division, it is £6·8 million, or £283,000 per club. For the fourth division, it is £4·8 million, or £200,000 per club.

Lord Justice Taylor rightly said that clubs cannot simply provide seats. They will have to put a roof over them, especially for a bad winter. That will cost at least £1 million per club. When a club puts a roof on a seated terrace, it must provide creature comforts such as toilets, a refreshment area and supporters' club rooms. That costs £250,000 per club. The minimum cost of implementing Taylor, which I want to happen, in every fourth division club will be at least £1·5 million.

The Home Secretary charges the Opposition that we have no policies. Not only do we have a policy: we have a splendid record in government.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): The Opposition have two policies.

Mr. Howell: If the hon. Gentleman will listen, he will learn that not only do we have a good policy, we have a magnificent record in government. In 1966, when we wished to host the World cup, we took it as a duty to provide at least 50 per cent. and in some cases 90 per cent. of the cost of all the capital work needed on grounds where it was to be played.

In 1970, we encouraged Scotland to stage the Commonwealth games and, in contrast to the Government, we provided substantial funds so that Scotland and Edinburgh could acquit themselves with credit.

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood) *rose——*

Mr. Howell: The hon. Gentleman must listen to the catalogue of events; then I shall give way.

In 1975, we not only passed the Safety of Sports Grounds Act, but negotiated with the football pools authorities to create the Football Trust. With the agreement of the then Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey), we agreed that no taxation would be imposed on the spot-the-ball competition. In return for that agreement, 8 per cent. of the take went to the Football Trust for the ground improvements on which we were insisting. This year, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook and I negotiated a new deal with the pools promoters which we offered to the Government. I hope that they will accept it, as it will produce £18 million a year for the football improvements—£180 million in the 10 years in question.

Mr. Hayward: If I heard the right hon. Gentleman correctly, he spoke about when "we"—the Labour Government—took the decision to host the 1966 World cup. What year was the decision taken to host the World cup in this country?

Mr. Howell: When I came to office, I was told by Denis Follows that he had approached the previous Conservative Government. He had been told that they would give every help and that they would provide motor cycle policemen to go round the country. I had to go to the Treasury to get some money myself. If hon. Members want to know the story, my autobiography comes out shortly and it is all there. It costs £14·95 and it is well worth a read. I am sorry to say that one of the people who comes out best is the right hon. and learned Gentleman the Home Secretary. I hope that he will reform from his practice of misrepresenting me in view of the justice I do to him in my book.

The levy of 42·5 per cent. on the pools is a disgrace. It is disgraceful that men and women who fill out their football pools are called upon to pay 42·5 per cent. in tax, when the tax on bingo, horse racing and everything else is 8 per cent. only. I hope that the Government will consider that problem.

It is important to consider the effects that the Taylor report will have on rugby union, rugby league and on cricket. All those sports will be required to provide all-seater grounds; it is a major problem for all sports, not just football. I hope that the Government will consider it.

I endorse what the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) said about planning and local authorities. Taylor rightly calls upon local authorities to understand the need to improve and replace stadiums and to be sympathetic to planning applications. I am glad to see that the Secretary of State for the Environment is present and I hope that he will recognise that, time and time again, local authorities turn down such applications. If they continue to do so, they will sabotage the Taylor report—none of us wants to see it sabotaged on those grounds. I would be grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's sympathy in that regard.

We must consult the supporters' clubs more often. They have a wealth of wisdom and knowledge and I am sorry that much of the football industry does not take it on board. I believe that every football club should have a genuine, independent, but sympathetic and realistic supporters' club, which should work in co-operation with its club. The supporters' clubs should be represented on the new Football Licensing Authority, which we have not discussed, and the sport itself should also be represented now that the Football Membership Authority has gone.

It is important that friction does not develop in the future, because the licensing authority—acting with great powers—has no representative from football or football supporters. I hope, in a constructive spirit, that when he makes his appointments, the Minister will consider that matter seriously.

Yesterday, the Home Secretary's response to the Taylor proposal about the need to deal with new laws to prevent pitch invasions, racial and obscene chanting and the throwing of missiles was disappointing—as was his response to my right hon. Friend the Member for

[Mr. Howell]

Sparkbrook's call for the need to provide more attendance centres. However, I was heartened that the Home Secretary said that he would look at the matter again urgently rather than merely rely on the Public Order Act 1986. I welcome that, and hope that he will do so. Lord Justice Taylor must have looked at the Public Order Act and concluded that it was inadequate. We know that it is, because the number of prosecutions for racial chanting, obscene calls or such matters is minuscule.

I endorse Lord Justice Taylor's report. I cannot do any better than to quote his fine summing up under his chapter headed, "A better future for football":

"I hope in these two chapters I have made it clear that the years of patching up grounds, of having periodic disasters and narrowly avoiding many others by muddling through on a wing and a prayer must be over. A totally new approach across the whole field of football requires higher standards both in bricks and mortar and in human relationships."

Those words have the full support of Her Majesty's Opposition. We trust that the Government will provide the resources which will turn fine words into reality.

9.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Colin Moynihan): Those of us who have been here throughout the debate will have heard with interest the opening remarks of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), for two reasons. First, he addressed three comments to me. He said that I was a supporter of Millwall, that it was in my constituency, and that I wanted a fixture list for next season. I am a supporter not of Millwall, but of Charlton. Neither club is in my constituency. I do not need a fixture list for next season; we are hardly through this season.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook should address at the Dispatch Box now an issue which is fundamentally important. Those who were present for his speech will have noticed that during his early remarks he said that supporters who wanted to stand should be allowed to do so. That led to an intervention by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), who could not accept that premise. He clearly and cogently put the argument for all-seater stadiums which is at the centre of Lord Justice Taylor's report. Later on, the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook's position was echoed by the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Mr. Pendry), who also argued against Lord Justice Taylor and said that those supporters who wanted to stand should be allowed to do so.

It is absolutely essential to the House, and as a message to people outside the House, for the Opposition to make their position absolutely clear. Do they support all-seater stadiums along the lines proposed by Lord Justice Taylor or do they not? I shall happily give way to the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] It does not surprise me that the right hon. Gentleman does not rise to his feet because *Hansard* and coverage of this debate will show clearly that the Opposition have rejected the main tenet of Lord Justice Taylor's report. They went further than that on a whole range of different issues and challenged his arguments on other matters. They even questioned whether the new penalties and criminal offences which Lord Justice Taylor has urged the Government to consider carefully and enact should be so enacted. It is disgraceful that the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook has not backed Lord Justice Taylor's report or all-seater stadiums along the lines outlined in that report.

The message from my hon. Friends is far clearer. Urgent solutions must and can be found to the problems that beset football. An ailing game must be treated and brought from the inward-looking boardrooms of Victorian England into the 1990s. That will not be done overnight, nor will this report alone provide the cure. We need a complete change in attitude, a new realism and, above all, courage from those who run the game and those who support it.

I recognise, as my hon. Friends have made clear, that football can creak and lumber on as it has been doing for years, bedevilled by trouble and shabby venues. Of course, change can remain a dirty word at most football clubs. Yesterday, in the intervention of the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr Ashton), we saw symptoms of such an attitude when he was unwilling to accept that football is an industry, a part of the leisure industry, which has to compete for spectators.

There is simply no excuse for the raw deal that most supporters get from their clubs nowadays. Clubs must move closer to their supporters. I agree with the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) that the views of supporters need to be taken fully into account by clubs.

But the reality is that too often in football local shopkeepers are too terrified to open and supporters have to be herded into grounds and protected every match day for their own safety by 5,000 or more police. The police are on duty to contain the problem, not to cure it. What other industry has the nerve to presume to ask the police to marshal its paying customers in and out of its premises? The police would be far better deployed in the local community and towns upholding law and order.

The football authorities should be leading the way. Like every form of activity for the paying spectator, be it cinemas, tennis or fitness clubs, football clubs must pay for the safety improvements themselves.

If every ground converted to all-seater and all those seats were covered, the Football Trust estimates that the cost would be £130 million. The calculation made by the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook was even less than that. Many clubs, particularly in the lower divisions, have attendances well below capacity and many currently uncovered standing areas will no doubt simply not be used, thus substantially lowering the cost.

Meanwhile, the Football Trust has offered £75 million towards ground improvements, and even if only half the income that the Football Association and the Football League derive from television—currently about £18 million a year—was spent on ground safety over the next 10 years, the costs would be covered in full. That is without considering the sponsorship and commercial arrangements, gate money and transfer fees, all of which provide important sources of revenue.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): If the Minister is so keen on sponsorship, why does the chairman of the Tory party have a subsidy as a Cabinet Minister? Why does not he get some sponsorship and run round with "Rupert Murdoch" across his chest, or something like that?

Mr. Moynihan: As usual, the hon. Gentleman talks nonsense. He should concentrate on what I have just said.

which is that television income alone over the next 10 years, or half that plus the money that the Football Trust has said that it will make available, would allow all the division clubs in 1999 to provide covered seating, which would meet the fundamental tenet of Lord Justice Taylor's report, with which every Conservative Member agrees even if the Opposition are divided on the merits of that proposal.

Mr. Denis Howell: Why have we not heard one word about the identity card scheme? Lord Justice Taylor condemned every stand that the Minister took on that.

Mr. Moynihan: If the right hon. Gentleman continues to intervene, he will not hear me deal with that, which I shall be only too happy to do.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): Let me stress the predicament of rugby league clubs, particularly those in the nether regions of the second division, which count their crowds in hundreds, have no access to the Football Trust and find it difficult to obtain sponsorship, but which may nevertheless find themselves, as designated clubs under the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975, faced with considerable costs.

Mr. Moynihan: As my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has clearly stated to the House, the application of the Taylor report to other sports will be given detailed consideration—not least in taking into account the point that my hon. Friend makes.

I return to the question of finance. The Opposition urged the Government to make more taxpayers' money available. It cost just under £1 million to police Chelsea football club, for example, last season, of which £140,000, net of value added tax, was recovered from the clubs—and £860,000 is a high price for the ratepayers of Hammersmith and Fulham to pay for the disruption caused outside the club and in the neighbourhood, particularly since the club estimates that only 2 per cent. of its gate comes from the local population.

It is wholly reasonable for the ratepayers of Hammersmith and Fulham to ask the Opposition why, when they face such large bills today, they should agree with a Labour party that seeks to increase taxation to pay for safety improvements at Stamford Bridge tomorrow.

There are three key reasons why we should reject Opposition calls to repeal the Football Spectators Act 1989. First, the Act provides the framework for the measures that Lord Justice Taylor discusses and recommends. Forty of Lord Justice Taylor's recommendations that impact directly on safety can be implemented by a football licensing authority, which is at the heart of part I of the Act.

Secondly, part I enables us to act swiftly in replacing stands by seated accommodation. If we did not have the legislative vehicle in place, we would not be in a position to give clubs as much time as possible to meet the timetable outlined in the report.

Thirdly, Lord Justice Taylor comments positively on part II of the Act, which will be a crucial measure later this year. Those three measures should have the unanimous support of the House, and it is sad to see Labour opposing them this evening. Those measures have the support of my right hon. and hon. Friends and of the British public. Only the Opposition parties appear divided between outright calls for repealing the Act and internal division as to how they should respond to the key safety measures that the report recommends.

Lord Justice Taylor was quite right to address himself to the invitation to tender issued by the management consultants employed by the football authorities.

Mr. Denis Howell: What about the identity card scheme?

Mr. Moynihan: The right hon. Gentleman asks about the ID card scheme. If he had read the report, he would know that the only reference to the invitation to tender is right at the heart of Lord Justice Taylor's assessment of the national membership scheme. I shall be more than delighted to outline it in more detail to the hon. Gentleman after the debate.

On the basis of Lord Justice Taylor's recommendations, we have decided not to proceed with the scheme's implementation. As I have always told the House, we were insistent that we would not move to the establishment of the FMA until we had given full consideration to Lord Justice Taylor's report. That we have done. However, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary made clear yesterday, the provisions in part I of the Football Spectators Act 1989 will remain in force, and the proposals for a national membership scheme will be put on the back burner. Work will continue to establish how Lord Justice Taylor's anxieties about the scheme can be met.

The problem of hooliganism has not gone away and it would be grossly irresponsible of the Government and the House not to give Lord Justice Taylor's package every support and to implement it. But be aware that we have a national membership scheme which, should we need it—*[Interruption.]* We can return to the House in due course to tackle the problem of hooliganism. As I have said many times, I believe in the national game. I want to see it fit that description——

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 210, Noes 277.

Division No. 57] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Boyes, Roland
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*	Bradley, Keith
Allen, Graham	Bray, Dr Jeremy
Alton, David	Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Armstrong, Hilary	Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	Buchan, Norman
Ashton, Joe	Caborn, Richard
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Callaghan, Jim
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*	Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Barron, Kevin	Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Battle, John	Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Beckett, Margaret	Canavan, Dennis
Beith, A. J.	Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Bell, Stuart	Cartwright, John
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*	Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Bermingham, Gerald	Clay, Bob
Bidwell, Sydney	Clelland, David
Blair, Tony	Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Blunkett, David	Cohen, Harry
Boateng, Paul	Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*

Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ken Eastham and
Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Begg, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James

King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. David Lightbown.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the thorough and thoughtful report made by Lord Justice Taylor into the causes of the Hillsborough disaster and regards its proposals as the basis for major improvements in the organisation of Association Football; welcomes the lead given by the Government in pressing for all-seater stadia, a proposal since endorsed in Lord Justice Taylor's report; welcomes the Government's acceptance of the majority of Lord Justice Taylor's recommendations; and urges the football authorities and the clubs to implement swiftly those recommendations which require action of them.

Private Medical Insurance

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. On the Order Paper there is a note to the effect that the Select Committee's consideration of the statutory instruments with which the House is about to deal has not yet been completed. There is a correction. The Committee met this afternoon and completed its consideration of the instruments. In an extract from its third report, the Select Committee

"draws the special attention of the House to the above instrument"—

the Private Medical Insurance (Disentitlement to Tax Relief and Approved Benefits) Regulations 1989—

"on the ground that it requires elucidation".

That elucidation is provided in a memorandum attached to the report. I thought that it would be of benefit to hon. Members to have that knowledge.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that information. Is the report available in the Vote Office?

Mr. Cryer: It is, Mr. Speaker.

10.13 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Private Medical Insurance (Disentitlement to Tax Relief and Approved Benefits) Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 2389) dated 19th December 1989, a copy of which was laid before this House on 19th December, be annulled.

Mr. Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to take the following motion:

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Private Medical Insurance (Tax Relief) Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 2387), dated 18th December 1989, a copy of which was laid before this House on 19th December, be annulled.

Mr. Brown: I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) for raising that helpful point of order. Some of his concerns will be raised by me and other Opposition Members.

It is ironic that, on the day when Britain's ambulance workers employed by the National Health Service have come to the House of Commons to present their case, the House has before it two statutory instruments that set in place tax handouts to private medical insurance schemes costing, on the Government's calculation, some four times the cost of settling the ambulance workers' claim. Set alongside each other in this way, the two issues provide a telling and disgusting insight into the Government's priorities.

On Second Reading of the Finance Bill last year, the then Chief Secretary, later Foreign Secretary and now Chancellor of the Exchequer, told the House that these proposals would ease the burden on the National Health Service. He did not go on to say how that would happen, and surely it is a fair question to ask: how does it relieve the burden on the NHS to give a tax handout to those who already have private medical insurance? The Government's figures show that some 90 per cent. of the cost of the proposals in the coming year are dead-weight costs. This expenditure is a subsidy to existing schemes, so I again ask: how does that help relieve the burden on the NHS? Surely the correct way to do that is to give the NHS the money direct.

The Government's first-year costings do not tell the whole story—they were never intended to do that. The understatement of the first-year costs is deliberately designed. As the Chancellor told us on Second Reading, it "needs to be seen in perspective".

He went on to boast about the money that the Government were giving the NHS. Again, the tabling of these regulations just before the House rose for the Christmas recess was hardly designed to ensure the maximum publicity for the proposals, yet what is set out could have far-reaching significance for the NHS.

These arrangements for claiming tax rebates under the scheme do not speak of a modest proposal, operating at the margins—a proposal that

"needs to be seen in perspective".

The arrangements that have been put in hand for basic rate taxpayers and, indeed, non-taxpayers are similar to those currently in place for claiming mortgage tax relief. It is a private medical insurance MIRAS scheme. Just as there is no real point in introducing tax relief to reward people for doing what they would have done anyway without the relief, so there is no real point in putting those arrangements for claiming into place for a scheme that is intended to be modest.

On the basis of the evidence so far, it seems reasonable to suspect that something more far-reaching is intended. When dealing with the Conservative party, it is important to watch carefully what it is doing rather than just listen to what it says. There can surely be no doubt that the arrangements could be a stepping stone for the introduction of more general tax reliefs for private medical insurance. It is pretty easy to predict the way in which the debate inside the private medical insurance industry will go—indeed, it has begun already. The industry mentions the costs of the administrative arrangements that accompany tax relief in this form—costs that fall on the industry and therefore, eventually, on the consumer.

The industry makes the point that encouraging special private medical insurance for pensioners distorts existing cross-subsidy arrangements between older—and therefore more vulnerable—and younger consumers of its product, to the industry's disadvantage. Arguing from that point of view, the logical next step is to make the existing reliefs more generally available. No doubt, the Chancellor will argue that such a step would relieve the burden on the Health Service even more. If that is not the Government's true intention, now is the time for them to say so. If the Minister can give the House a firm assurance that those reliefs will be extended before the next general election, I shall happily give way and afford him an opportunity to do so. The hon. Gentleman may refer to it in his speech, as he does not seem to want to do so in mine.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield) *rose*—

Mr. Brown: I am prepared to take assurances from wherever I can get them. I suspect that the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) has slightly more sympathy with my points than most Conservative Members. If the hon. Gentleman felt that in some future Conservative Government an assurance from him would be binding, I should willingly give way to him. It is disappointing that he obviously does not think that.

There can be no doubt that the regulations reduce the tax base in an unfair and socially divisive way. The true subsidy is, of course, open ended and it is not limited to the Government's estimate of £40 million.

In a pretence of fair play, the present Chancellor of the Exchequer said on Second Reading:

"Even non-taxpayers will benefit because they, too, will pay their premiums net of tax relief."—[*Official Report*, 25 April 1989; Vol. 151, c. 818.]

There are three broad categories of non-taxpayers, but for the sake of my argument we shall leave royalty out of this, which leaves two broad categories. The first consists of those who are rich, but who are non-taxpayers because they are advised by professional tax avoiders. Under the regulations, even the most unscrupulous tax avoider will receive the relief, whether he pays tax or not. The second category includes 75 per cent. of Britain's pensioners who do not pay income tax because they are too poor and who are too poor to pay private medical insurance premiums.

Why should older people have to pay into private medical schemes? They have been frightened into it by a pretty realistic assessment of what the Government intend to do to the NHS and frightened into believing that, even on a restricted budget, private medical insurance must be a priority and a matter of life and death. Why should Britain's pensioners be bullied into paying private medical insurance premiums? Have not they, of all people, already paid towards the NHS? Now that they are more likely, because of their age, to need to use the NHS, the Government say, "Pay again, go private and we shall give you tax relief." How typical it is of the Government's business dealings, exemplified by the privatisation programme, that they are trying to sell again to Britain's pensioners the health care provision that they thought that the NHS already gave.

Needless to say, the statutory instruments fly in the face of the Government's stated tax policy. The Government's case used to be that they were reviewing and, where possible, eliminating allowances with a view to reducing overall rates of direct taxation. Tax allowances were a form of public expenditure, which were listed in the White Paper. The Conservative party's case used to be that it sought to reduce the burden on ordinary taxpayers, but here the Conservative Government are doing the exact opposite. The taxpayer has to pay for handouts to pensioners with private medical insurance, 90 per cent. of whom were in such schemes anyway, even without the inducement of the relief.

I want to draw the attention of the Financial Secretary to several matters of detail which arise from the two statutory instruments, and to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South referred in a point of order at the start of the debate. Regulation 4 of the Private Medical Insurance (Tax Relief) Regulations 1989 sets out the information that has to be provided by an individual to claim relief at source. Part of the information required is a certificate specifying that the contract satisfies the requirements of section 54(2) of the Finance Act 1989. That provision requires that the person who is insured by the contract is resident in the United Kingdom. I believe that the regulations should also require the individual to notify the Inland Revenue if the position changes at any time during the period that is covered by the insurance. Why do the regulations not require that? Why should it be possible to take the relief and then to move overseas?

On a similar point, why does regulation 10 not require non-United Kingdom insurers to make the information that regulation 10 requires available in the United Kingdom? Under regulation 12, which relates to qualifying insurers, a declaration has to be made to the effect either that the person is carrying on a business in the United Kingdom or, if not, that he is a national of a member state of the EC. Should not the insurer certify that the contract will be brought in, in its entirety, as part of the business carried on in a member state and that it will not be reinsured offshore? Does not the wording provide a loophole to permit offshore reinsurance?

When we discussed these matters in July 1989, the then Financial Secretary—now the Chief Secretary—announced in a written answer a broad outline of the areas that would be eligible for tax relief. That was with a background of the industry lobbying against what it felt might be an unduly restrictive framework of regulations. Hence the then Financial Secretary opened his July answer with a robust:

"Our intention is that a comprehensive range of treatments will be permitted under private medical insurance contracts which attract tax relief."—[*Official Report*, 19 July 1989; Vol. 157, c. *181*.]

The Medical Insurance (Disentitlement to Tax Relief and Approved Benefits) Regulations set out the detail. It is pretty comprehensive. The regulations provide that services must be associated with the treatment or consequent upon it. That is pretty broad. I know that it was the then Financial Secretary's intention to exclude alternative medicines, but I am by no means certain that that is what the regulations do. Will the Minister assure the House that it will not be possible for, say, a wealthy, eccentric pensioner to undergo therapeutic treatment by standing in a bath of water and having small electric shocks passed through it and to claim tax relief at the top rate on the whole bizarre arrangement? Let me put it like this. She could, in any event, claim under the regulations for the private ambulance to take her there and back. The regulations provide for generous tax relief for the use of private ambulances, when the Government are willing to see the industrial dispute in the ambulance service that the rest of us use drag on and on. There can be no morality in that.

On the subject of morality, are not the regulations open to abuse in another way? It would not be the first time that the Conservative party had got itself into trouble with society osteopaths, but in Harold Macmillan's day nobody, so far as I am aware, suggested that the arrangements should qualify for tax relief.

A provision limiting accommodation, as a service, to not more than 14 days is surely easily evaded by regular return trips to hospital. Anyway, who will enforce the provision of accommodation for the patient's family or friends? In fact, there is very little in the regulations that allows for supervision of the arrangement, nor is there much history of the supervision of private medical insurance. The Government, who proclaim themselves to be keen on investor protection, provide no special protection for consumers of private medical insurance. There is no body to adjudicate on disputes. There is just the individual, probably ill, confronted with the might of an insurance company that will not pay up.

These rotten and unenforceable regulations do nothing to improve this already contemptible provision in the taxation system. The proposals are designed to spearhead development of a two-tier Health Service, with top rate tax relief and a queue-jumping inside track for those who can afford it, and an under-resourced and neglected Health Service for the rest of us. Private medical insurance is a risky business. Preconditions are not covered and the

[Mr. Brown]

policy may not cover the specific illness with which the insured ends up. And of course one cannot rely on the tax relief either, because an incoming Labour Government will abolish it in its entirety and put the money safely back into the National Health Service where it belongs.

10.27 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Peter Lilley): I apologise to the House if my voice is at all slurred. It is not because I have dined well but because I have been to the dentist—an NHS dentist, I hasten to add.

I am grateful for the opportunity the Opposition have given us to debate these instruments, but I am slightly surprised that we are being asked to debate them and that they are being prayed against. After all, the most important of the two statutory instruments is named "Disentitlement to Tax Relief and Approved Benefits". It is a limiting and restrictive measure. It restricts the availability of these reliefs, to which I understand the Opposition object.

The rationale was debated and the debate was resoundingly won in the Committee on the Finance Bill and on the Floor of the House last year. As it has been reopened, it is worth recalling why the measure was introduced. The number of people covered by private medicine doubled in the 1980s.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Not by individual choice.

Mr. Lilley: From a sedentary position, the hon. Member points out that a number of trade union members were collectively covered by private medical insurance and contributed to the 10 per cent. of the population who are so covered. But only 5 per cent. of over-60s continue with private medicine, obviously because on retirement people who have had insurance cover, often provided by their employers, find that the premiums rise as their income falls. The relief is introduced to help people in precisely those circumstances to continue their private medical insurance, if they so wish.

The regulations have a second purpose—to relieve pressure on the National Health Service, especially for elective surgery, and thereby enable the NHS to provide a better service for those who choose or cannot afford to do other than remain on the NHS.

It might be possible to mount a critique—for a moment I thought that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown), in his lucid and witty speech, was going to follow this line of argument—that the relief will not be sufficiently attractive to encourage many more people into private medical insurance, and therefore will not provide much relief for the National Health Service. But he rapidly abandoned that line of argument and went in the other direction, as did every Opposition Member in Committee on the Finance Act 1989. The hon. Gentleman was worried that the relief would prove too attractive, that it would attract a great deal more private medical insurance among those over 60, and that as a result the relief would cost more than the initial £40 million which we expect in the first year.

The hon. Gentleman asked how the regulations could provide relief. It is fairly obvious that every extra person attracted into private medical insurance provides relief for the NHS. It means that potentially fewer patients need treatment on the NHS. So long as the cost of the tax relief on operations carried out privately is less than the cost of providing similar extra operations on the NHS, tax relief must be a more cost-effective way than extra spending. This will be the case so long as the cost of the operation in the private sector is less than two and a half times what it would be in the public sector. Of course, it is four times where basic rate tax relief is concerned, when we are talking about 25 per cent. of the cost of private operations being borne by tax relief as against 100 per cent. if they were carried out in the public sector.

If Opposition Members are seriously suggesting that private medical operations are carried out at such a multiple of the cost of operations in the NHS, they must also be saying that pay beds in the NHS must be enormously profitable, because they can sell at the private medical price operations provided at NHS cost. Therefore, they would be raking in a great profit. It is extremely odd that they sought to close down and eliminate pay beds from the National Health Service, despite the fact that it is generally recognised that pay beds provide a certain profit, but not on anything like the level that would follow from the costs that Opposition Members suppose.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Surely the Minister is making the wrong comparison between the cost of the operation in the public sector and the cost of the tax relief on the premiums, including the premiums of those who do not have operations on the National Health Service because they are not ill, and the premiums of those who are not able to to avail themselves of private insurance arrangements because they do not cover the circumstances which arise. He should be comparing the cost of the hospital operation with the cost of the tax relief on the premiums.

Mr. Lilley: That is what I am implicitly doing. The premiums reflect the cost of treatment, which, by and large, the non-profit-making private medical insurance organisations have to pay for. If the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that those organisations are surreptitiously making profits and creaming them off, he ought to report that more publicly. But the whole principle of insurance is that those who do not require treatment—or make losses or suffer damage—are paying for those those who do. Matters are evened out through the cost of the premiums.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East asked a number of questions about the contents of the regulations. He said that the regulations would allow all sorts of strange treatments—the nature of which caused some amusement—to be available on the NHS. I do not know why anyone should wish to claim that. If he reads the regulations closely——

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The NHS?

Mr. Lilley: I am sorry. I meant available on private and medical insurance and therefore eligible for relief.

If the hon. Gentleman reads the regulations closely, he will find that they restrict relief to those operations and treatments that are more frequently carried out on the National Health Service than in the private sector. That is a simple way of excluding, for example, inessential plastic surgery. Essential plastic surgery operations are carried

out on the NHS, but not purely cosmetic plastic surgery operations, which would therefore be excluded under the definition.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): We all know 80-year-olds who want to have their faces lifted.

Mr. Lilley: Exactly.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East asked me to predict whether any extension of the tax relief was envisaged. I have made it clear that the relief deals with a specific problem—that is to say, people dropping out of medical insurance schemes on retirement. That is its purpose and that, I think, is a justification which separates it from any wider relief.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We seemed to be so close there. Can the Minister give the clear and specific undertaking that the reliefs will not be extended at all before the next general election?

Mr. Lilley: I thought that I was very clear and specific.

The hon. Gentleman also asked me whether regulation 12 would prevent offshore reassurance. The answer to that is that there is no need. The important point is that the insurer must be in the European Community. If it reinsures the risk, that makes no difference to the tax relief due.

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): Wrong piece of paper.

Mr. Lilley: I am moving on from the issue that fascinated the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East so much.

Although the hon. Gentleman did not emphasise it tonight, he has tried to pretend on previous occasions that the relief that we are offering for medical insurance for the over-60s would merely divert resources away from the NHS and not provide any relief to it. Underlying that is what, by analogy with the famous lump of labour fallacy, one might call the "lump of health care" fallacy. Clearly it is a fallacy to suggest that the supply of health care cannot be expanded to cope with the demand generated by £40 million-worth of tax relief. How else could there be enough extra supply of health care available to meet the £2½ billion of extra money which we have pumped into the National Health Service this year—for about the second year running? If we expect that the supply of health care can be increased if extra money is made available on the substantial scale on which the Government have made it available to the Health Service, and that that there will be a response to it, it is reasonable to suppose that on the comparatively small scale that the insurance relief represents resources will also become available in the private sector to meet the extra demand so created.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: How does the Minister account for the 90 per cent. dead-weight cost in the Government's first-year costings for the project? Surely the overwhelming bulk of the relief that they are to give is to people who already have private medical insurance, so it will make no difference at all.

Mr. Lilley: Simply because it is the first year and it will take time for the medical insurance companies to market the relief and to expand it. As has been said from a sedentary position, that will lead to a greater relief, but, as I said earlier, it will lead to a greater relief of the burden on the NHS. That is both likely and welcome.

Only those who oppose private medical insurance and treatment per se are against the relief, which is basically the attitude of the Opposition. They resent people making provision for their own health care. We believe that in a free country it is perfectly right for people to have the opportunity to do so and that it is reasonable to provide encouragement for those who are over 60 to continue with their private health care. This modest relief enables them to do so while reducing the pressures on the Health Service. I commend that and the regulations to the House.

10.40 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): It is absolute nonsense for the Minister to claim that it is necessary to be opposed to all private health care and all private health insurance in order to be opposed to the tax relief that the regulations embody. The Minister must be in favour of all sorts of things on which he does not give tax relief. I presume that he is in favour of child care being more widely available, but he is stalwartly opposed to giving any tax reliefs for child care and he advances all sorts of arguments about why it should not be done. I am sure that, among other things, the Minister is in favour of all sorts of environmental measures on which he is currently resisting tax reliefs in discussions with other Ministers.

It is simply nonsense to claim that anything that is good must have a tax relief attached to it. There are people who are in favour of private medical insurance or who certainly think that it is a proper legal and legitimate activity, whether or not they wish to encourage it, who do not feel that this tax relief is necessary. That part of the Minister's argument is therefore plainly absurd.

Equally, there are strong reasons to believe that the signals that are given out by the regulations are extremely damaging to the National Health Service and that they are intended to be so. They give many people the signal that they may not be able to rely on the National Health Service if the Government stay in office for much longer and that they would therefore be well advised to make alternative provision. The Government are saying, "What's more, in order to underline that, we'll offer you a tax relief if you are retired to encourage you to take out that provision." That is a bad and demoralising signal for everybody who works in the National Health Service.

The Minister must have argued on numerous occasions that any tax relief is a subsidy and a deliberate distortion of what would otherwise be a market choice or a market decision. Some tax reliefs are defensible and have a purpose, so presumably this one has a purpose. The purpose is to encourage people to believe that they need private health insurance instead of relying on the National Health Service. Presumably that is the only basis on which the Minister is willing to agree that such a subsidy should be offered—unless, of course, it is simply the consequence of the Prime Minister insisting, as she has done over other things, such as football identity cards, "Never mind the logic, I want it, so the Government are going to have it." Perhaps that is what has turned the Treasury's traditional arguments against tax reliefs on their heads. The regulations provide tax relief in an area and in such a way

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

as to lead people to believe that the National Health Service is far from safe in the hands of the present Government.

The Minister advanced the argument that it is a tax relief of limited purpose. It is intended to encourage those people who have had occupational schemes of private health insurance, partly provided by their employers, to continue those schemes at the point where they become most vulnerable, when they retire. If that was so, the tax relief would be confined to people who were already members of such schemes, and it is not so confined. The Minister made it clear that it will be open to people—indeed, they will be encouraged—to take out such schemes anew, even if they have had no part in any previous employers' scheme. That limited purpose cannot, therefore, be the regulations' purpose.

If the Minister has any hopes of reducing the massive dead-weight costs of the scheme, he must be hoping that it will attract a great deal of new business, some of which will not come from people who are simply continuing with their existing health insurance that might otherwise become too expensive for them when the retire.

I said that all tax relief is a subsidy. Equally, all tax relief is a diversion of funds. There may be a justification for choosing to divert money from some other purpose to relieve the premium costs of people who pay for particular insurance policies. However, no justification has been advanced for this measure which is not intrinsically harmful to the whole concept of the National Health Service.

Many people need no encouragement from tax relief to sustain the private health insurance industry. The diversion of funds seems even more pointless when all that it does is to put money into the pockets of people who already, without tax relief, have decided that they wish freely to spend their money on private health insurance. They are fully entitled to do so, but they needed no tax relief to make them do so and they do not need it to enable them to continue to do so.

I am strongly opposed to the regulations. If I had not known the Government better, I might have imagined that the phrase "disentitlement to tax relief" meant that the Government had seen the error of their ways. We know that they have not and that they are still deeply committed to the scheme.

I find myself in agreement with almost everything that the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) said in his opening remarks. However, although I was amused by him, I began to part company with him when he spoke about alternative medicine. There is no logic in discriminating heavily against alternative medicine in operating the scheme.

Some of the people who are most keen—keen is the wrong word; perhaps I should say compelled—to make use of health provision outside the National Health Service are those who want to use forms of alternative medicine that are not readily available within the Health Service. Once the door is opened to tax relief for insurance schemes, it would not be right to have some general presumption against legitimate and well-established aspects of alternative medicine in the scheme. I hope that the Minister will not take the satire of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East as a signal that there is general approval for the idea that alternative medicine should be pushed out.

I suppose that it is in the nature of things that alternative medicine has an uncomfortable relationship with the National Health Service. Some operates within it and some operates without it. The pattern is not even across the country. The relationship of alternative medicine with the private sector is such that I hope that the Minister will not discriminate against alternative medicine in the operation of the scheme.

We cannot be much impressed by the mess that the statutory instrument is in. I know that the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments, seeks to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and will say more about it in detail. I shall confine myself to the passage in the memorandum supplied to the Committee by the Inland Revenue. Referring to one of the oversights, it says:

"Whilst this oversight is most regrettable, it does not affect the meaning of the regulations. The references to the repealed provisions are simply ineffective and have to be construed as if they were not there."

Why on earth do the Government bring before the House regulations which are the law which have to be construed as if they were not there? What are we coming to? Only last week the House was presented with a statutory instrument on which it had to vote without knowing the outcome of the considerations of the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments or the Committee which considered the merits of the instrument. Week after week, we see delegated legislation pour through the House in more and more of a mess. The Government should be thoroughly ashamed of bringing before the House statutory instruments which are not fit to be on the statute book.

10.48 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): My hon. Friend the Minister probably knows that I am less than enthusiastic about this new tax relief, as I explained when we debated the matter in the Committee which considered the Finance Bill last summer. Having listened carefully to his arguments this evening, I am no more persuaded now than I was then.

The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) asked about the possibility of the relief being extended so that everyone could obtain tax relief. That would not be an expensive exercise. Millions of people already have such relief. It is provided by their employer and is tax-deductible for the purposes of corporation tax. They have to pay tax on it as a benefit in kind. The taxability of the benefit would have to be withdrawn. I should be completely opposed to that.

Treasury Ministers have never seemed to me enthusiastic about the new relief, so I am sure that they do not want to extend it any further than necessary. I hope that they have got Inland Revenue officials to crawl over the regulations, even if they are defective, to ensure that the relief is restricted as far as possible. For that reason, I do not agree with the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) who said that it should be extended to alternative medicine. Since I was against the relief in the first place, I should like to see it restricted as far as possible and the cost to other taxpayers kept to the minimum.

My hon. Friend the Minister said that the first object of the exercise was to help people on retirement who went

from a situation where their employers paid for such private health care to paying for it themselves. There are many other things provided for by employers for which people must pay on retirement—for example, a company motor car or other benefits in kind. I do not think that anyone would suggest that there should be tax relief on such items. On retirement, people simply have to cope on a lower income with some costs that were previously met on their behalf by their employer. I understand the argument, but I do not think that it is a powerful one.

My hon. Friend also said that the tax relief would help the National Health Service, as it would encourage people to make private health care provision and to have certain operations carried out at private hospitals. However, one of the greatest burdens on the NHS is our old people. That is no criticism of them: it is a fact of life that, as one gets older, one is more prone to illness. The growing geriatric population is a great burden on the NHS, and many of the ailments and illnesses from which the old suffer are uninsurable.

In the long run, the NHS always picks up the tab. I do not believe that the relief will provide the help to the NHS for which a case has been made. I agree with other hon. Members that there will be a substantial dead-weight cost —the Treasury also accepts that. On any objective cost-benefit analysis, the relief is not worth pursuing.

I am against eroding the tax base, and I look extremely critically at all proposed new tax reliefs. Soon after the relief was announced—in February, I believe—it did not come as a surprise to me that people wrote to me to ask whether we could have tax relief on private school fees. Others might argue that tax relief should be given to commuters to meet their fares. Except in exceptional and well-justified circumstances, I do not see why one group of taxpayers should be required to subsidise other taxpayers. I should like to see as broad a tax base as possible and tax rates as low as possible.

I hope that the Inland Revenue has looked closely at the regulations. I am certain that it has as it will want to restrict the relief as much as possible. A better way in which to spend the £40 million would have been to give some relief to all tax-paying pensioners by increasing the age allowance. Those tax-paying pensioners who do not take advantage of the relief available as a result of the regulations will be subsidising those who do. No case has been made in favour of that.

10.52 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I want to deal with the position of the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments, which does not concern itself with the merits of instruments. I shall conclude by expressing my views about the merits of the instrument. The Committee, however, would not want to impose an attitude about the merits of the instrument, as the function of our Committee is to deal purely with its technicalities.

As I mentioned on a point of order, we reported the instrument, as the Committee thinks that it needs elucidation. The Committee can report an instrument to the House if it believes that the drafting is unclear. The Committee asked for a memorandum from the Inland Revenue on why regulation 6(1) of the Private Medical Insurance (Disentitlement to Tax Relief and Approved Benefits) Regulations 1989 specified that drugs used in the course of surgical procedures were covered, but did not similarly refer to drugs used in the course of medical procedures.

We felt that by specifying "drugs and dressings" in regulation 6(1)(c) in an attempt to clarify the position, the Department had created yet more confusion. We suggested that the confusion was made worse by the reference to drugs and dressings, which suggests that things used in providing care after an operation—for example, changing bandages—are excluded from cover. It also leaves in doubt the question whether drugs and dressings used in the provision of relevant services, such as the fitting of prosthetics, are also covered.

The Committee takes the view that legislation which goes from this place should be as clear as we can possibly make it. If this case is argued, it will be argued in the courts —an expensive and lengthy procedure which, in the Committee's and certainly my view, should be unnecessary.

It is worth considering why the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments is having to report so many of the instruments to the House. The Government determine the House of Commons' timetable. They were determined to put down the prayer—albeit tabled by the Opposition— for debate today. The Select Committee did not have adequate time to carry out its function.

Its proper function should have enabled the report to be in the Vote Office in advance of this debate so that all hon. Members could see from the Order Paper that the statutory instrument had been reported to the House. The Committee is obliged to do that under the Standing Order by which it was established so that Members can get hold of reports and see for themselves whether they want to take part in the debate. They can then make a judgment about the information. That is our function.

However, the Government are rushing through too many pieces of subordinated legislation, too many statutory instruments, for the procedure to be properly followed. The Select Committee on Statutory Instruments takes a fortnight to carry out its business. We meet every Tuesday at 4.15 pm. We consider an instrument on the first Tuesday and, if we find a flaw—an abuse of power, unusual use of powers or, as in this case, lack of elucidation in the drafting, making it ambiguous—we are obliged to ask the Department for a memorandum.

We generally consider the memorandum the following Tuesday—one week later. Today, we considered the instrument, produced the report and put it in the Vote Office. However, we simply could not do that if there were half a dozen instruments which needed reporting on the same day. Normally, we would have reported this instrument for next Tuesday, in plenty of time to get it in the Vote Office and for Members to consider it.

One difficulty is that the rubric on the Order Paper says that we have not completed our consideration. Some hon. Members may have seen that during the day, when it was perfectly true, who are not here now because they are waiting until next week when they think that the Committee's report will be completed.

The Government, far from making good their claim in 1979 that they would take government off the backs of the people, are in reality imposing more and more legislative burdens every week. If we take as a standard the number of statutory instruments which were produced by the last Labour Government—a basis of comparison that the Government are fond of making—we find that the

[Mr. Bob Cryer]

Government produce more statutory instruments each year than the last Labour Government did. They now produce them at the rate of 2,500 a year.

Such is the Government's predilection for subordinate legislation that, during the past 18 months, they have produced 23 subordinate instruments containing Henry VIII clauses, which empower a Minister to change private legislation. In some of those cases, there was no further reference to the House because they did not have to be debated under the affirmative procedure; nor were they subject to the negative procedure and a prayer, unlike the one that we are dealing with tonight.

The result of all that is that the House does not have adequate time to deal with statutory instruments. Today, we have been rushed; I have had to distribute copies of the memorandum and the instrument to those of my hon. Friends who were interested. That is not good enough. The Select Committee is not being allowed to carry out its functions.

Last week, there was no copy in the Vote Office of the report of the debate upstairs on another statutory instrument—a substitute for a debate on the Floor of the House, due to lack of time. On that occasion, we were debating a statutory instrument which the Committee reported on the same day and which was placed in the Vote Office in the same hasty way as happened today. Such achievements are possible only because of the Committee Clerks' great devotion to duty, making that extra effort for the benefit of the House. Nevertheless, the procedure is still unsatisfactory.

Moreover, we did not have the verbatim report of the Committee's proceedings from *Hansard*, because *Hansard* itself is over-burdened with the Government's legislation. The way in which the Government machinery is spewing out Bills of one sort or another and a massive number of statutory instruments is becoming quite oppressive.

Let me comment briefly on the merits of the instruments. I do so not as Chairman of the Committee, because the Committee does not deal with the merits of an instrument—only with its technicalities—but I am sure that the Committee would share my concern about the pressure on it to deal with instruments and to carry out our duties to Parliament. If the Government reduced the number of statutory instruments that they are producing and honoured their pledge of 1979 to reduce the legislative burden, they would be doing us all a favour.

The Government are producing this legislation hastily, to mount a partial attack on the NHS. No matter how much the Government proclaim their devotion to the NHS, the privatisation of services, the opting-out scheme for NHS hospitals, the indicative drug budgets being imposed on doctors, and these statutory instruments giving tax concessions to people who are already benefiting from the private sector are all part of a general erosion of the NHS. The Government show a strong mistrust of the medical profession, which is not shared by the population at large.

The Government are not prepared to confront the NHS, because they know that it is far too popular. People see it as part of their freedom—a freedom from fear. That was the title of a book writen by Aneurin Bevan, following his experiences. A person's life is enriched if he has no fear of doctors or hospital bills. The Government know that the NHS is deeply etched into the lives of the British people, who are determined to defend it.

In 1948, the consultants threatened strike action against the development of the NHS, but now the consultants, doctors, nurses, porters and the people at large are organising to defend the NHS. That is what the ambulance men and women are doing. They are defending the service by seeking to maintain their standards of payment and training.

The statutory instruments are part of that general attack on the NHS. Even a Conservative Member has criticised this tax relief. This is a politically willed tax relief and has nothing to do with equity, justice or fairness. It is simply part of the Government's attempt to erode the NHS but, like all the other attacks on the NHS, it will fail.

11.4 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Often, there is a kind of logic behind the Treasury's gifts to a reluctant nation. It is not that the Treasury wants to give presents that bear a strong resemblance to Miss Haversham's wedding cake—more a case of the political objectives that they can help to achieve.

The Treasury knows very well that the tax concession before the House will make no difference to the elderly people using the National Health Service. However, it knows too that an increasing number of people who have paid premiums for private health care, or who had those premiums paid for them, discover as they grow elderly and start to suffer from routine conditions that if they can continue to receive cover at all, it will be at a much increased premium.

That is the case not only in respect of private scheme members suffering from perfectly straightforward conditions, but in relation to exclusions. We all know of people who contributed to private health care schemes all their working lives. When they retire or, even worse, contract a chronic illness, they may discover that they are no longer welcomed by private insurers—who regard their schemes as offering protection only for as long as the benefit is on their side.

Because the Treasury understood the political import of that situation, it had to do something to encourage the public at least to maintain their existing payments to private health care schemes. I know of many people who paid into schemes almost from the first day they started work, only to discover that when they began to develop the early symptoms of a major carcinoma, for example, their insurers started making it clear that they would not continue to receive payment for treatment. As that becomes public knowledge, increasing numbers of the elderly, on reaching a point in their lives when they must consider a reduced standard of living in managing on a pension, will decide that one thing that will not benefit them is private health care.

Politically, that situation is extremely damaging for the Government, because even after squeezing the Health Service quite brutally, as they have done over the past 10 years, they still need large numbers of people to contribute to private health schemes, if only because they are part of the political ethos that the Government want to promote. People who suddenly cease to pay premiums when they reach 60 are a political embarrassment—particularly as they are mainly those who have always supported the

Conservative party and who will express their views on the difficulties that they have encountered in no uncertain terms.

The Treasury has come along with a scheme that is not intended to help the NHS. That is its last purpose. Nor is it intended to provide better cover for those who have contributed to private schemes and who are now elderly —because many schemes automatically exclude such members if they develop a major illness. Instead, the regulation is designed to make a political point—to keep up the numbers of those paying for private health care.

That is being done not because the private sector offers the best way of delivering health care, because we know that it is one of the worst and most expensive. It is being done because the Conservative Government want to make a political point, which they will be unable to make if the public cease to contribute to private health care. The Minister can hardly believe that it is in anyone's interest to make such tax relief available unless it is meant as a useful political gesture. It may be exactly that, but that is all that it is.

The average voter will not be taken in. Not even the average Conservative voter who has contributed to private health care for many years will be taken in. Certainly the scheme will do nothing to shift the burden of expense, because the elderly require more health care, and they need it delivered to them by the most direct and efficient route possible. The scheme is designed to maintain the miasma, the impression, the image that somehow, if one contributes to private health care schemes, one will get better treatment in the long run. That is not a fact.

If this is meant to be a tiny thin edge of a devastating wedge, the Minister has made a mistake, as has the Conservative party, for it is largely Conservative voters who have always had the firm belief that contributing to private medicine produces better care. That is manifestly not the case, and in many instances it contributes to worse care.

We have not yet reached the point where, for example, in Marseilles, private doctors are killing one another to take control of private clinics. Who knows, such an ethos may develop here if people get into the cut-throat business of providing private care solely on the basis of profit. We have not yet reached that stage, but what the Government are proposing is designed to convince people that private care is better than the NHS. Frankly, I do not think that the electorate are that stupid.

11.11 pm

Mr. Lilley: Opposition Members have made a number of attacks, some detailed and some general, against the regulations. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said, reasonably, that it was possible to oppose tax reliefs of this kind without being opposed to private medicine. I agree, and I was simply saying that Her Majesty's loyal Opposition, rather than the Liberal party —or the SLD—were opposed to it on that ground.

I recognise that the fiscal purists believe in the absence of all reliefs and therefore oppose the relief that we are discussing. I am not sure that the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed falls into that category. He favours some tax reliefs for certain things of which he approves but not for other things, of which he thinks we approve more. That is why I gather he is against this relief.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) is, and can proudly claim to be, a fiscal purist. His position is consistent and reasonable. I have always been more inclined to believe that, though one should do away with reliefs wherever they are unnecessary and very expensive, there is scope for closely targeted reliefs, and the one before us falls into that category, which is why we accepted it. It also brings the benefits on the public expenditure side that I spelt out.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed also said that these instruments sent out the wrong signals, would somehow demoralise people and would lead them to believe that at some unspecified date at the end of this century or the beginning of the next something terrible would happen to the NHS. That is so much rubbish and bunkum. No such message is drawn from other tax reliefs that exist in the system, and he knows as well as I do that the vast majority of people, including all Conservative Members, are wholly committed to improving the NHS, the national well-being and the national health generally.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that the logic of the system implied that we should limit the relief to those with existing schemes. We are keen and anxious that more people should, if they so desire, take out private medical insurance and thereby relieve the pressure on waiting lists, as I spelt out.

The hon. Gentleman asked, paradoxically, why we excluded alternative medicine from the scheme. He is against the scheme, but he wants to extend it more widely than the facilities available on the NHS. If the NHS does not think that a particular type of treatment is appropriate to be financed from the public purse, it would seem odd that it should be encouraged by this tax relief. It certainly would not, by definition, if we extended the relief in that way, have the effect of relieving any pressure on the NHS as the NHS does not carry out such operations.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the misprints at the bottom of the principal note in the schedule, for which I apologise unreservedly. My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield said that he hoped that the Inland Revenue had "crawled over" the measure to ensure that it was as tightly drawn as possible, and I assure him that it was while doing just that that the Revenue discovered the mistakes. Although it is regrettable that they appeared in the first place, I am glad that they were discovered and that their existence was made known to the House.

Mr. Cryer: The Department has said that it will introduce changes at the earliest opportunity and issue a schedule identifying the errors. Will that be issued to recipients of the instrument free of charge?

Mr. Lilley: I will find out and let the hon. Gentleman know, but I do not think that this is the most expensive piece of paper available—or, indeed, that it is likely to go to people who are unable to afford a second copy.

I hope that it will not embarrass the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) if, for the second time in recent debates, I pay tribute to him and the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments for their work in general and for their work in this regard particularly. He has sought elucidation, and, if it is appropriate, I shall make it available directly to him or to the Committee. He asked whether the correction to the misprints would be issued free. A correction slip will be issued free. I hope that that satisfies him.

[Mr. Lilley]

The hon. Gentleman suggested that the prayer was being debated too soon. I understand that his Committee's timetable is involved, but the statutory instruments came into force three weeks ago, and it was appropriate to debate them as soon as possible. This was the first opportunity that was compatible with an early debate and with the Committee's being able to go through them.

The hon. Gentleman went on—in his private, or political, rather than his Committee capacity—to suggest that the measure represented an attack on the National Health Service, foreshadowing the remarks of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). There is a degree of paranoia among Opposition Members about private medicine and the National Health Service, but it is perfectly possible for the two to exist side by side to the benefit of each. That is the aim of all the measures that the Government have introduced: there will be no conflict.

We are often invited to compare this country—to its disadvantage—with countries such as Germany and France, which allegedly spend a higher proportion of their gross domestic product on health. The main difference, however, is the much greater percentage of GDP that those countries spend on private medical care. In the eyes of the Opposition, that apparently does not undermine the national health services of those countries; nor need a thriving private medical sector undermine this country's National Health Service.

Sir Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): Surely co-operation between private medicine and the National Health Service is necessary to provide patients with better facilities.

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is quite right.

The hon. Member for Bradford, South suggested that the NHS hospital trusts that are proposed as part of our Health Service reforms would in some way undermine the service—that they would be opting out. He knows that that is bunkum. The fact that he has to resort to such allegations suggests that he is trying to feed people's fears rather than that he believes what he is saying.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich said that the private medical insurance schemes ceased to provide effective cover for patients beyond a certain point, and that this measure was meant to redeem that weakness. In fact, she is almost certainly wrong, at least in many cases. I offer no broad defence of all medical insurance schemes. In one respect she is certainly wrong. I cannot see how, as she suggested, this particular tax relief would resolve the problem that she alleges to exist. On that ground her attempt to find some obscure reason for the introduction of this scheme falls.

Mr. Boateng: It is as plain as a pikestaff.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman thinks that it is as plain as a pikestaff. Certainly it is not clear to me how the difficulty alluded to by the hon. Lady is overcome by this tax relief.

Mrs. Dunwoody: When people who have been contributing to private health schemes become elderly many of them suddenly realise that they are not covered for the diseases from which they are suffering. They then cease to contribute because, even if they stayed in the schemes, their premiums would go up and their cover down. On the whole, they are not silly enough to continue that arrangement. This tax relief will result in many people continuing to pay into schemes in the belief that, somehow or other, they will get a tiny amount of cover. But the question of real health care will not be taken care of.

Mr. Lilley: Obviously contracts specify what is covered and what is not. In another place the noble Lord Wigoder, who has some knowledge of BUPA, said in relation to that body:

"There are no additional exclusions of any kind applied to elderly subscribers . . . Overall somewhere between 96 to 97 per cent. of the hospital and surgical claims that we receive are paid in full."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 17 January 1990; Vol. 514, c. 695.]

I quote those words without endorsement. If the hon. Lady wishes to disagree with the noble Lord and show him that he is wrong, she is entitled to take up the matter in correspondence with him.

I conclude by reiterating—*[Interruption.]*—to the obvious support and enthusiasm of my hon. Friends, that these two instruments will implement the measure introduced in the last Finance Act, which had the overwhelming support of this House. It will do so in a sensible way, which will limit that relief to the provision of treatments available on the National Health Service, and, in so doing, make life easier for those who are retiring and wish to continue their private medical insurance, and will relieve pressure on the National Health Service.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 128, Noes 168.

Division No. 58] **[11.23 pm**

AYES

Alton, David	Doran, Frank
Armstrong, Hilary	Duffy, A. E. P.
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Dunnachie, Jimmy
Ashton, Joe	Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Eadie, Alexander
Barron, Kevin	Eastham, Ken
Beckett, Margaret	Fatchett, Derek
Beith, A. J.	Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*	Fisher, Mark
Blair, Tony	Flynn, Paul
Blunkett, David	Foster, Derek
Boateng, Paul	Foulkes, George
Boyes, Roland	Fyfe, Maria
Bradley, Keith	Galloway, George
Bray, Dr Jeremy	Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*	Golding, Mrs Llin
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*	Graham, Thomas
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*	Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Buchan, Norman	Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Callaghan, Jim	Harman, Ms Harriet
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*	Haynes, Frank
Campbell-Savours, D. N.	Henderson, Doug
Canavan, Dennis	Hinchliffe, David
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*	Home Robertson, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*	Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*	Howells, Geraint
Clay, Bob	Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Clelland, David	Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann	Ingram, Adam
Cohen, Harry	Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*	Kennedy, Charles
Corbyn, Jeremy	Kirkwood, Archy
Cryer, Bob	Lamond, James
Cunliffe, Lawrence	Leadbitter, Ted
Dalyell, Tam	Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Darling, Alistair	Loyden, Eddie
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*	McAllion, John
Dewar, Donald	McAvoy, Thomas
Dixon, Don	McCartney, Ian
Dobson, Frank	McFall, John

McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Rogers, Allan
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, *Jimmy*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Battle and
Mr. Robert N. Wareing.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Allison, Rt Hon Michael
Ancram, David
Arnos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'th's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evennett, David
Favell, Tony
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gow, Ian
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hind, Kenneth
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knox, David
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pawsey, James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thurnham, Peter
Twinn, Dr Ian
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Wells, Bowen
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR ADMINISTRATION

Ordered,

That Mr. David Ashby and Mr. Jack Aspinwall be discharged from the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and Mr. William Hague and Mr. Michael Lord be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

PETITIONS

Ambulance Dispute

11.35 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): On this day of action in support of our ambulance drivers and crews throughout the country—action which has focused on Westminster as well—it is with very great pleasure indeed that I present a petition signed by 40,000 people from all parts of the country in support of the case which the ambulance men are putting forward and urging the need for a speedy resolution of the dispute. They say:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your Honourable House urge the Secretary of State for Health to use the good offices of ACAS and agree to arbitration in order to end this unnecessary dispute; and urge the Secretary of State to provide a pay formula for the Ambulance Service similar to that for the other emergency services.

It is my very great pleasure, on behalf of the 40,000 who signed this petition, to present it formally to the House.

To lie upon the Table.

Mobile Home Residents

11.37 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I wish to present a petition on behalf of 515 residents of mobile homes in the Glanford and Scunthorpe constituency. This petition was organised by Mr. J. E. Epps of 40 Main avenue with the help of a Mr. East.

The petition draws the Government's attention to the injustice that mobile home dwellers face with the imposition of the poll tax. Under the old system, the rates took into account the fact that those people who lived in mobile homes paid a site rent which covered such things as the installation of street lamps and the maintenance of the roads on the site. This, of course, is no longer taken into account in the poll tax. People on low incomes, many elderly people who have sold up to retire to mobile homes, many young families who cannot get a council house to rent and cannot afford to buy a home, live on these mobile sites, and this unfair and regressive tax falls very heavily upon them.

I give my wholehearted support to the petition.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that you Honourable House will reconsider the effects and application of this unfair tax.

To lie upon the Table.

Allergies

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

11.38 pm

Sir Jim Spicer (Dorset, West): I claim no special knowledge of the problems which can be, and indeed are, caused by our environment to many people in this country. Allergy symptoms are just one small part of a whole range of modern diseases, such as certain cancers, heart disease, multiple sclerosis and Alzheimer's disease, but there can be little doubt that environmental pollutants such as aluminium, pesticide residues, hydrocarbons and so on are factors in all these diseases.

My interest in allergy and other areas related to it stems entirely from my work within my constituency. I should like to give two specific examples from within that constituency.

The first relates to a young man called William Rudd, who was the son of very good friends of ours and who went to school with my daughters at a very early age. He grew up to be a great sportsman, a good athlete and a good all-rounder and scholar. In his late teens he developed major allergy problems which grew worse as he advanced into his 20s. The only effective treatment that could be provided for him—when I say "effective treatment", I do not mean treatment leading to a cure but treatment to contain the problem—was provided by Dr. Jean Monro.

However, the treatment was private and rather expensive. For many years, William's parents, who were farmers, struggled to raise the money to pay for it. I did my best to help. I am delighted that the local health authority eventually began to contribute to the cost of the treatment. Without the treatment, William's life would have been unbearable. Even with it, the outcome was that in his early 30s, having suffered from myalgic encephalomyelitis and total allergy for more than nine years, he took his own life. He had lived in a sterile environment, virtually on his own, throughout the nine years, and I think the strain and the stress became unbearable.

I turn to a happier history, again of a constituent, Miss Cathy Bailey. Until September 1987, she was teaching full time in Dorchester. Then she became ill. After nine months of visits to doctors and specialists, during which time she deteriorated in every way, she saw Dr. Jean Monro, who diagnosed ME, with multi-food and chemical sensitivities as well.

I first met Cathy in October 1988. By then, she was a truly pitiful sight. She weighed just under five stone, was incapable of working and was in total decline. Once again, I am delighted that West Dorset health authority turned up trumps and helped with the funding of her treatment. Without that help, she would not have been able to continue the treatment.

Cathy came to see me just two weeks ago. I have never seen such a startling transformation. Her weight is up to eight stone and she is back at work, although only part time. Without the support and understanding of West Dorset health authority, of our director of community medicine, who saw Cathy and understood what the problem was and how it should be treated, of Dorset education authority, which gave her full support, and of her own headmaster and her school, who carried her willingly and happily during the period of illness, and

above all, without the treatment that she was given, I am convinced that by now she would have been a total invalid or dead.

I will let my hon. Friend the Minister have a note of Cathy's history because it relates clearly and concisely, with dates, not only the tremendous help and support which she was given by some people in the medical profession, but also the scepticism that she encountered from others in the profession, who said, "There's nothing wrong with you; go away have a long walk, take more exercise and you'll be fine," or "Go to a psychiatrist who will sort you out, because it's all in your mind."

The difference in the attitude of the medical profession in Cathy's case is mirrored throughout the country. We all know that a large number within the medical profession will not accept that ME or allergy is an illness which requires careful and specialised treatment.

I am delighted that, in west Dorset, there are many dedicated people. As a result of their experience of this new and largely unknown problem, a chair in environmental medicine has been established at the Robens Institute at the University of Surrey. Professor William Rae has been appointed to the chair, and he plans to undertake a wide range of investigations into this field. A former colleague of ours in the House, the Earl of Ancram, is the president of the Environmental Medicine Foundation, and a constituent of mine, Lady Colfox, is its chairman.

In a few short minutes, it is not possible to do more than to touch upon the many and varied problems that arise from these conditions, but I know that almost every hon. Member has constituency experience of those problems. Early-day motion 288, tabled by my hon. Friends and me, bears witness to that fact: within two or three weeks it had been signed by 184 hon. Members.

I ask my hon. Friend and her Department to undertake to have a long hard look at this subject and in particular to study, and, it is to be hoped, give support—both physical and financial—to the work of the Environmental Medicine Foundation, which is being so ably led by Professor Rae.

11.46 pm

The Minister for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): We are all indebted to my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, West (Sir J. Spicer) for raising this important subject. It is clear from the examples that he gave and from his history of involvement in the Environmental Medicine Foundation that my hon. Friend has taken responsibility for championing the cause of those suffering from such conditions and for drawing their problems to the attention of the House.

In recent years many people have become interested in allergies. Such concerns are increasingly shared by doctors as well as by those people who suffer from allergies of various kinds. We all live in an increasingly complex environment in which there are many substances that may affect us as we go about our everyday life.

Many people—the precise number is unknown, but it may be 10 per cent. of the population—suffer from some kind of allergy. Of course, one problem is that the label "allergy" is now attached to a number of apparently unrelated symptoms and problems of varying degrees of seriousness. Some of those with a so-called allergy may be reacting to a period of stress or some kind of emotional problem. Such people may be difficult to treat or manage. Others are demonstrably allergic to a variety of substances. A variety of treatments can be offered, including avoidance of exposure to that substance or substances and treatment aimed at producing symptomatic relief.

It is a measure of the increasing importance that the medical profession gives to allergy that clinical immunology and allergy has now been accepted as a separate speciality. My hon. Friend referred to the difficulty of getting sufficient medical recognition for the subject, but I hope that he will agree that there has been progress. The Royal College of Physicians recommended that the speciality should be recognised in 1987 and subsequently the joint committee on higher medical training gave its approval. Before that time it was incorporated under the heading of general medicine, and lost in a variety of other subjects. Of course, this did not mean that there was no NHS treatment for allergy. Then, as now, there were a number of hospital consultants who took a special interest in the subject.

Treatment for allergies is widely available under the NHS. Less serious cases, which are perhaps in the majority —for example, people with one of the milder allergic reactions to a particular kind of food such as shellfish or who suffer from hay fever—are treated satisfactorily by their general practitioners or even by over-the-counter remedies. Where symptoms are more serious or more prolonged, a GP may refer the patient to a hospital consultant if that is considered to be necessary.

I am happy to say that there are about 45 specialist NHS clinics located in various places around the country. Such clinics are not the only ones equipped to investigate the cause of allergic reaction in individual cases, and recommend treatments. Many other specialists outside these clinics take an interest in various kinds of treatment for allergies, and provide it under the NHS. These will include chest specialists. Allergy is so important for their work that training in allergy is a mandatory part of their postgraduate training. The postgraduate training of dermatologists, paediatricians, ear, nose and throat surgeons and gastro-enterologists also includes a component of study of allergy and they can and do provide treatment.

I recognise the points made by my hon. Friend and that there are times when patients feel that they have not been given the consideration and respect that their circumstances require. However, we are continuing to see further progress in the significance and priority that is given to allergy.

Following the recognition of allergy as a specialty, the position has continued to improve. The joint planning advisory committee, which advises the Department of Health on medical manpower, last looked at the position of senior registrars in 1988. At that time it recommended that the number of senior registrars in clinical immunology and allergy should double, from five to 10. It is due to review the position again in 1991. I know that my hon. Friend will regard that with close interest.

Only yesterday the Department issued an executive letter on rehabilitation and clinical immunology and allergy informing health authorities that the specialties of rehabilitation and clinical immunology and allergy will be recognised as separate clinical specialties for manpower purposes. Employing health authorities will therefore need to change the designation on the contracts of those doctors currently in post practising in those specialties. It also

[Mrs. Virginia Bottomley]

reminded health authorities that in 1987 the Royal College of Physicians recommended that each district should have a physician in immunology and allergy either in a system-based specialty such as thoracic medicines or, for example, a general physician with a special interest.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): Will my hon. Friend state clearly whether those provisions will lead to increased funding for the additional posts? She mentioned funding a moment ago.

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend will be well aware that there has been a substantial increase in resources for the Health Service in recent years. The specific allocation of resources is, of course, a matter for the district health authorities in conjunction and discussion with the regional health authorities. The requirement from the Department that manpower is more explicitly defined and the greater recognition of the specialty will mean that those planning service provisions will inevitably have the subject drawn to their attention more effectively.

Under our new proposals, it is for the district health authorities to plan to meet the health needs of those resident in their population and it may well be that individuals will wish to take up with their district health authority the question of what arrangements it has made and what contracts it has placed for the special treatment of patients with allergic problems. From 30 September 1990 health authorities will need to have amended the contracts of doctors in post practising in clinical immunology and allergy and to record them separately which will mean that there is greater clarity about the availability of those with the skills to undertake this work.

There are some National Health Service clinics with long waiting times before a first appointment is given. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, West is well aware of the problem. Sometimes the general practitioner may consider that the treatment available does not meet a particular patient's needs. In such cases, it is always possible for the GP to refer to another consultant elsewhere. If a hospital consultant takes the view that in his clinical opinion the facilities available are not suitable for a patient, it is always open to him to ask the responsible health authority if it will agree to finance treatment for an NHS patient in a suitable private facility. This is the case in my hon. Friend's example. The health authority's response to such a request will depend on its assessment of priorities within the available resources. Where the treatments are given in a private facility there is often the clear requirement that they should have been subjected to rigorous scientific evaluation.

In today's modern world, there is a wide variety of allergy. Hay fever is an allergic reaction to pollen grasses and to trees such as the silver birch. Many people have been worried that oil seed rape—noticeable because of its bright yellow colouring—has increased the severity of their hay fever. Studies are currently being undertaken to see whether that is the case. Others are worried that they are allergic to various kinds of food or to the additives used in the preparation of food. Some people are convinced, for example, that children's behaviour and hyperactivity may be associated with additives and other dietary factors. People who think that they or their children are affected may wish to purchase foods which are additive free or do not contain additives which create a problem.

To enable those who wish or need to avoid certain additives to do so, all additives, with the exception of flavourings, must be specifically identified by name or serial number on the ingredients list of pre-packaged foods. The E prefix used with the serial number means that it is one of those permitted for use throughout the EEC.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, West drew attention to environmental medicine and Professor Rea at the University of Surrey at Guildford. As a Member of Parliament with a neighbouring constituency to Guildford, I am well aware of the work of the Robens Institute. On many occasions it has identified particular areas of concern and has pioneered work on the subjects on which it has focused attention. The work of the Robens Institute covers several important areas and the new initiative, to which my hon. Friend drew attention, is arousing interest.

The advance of medical science in this country depends on the traditions of publication and scrutiny by the scientific community. I look forward to seeing the publication of the works of Professor Rea and others working with him. The Department of Health would naturally be prepared to consider the implications of any new ideas of confirmed effectiveness and validity for the development of patient care in the NHS, as it would the results of any other relevant work.

My hon. Friend will be aware that the Medical Research Council is the main agency for the disbursement of public funds on medical research. I was previously a member of the Medical Research Council and I cannot speak too highly of its ability to scrutinise and allocate resources. It will be up to the EMF to apply to the MRC for support of its work.

In August we wrote to the chairman of the EMF concerning the specialist chemical analyses required for the work of the EMF. We explained that facilities for the analysis of blood for very low concentrations of chemicals, including pesticides, are available in the United Kingdom at the UK Atomic Energy Authority establishment at Harwell at commercial rates. I hope that it will be possible to follow that up.

Many people, on the basis of their experience or that of a friend or relative, believe strongly that environmental medicine, in the sense used by the foundation, can help in the treatment of various conditions. The two examples that my hon. Friend gave from his constituency experience make it clear how poignant some cases are and how desperate the sufferers and their families are for help.

It is important that treatments are subject to careful scientific scrutiny and analysis. If fresh insights from any form of practice are to show their potential, they must be submitted to the highest possible standards of assessment and verification. It is scientific, not political or managerial, judgment which is at issue. The key to progress on this initiative must be the reaction of the medical and scientific community to careful evaluation of the work of the EMF. The development of medicine and science in this country has depended on this process. Those with new ideas have to subject them to the rigorous scientific scrutiny of their peers, followed by independent confirmation, before they are put forward for wider acceptance. I am sure that that continues to be the right way forward.

I pay tribute again to my hon. Friend. He has raised a subject of great importance to the House. I should also like to thank my hon. Friends the Members for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) and for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith), who are also present. They have made clear their interest in the subject and in the progress in the work that has been undertaken. I know that individual constituency cases have been brought to my hon. Friend's attention for which assistance and relief have been provided.

Allergies can be enormously distressing to the patients suffering from them and to their families. We must carefully monitor developments in medical science which move us towards the successful treatment of those distressing conditions. I shall certainly continue to watch carefully the work undertaken, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, West and I will have further discussions on this subject.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 31 January 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON REGIONAL TRANSPORT (PENALTY FARES) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Object.

To be read a Second time tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker: Does the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) intend to object to all the private Bills?

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: I do.

LONDON UNDERGROUND BILL

MIDLAND METRO BILL

SOUTH YORKSHIRE LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT (No. 2) BILL

Orders for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time tomorrow.

BRITISH RAILWAYS BILL *(By Order)*

Order for consideration, as amended, read.

To be considered tomorrow.

KING'S CROSS RAILWAYS BILL

Motion made,

That, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order 121 (Quorum of committee on opposed bill), leave be given for the Committee on the King's Cross Railways Bill to proceed with a quorum of two.—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered on Thursday 8 February at Seven o'clock.

BRITISH RAILWAYS ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

(By Order)

Order for consideration read.

To be considered tomorrow.

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

National Health Service

1. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much was spent per head of the population in Scotland on Health Service care in 1989; and what was the figure for 1979.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): In 1979 Health Service expenditure in Scotland was £205 per person. In 1989 it was £552 per person. That is a rise of 34 per cent. in real spending power.

Mr. Cran: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that by any objective examination of the facts, the Scottish Health Service is unquestionably second to none? That is illustrated by the fact that my father is receiving quite outstanding care at the Royal Infirmary in Aberdeen and the service at that hospital is open to anyone in that area. It is also shown in the quite astonishing building programme that has occurred since 1979 under this Government during which time there have been 54 major hospital building programmes with another 32 in train. If that is not enough, there has been a 32 per cent. increase in qualified nursing staff to look after the additional patients which the expansion has occasioned. Does not my right hon. and learned Friend agree—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. That question is far too long.

Mr. Rifkind: While the National Health Service continues to have certain difficulties, it is right to draw attention to what has been achieved over the years. In Scotland, the number of in-patients has increased by more than 20 per cent. over the past 10 years while the number of out-patients has increased by 12 per cent. and the number of day cases treated by hospitals has increased by no less than 119 per cent. It is right that that side of the story should be emphasised.

Mr. Ernie Ross: Has the Secretary of State had time to study the press release issued by his junior Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, about the ambulance dispute yesterday in which the Under-Secretary claimed that lives are put at risk? Given the amount of money that the Government are trying to claim that they have spent, exactly whose lives are put at risk? What is the Secretary of State doing about that?

Mr. Rifkind: The concern to which the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) drew attention was that if there is not a proper response to 999 calls, and if ambulance officers do not accept the advice of their own unions in dealing with emergency cases, sadly there can be a risk to human life. I am sure that the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) would join me in urging ambulance workers to respond to emergency calls in a proper and responsible fashion.

Mr. Sillars: Is not the pertinent measure the expenditure in relation to need at the present time? If that is the case and if the Secretary of State is so brilliant, why has the Greater Glasgow health board suffered a £12

million cut in its budget this year and faces a £16 million cut in its budget next year? Again if the Secretary of State is so brilliant, why have we managed to have a Health Service in which there are demoralised nurses, doctors, ambulance men and ancillary workers and a public who do not believe that the Health Service is any safer in the hands of the lady in Downing street than in the hands of the devil himself?

Mr. Rifkind: I do not accept for a moment the figures that the hon. Gentleman has been gratuitously introducing into the House. However, he may like to reflect on the fact that in his constituency, the health board in the city of Glasgow is, and continues to be, the best funded health board in the United Kingdom. Had the hon. Gentleman wanted to be fair, he might have prefaced his remarks by at least recognising and welcoming that point.

Sir Hector Monro: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that we cannot really judge patient care in terms of statistics? It must be true that we have far more doctors, nurses and specialist care in Scotland than were available in 1979. Does he agree that the Health Service is safe in our hands and will be developed effectively in years to come?

Mr. Rifkind: I do not question for a moment that there are still many things that the Health Service in Scotland would like to do but is unable to do even with the levels of funding that it has achieved. That goes without saying. The Health Service has continually been improving ever since it began in 1947. It is unfair that those who quite understandably call for even more improvements do not recognise the dramatic improvements that have taken place over the past 40 years or, indeed, over the past 10 years. Any fair debate on this subject should recognise that, as well as call for further improvements in the Health Service.

Mr. Wilson: How many scarce resources belonging to the National Health Service in Scotland have now been used up in trying to defeat the ambulance men and women and in forcing them to give up their rightful claims by starving them into submission? Would the Secretary of State care to contemplate the newspaper headline that I am showing him as an acceptable face of the ambulance dispute? No matter how the soldiers and police try to perform the duties that have been thrust upon them, they are simply not able to do so because they lack the necessary equipment and training. Will the Secretary of State confirm that twice as much money has been spent on trying to defeat the ambulance men in Scotland, and elsewhere in the United Kingdom as would be required to settle their pay claim in full and give them the just settlement that every humane man, woman and child in Scotland wishes them to obtain?

Mr. Rifkind: No one questions for a moment that the police cannot provide the same quality of service as the ambulance officers. If that is a matter of concern to the hon. Gentleman, I hope that he will join me in calling on ambulance officers to return to normal work. The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that there are recognised negotiating structures. He knows also that the offer that has been made to ambulance officers is compatible with what the vast majority of other people who work in the National Health Service have already accepted. Therefore, he must appreciate that we must be fair to the National Health Service as a whole. To give to ambulance workers, whose income has increased substantially over the past few years——

Mr. Wilson: Rubbish.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman says, "Rubbish." He should remember that an ambulance officer's income in 1979 was less than £3,000. If ambulance workers accept the offer that has been made, the figure will be more than £11,000. Even taking inflation into account, that is a major increase.

By all means let these matters continue to be discussed and negotiated, but if the hon. Gentleman has patients' interests at heart, as I am sure that he has, he should urge ambulance workers to return to normal work so that the public should not suffer because ambulance workers have a pay disagreement with their employers.

Competitive Tendering

2. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has had regarding competitive tendering in the National Health Service in Scotland.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): Health boards have reported savings of £66 million, which have been used to recruit additional medical staff and improve facilities for the young, the elderly, the disabled and the mentally handicapped.

Mr. Hogg: The Minister's answer is consistent with previous answers. Is he aware that, of the contracts that have been awarded in the Greater Glasgow health board area, three companies—Initial Health Services, Mediguard and Hospital Hygiene Services—figure very strongly? Is the Minister further aware that those companies have a dubious record and have either withdrawn from or been sacked in Bradford, West Leeds, Northampton, Merton and Sutton, North Warwickshire, Norwich, Nottingham, Pontefract, South Tees, York, East Birmingham, Manchester, Bromley, Canterbury, Gateshead and Oxfordshire? Why must we put up with the same in the Greater Glasgow health board? How much money must be spent on redundancy payments for real Health Service staff who have lost their jobs because of those private companies?

Mr. Forsyth: In March last year, the saving available to improve patient care for the Health Service in Scotland as a result of competitive tendering was £5·5 million. The figure today is £66 million. The hon. Gentleman asked about redundancy payments. To date these amount to £5·2 million, compared with £66 million. Substantial additional resources are available for patient care.

The hon. Gentleman complains about particular companies. Three quarters of both the contracts and the savings have been obtained, not by private contractors, but the in-house work force carrying out the same task in a different way. He also complained about the quality of services. I am sure that he will have seen the parliamentary answer that I gave the other day. An independent survey of standards of provision where private contractors have been brought in showed that the standards were at least as good as, if not better than, those achieved by the in-house work force.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Does my hon. Friend agree that if Opposition Members were successful in campaigning against competitive tendering they would deprive patients of substantial additional resources for patient care? Will he confirm that every health board in Scotland has made savings and that in Greater Glasgow many extra staff have been made available? For example, is he aware that 74 extra staff for mental illness and handicap have been employed as a direct result of those savings?

Mr. Forsyth: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Incidentally, I congratulate him on sporting the blue rose of Eastwood. He is right to draw attention to the substantial improvements in staffing and facilities in Greater Glasgow as a result of the competitive tendering programme. The public are entitled to ask why Opposition Members do everything possible to frustrate the Greater Glasgow health board in pursuing a policy that produces real, tangible and substantial benefits for patients, particularly those with mental handicap or illness.

Mr. Dewar: Is it not sad that staff of the health boards who have spent years in the service of the NHS have to give up hard-earned terms and conditions in order to save their jobs? Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the imposition of competitive tendering in areas that touch the core of the Health Service—such as diagnostic services, laboratories and radiography—is damaging? Does not the Minister realise that there is no public support for policies that threaten to turn those services into opportunities for private profit? In view of the contrived changes in the rules on VAT and redundancy, is he satisfied that competition has not been rigged?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman makes several points. His first was about people giving up hard-earned terms and conditions. For contracts that have been won in-house—that is the majority; three quarters—the terms and conditions remain the same. They are Whitley terms and conditions. However, restrictive practices and the business of paying double time when it is not necessary have ended. That is how savings have been made. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to complain about the way in which savings have been made, he should address his remarks to the trade union officials who co-operated in the process in the interests of the Health Service and of obtaining the best deal for the patients.

The hon. Gentleman wrote about rigging to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, who answered his question fully. I am surprised that he has raised the matter again. VAT is payable only where the cost of the outside contractor, inclusive of VAT, is less than the cost of the in-house service.

Mr. Speaker: We are making slow progress this afternoon. Briefer supplementary questions may receive briefer answers.

Public Expenditure

3. **Sir Nicholas Fairbairn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the level of public expenditure per head in Scotland of programmes for which he is responsible.

Mr. Rifkind: Scottish Office expenditure for the current year will be £1,771 for every man, woman and child. This will rise to £2,047 in 1992.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: Will my right hon. and learned Friend lose no opportunity to remind the people who live in Scotland, of whatever race, that they benefit to a greater extent than anyone else in the United Kingdom in all programmes of expenditure and that if they were to consider anything as foolish as a Socialist Government, a convention, an assembly or independence, they would be deprived of the level of living that we uniquely enjoy in western Europe.

Mr. Rifkind: I very much agree with the sentiments behind my hon. and learned Friend's question. However, he is not entirely correct, because the level of expenditure in Northern Ireland is higher than that in Scotland. My hon. and learned Friend is certainly correct that public expenditure in Scotland is considerably higher per capita than that in England and Wales, which is a benefit which Scotland derives from the present constitutional arrangements.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Does the Secretary of State recall that I wrote to him a couple of weeks ago to complain bitterly that while England and Wales has a substantial programme of cochlear implants, which are vital for deaf people, no announcement has been made in Scotland and we have no such programme of spending? When will the right hon. and learned Gentleman reply positively and make that money available to the health boards in Scotland so that deaf people in Scotland can benefit substantially?

Mr. Rifkind: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman has not scrutinised his newspapers carefully because we made a comparable announcement that similar provisions are to be introduced in Scotland and we are working on the details at present.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that such expenditure programmes could not possibly be sustained in the event of any fraudulent proposals being brought forward for a Scottish Assembly in Edinburgh? Does he further agree that we could not enjoy the same number of Members of Parliament and that we certainly could not expect English Members of Parliament to support such programmes?

Mr. Rifkind: If a Scottish assembly were responsible for the matters that are currently the responsibility of the Scottish Office, and if it were required to raise funds for those matters from within Scotland, the present level of spending on education, health, housing and other measures could be maintained only by a dramatic increase in income tax which the people of Scotland, alone in the United Kingdom, would be required to pay.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Can the Secretary of State say whether a system of devolution in Scotland is likely to bring about increased public expenditure per capita?

Mr. Rifkind: It would depend on the spending policies of such a Scottish assembly as might be created. The point that I have just been making is that even if a Scottish assembly did not wish to increase expenditure, but simply to maintain the present level of expenditure from the taxes raised in Scotland, it would have to level additional income tax that would not be paid by people elsewhere in Britain. That is why such proposals would be very much against the interests of the Scottish economy, employment in Scotland and the general welfare of the people of Scotland.

Mr. Thurnham: Will my right hon. and learned Friend bear in mind the need to involve the private sector as much as possible in public expenditure programmes? Scottish civil engineers have a high reputation abroad, but need to have experience at home if they are to make the most of the worldwide opportunities.

Mr. Rifkind: That is the case, and that is why I am delighted that the recent surveys by the Fraser of Allander Institute and the Confederation of British Industry in Scotland have suggested that the Scottish economy will do even better than that of the rest of the United Kingdom over the next few years. They pointed particularly to manufacturing industry and exports. It is encouraging that only yesterday a prediction of increased exports from Scotland was made by Scotland's business men. I am sure that the whole House will be delighted to welcome that.

Councillors (Allowances)

4. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received about the Government's plans to change the system of allowances for councillors in Scotland.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): A number of representations have been received. The Government have agreed to defer the introduction of the new scheme for up to three months to allow the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities time to produce specific alternative proposals.

Mr. Campbell: Is the Minister aware that the Government's initial proposals have united councillors of all parties, and of none, in Scotland in opposition? Does he accept that no one becomes a councillor in Scotland because he or she wants to profit from the attendance allowance? Is he aware that the sum of £10, which was fixed in 1974, should be not less than £40 at today's prices? In the settlement that the Government will eventually reach, will he undertake to ensure that proper account is taken of the commitment and responsibilities of councillors throughout the length and breath of Scotland?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's last point is yes, but I must stress that even under the consultative proposals that have been put forward, the sums available to councillors in Scotland would have been at least 80 per cent. more than those for councillors south of the border and up to 125 per cent. more for district councillors. Strong representations were made about distribution and we have recognised that some authorities have a much larger workload and larger electorates than others. We were conscious of those facts and responded to COSLA's recommendations to defer those matters. We look to COSLA to come back to us with what we hope will be a much fairer and more consistent approach. I should stress that the sums available to councillors next year will be no less than those available this year—the sum for Britain as a whole being increased from £37 million to £42 million.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: Will the Minister bear in mind that the vast majority of councillors do the job voluntarily? Often their home is inundated with people with serious problems and the family cannot enjoy a decent meal at night because of the phone calls that have to be attended to immediately. This being the case, should not there be decent compensation for councillors who do a hard-working job?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I stress that I have been a councillor, so I am acutely conscious of the point that the hon. Gentleman has made. Council membership is based on the principle of voluntary public service and is not regarded as a salaried appointment. However, it is in the public interest that councillors should not suffer financial loss because of the public service that they perform.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend accept that many people believe that local government, in Scotland and elsewhere, was better when councillors such as myself were unpaid volunteers, rather than, as under the present system, some at least being semi-salaried?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I am aware of the activities of my hon. Friend, but I stress that chairmen and convenors sometimes have to give almost full-time service and the special responsibility allowance is appropriate in their cases, and will be forthcoming.

Employment Training

5. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received regarding the performance of the employment training scheme in Scotland.

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Mr. Ian Lang): Since September 1988 when employment training first started in Scotland, my right hon. and learned Friend has received 190 representations about the operation of employment training in Scotland, and 66 were parliamentary questions.

Mr. Wallace: The Minister will be aware that, under the employment training regulations, it is possible to give to single parents an allowance for child care while they are in training. How does he explain the selective approach to my constituents who are the wives of fishermen and who, when their husbands are at sea, are to all intents and purposes single-parent mothers and who wish to undertake training? Will the new local enterprise companies that are to be set up in Scotland and will have a training remit have the flexibility to allow payment to be made to such wives?

Mr. Lang: It is part of our purpose that local enterprise companies should have as much flexibility as possible in the development and administration of training schemes. That is one of the important reasons why we are setting them up. At the same time, the existing arrangements take account of problems in different parts of the country. The hon. Gentleman will know that in the administration of employment training in Orkney and Shetland, consideration is being given to awarding skill shortage status to that area, which will be of advantage to it.

Mr. Worthington: Is the Minister aware of the report that has just been published by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations showing what the consequences for community care were of the transition from the community programme to the disastrous employment training scheme? That report has shown that over £17 million has been lost to community care, and that 50 per cent. of the care for the elderly and 62 per cent. of the care

for the disabled have been lost. The voluntary organisations warned the Minister that this would happen, but he could not have cared less. Will he now show some regret for the distress caused by the withdrawal of these services?

Mr. Lang: One of the reasons for the loss of places was the lack of co-operation—indeed, the positive hostility—of many authorities. The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations is heavily funded by the Government and it does a good job. However, it is important that it should realise that employment training is not another form of social care—which is already fully provided—but essentially an employment training scheme to help unemployed people into jobs. In that, it is doing much better than the community programme did, as it is now helping 59 per cent. of leavers into jobs or further training and education, compared with 42 per cent. on the community programme. We should encourage that trend.

Mr. Lester: When my hon. Friend has the opportunity to make representations to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, will he draw his attention to the following anomaly? Under the employment training scheme we quite properly support single mothers by allowing them to claim the costs of child care, but when they are trained and seeking a job there is no provision for looking after their children—a heavy premium for anyone seeking employment. Might there be an opportunity in the next Budget to do something about that?

Mr. Lang: I understand that there are certain advantages at salaries of up to £8,500 a year, but I shall pass on my hon. Friend's comments to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. My hon. Friend would not expect me to comment on what might be in the Budget.

Local Government Finance

6. **Sir David Steel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the level of the poll tax for 1990-91.

Mr. Rifkind: There is a wide variation in community charge levels. Some authorities have reduced the community charge, while others have made large increases.

Sir David Steel: Do not the figures released yesterday show an average increase over Scotland of 9·1 per cent., with many authorities showing increases of more than 15 per cent? In the light of that, how will the Government maintain the fiction to pensioners, ambulance men and others that the rise in the cost of living is 6·5 per cent?

Mr. Rifkind: I noticed that the right hon. Gentleman did not mention that the two district councils in his constituency have reduced the community charge, or that the regional council has had a zero increase—perhaps it should have reduced its charge, too, given the grantt that it received. The increases in the community charge were less than the local authorities were predicting, and would have been much less if Labour-controlled authorities had not substantially increased the community charge by going for higher spending. It has been significant that a number of Labour local authorities receiving large increases in grant have used the money to increase spending rather than to reduce the charge.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: Leaving aside the concept of averages or of the middle ground which is so favoured by the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel)—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We do not expect this at Scottish questions.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: Leaving aside the average concept or the middle ground so favoured by the right hon. Gentleman, may I ask my right hon. and learned Friend to lose no occasion to remind the people of Scotland and the people of England that if they want to have the money that they earn spent by Socialist authorities, they should vote Socialist? If they do not want that, they should vote Conservative.

Mr. Rifkind: There is no doubt that Labour authorities appear incapable of maintaining services without huge increases in local taxation, while non-Socialist authorities appear more able to maintain the same level of services by means of better management and better value for money. The public clearly and rightly take that factor into account.

Mr. Canavan: How can the Secretary of State possibly justify the Tory Government imposing this crippling tax system on the people of Scotland? In some areas the full poll tax will be more than £400, and even on maximum rebate people who depend on social security benefits and students who possibly have no grant will be expected to find more than £100 for the poll tax. Is it any wonder that at least half a million people throughout Scotland are refusing to pay the tax, or that many will continue their resistance until the Government come to their senses and abolish this iniquitous tax?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman's rather unimpressive sympathy for people on low incomes would be slightly more persuasive if he, with a substantial income, were prepared to pay the tax that Parliament expects his constituents to pay. With his large income, the hon. Gentleman does not set an example of a sense of social responsibility and he cannot expect the House to treat his views with other than contempt.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. An hon. Member used the word "cheat". Is not that unparliamentary?

Mr. Speaker: I did not hear it, nor did I hear what the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) was shouting a little earlier. We really ought to get on.

Enterprise and New Towns (Scotland) Bill

7. **Mr. Andy Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has had from the business community in Scotland about the Enterprise and New Towns (Scotland) Bill.

Mr. Lang: The business community in Scotland has warmly welcomed the Enterprise and New Towns (Scotland) Bill and is enthusiastically participating in the groups bidding to become local enterprise companies throughout Scotland.

Mr. Andy Stewart: My hon. Friend's reply confirms the impression I got last weekend when I visited Scotland for a family wedding, which was most enjoyable, and I saw for

myself the economic success created by this Conservative Government. Does not my hon. Friend agree that Scottish Enterprise will build on this development?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is because of the success of the Scottish economy in recent years that we are able to contemplate Scottish Enterprise, and it is because of the needs of the years ahead that we are now bringing it forward, combining the training role of the Training Agency with the economic development role of the Scottish Development Agency, and devolving it to local companies around Scotland. The enthusiastic involvement of the business community—we have now received 22 bids from groups of business men seeking to form local consortia—is very encouraging for the future of the Scottish economy.

Mrs. Fyfe: How is the Minister responding to the views expressed by employment training trainees who have experienced grossly inadequate and irrelevant training schemes and schemes in which they have been treated as cheap labour?

Mr. Lang: We always investigate such complaints. The hon. Lady will know that we have investigated such allegations as have come to our notice. The vast majority of such allegations have turned out to be ill founded, but where any minor deficiencies are discovered they will be dealt with in the appropriate way.

Scottish Development Agency

8. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the total expenditure by the Scottish Development Agency since May 1979.

Mr. Lang: Since May 1979 the Scottish Development Agency has spent a total of £1,291 million.

Mr. Knox: Can my hon. Friend say how much, on average, the agency has spent each year since the present Government came into office, and how that compares with the average amount spent under the previous Government each year?

Mr. Lang: Perhaps I can best illustrate the figures by telling my hon. Friend that the budget for next year, at £180 million, is the largest that the agency has ever had —15 per cent. higher in real terms than in the last year of the last Labour Government.

Mr. McKelvey: The Minister will be aware that precious little of that money ever went to Kilmarnock. For that matter, I should like to know how much went towards improving the environment. Will the Minister undertake, on his next journey up north, to put on his hiking boots and march from Tummel, through Loch Rannoch, by Lochaber? He can go along heather tracks with heaven in their wiles. Some of us might think that there was a braggart in his step amidst all that beauty. Will he stop and reconsider the fact that if he does not give local authorities enough money to neutralise the billions of tons of rubbish and poison being poured into our coastal waters, neither he nor any of us, will ever
"smell the tangle o' the Isles".

Mr. Lang: I know that this is the season of Burns—we have just had the Kilmarnock edition. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the importance of environmental renewal. He is absolutely right. This year the agency is spending about £54 million on environmental renewal projects. A total of 2,500 land renewal projects have been carried out in the last decade.

Inner Cities

9. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his policies for tackling the poverty in inner cities.

Mr. Rifkind: The Government have launched a major initiative to deal with deprivation in Scotland's peripheral housing schemes, working with local people, the private sector and other public bodies. Good progress is being made.

Mr Wray: When I look at the statistics and remember that the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys has not done a survey of child poverty since 1981, I fail to understand that reply. The present indicators, which are available on the data base of the statistical section of the Library, show that Glasgow has the highest average rate of poverty in the nation. I should like to know what the Minister, having frozen child benefit, imposed the poll tax and made cuts in other benefits, intends to do about it.

Mr. Rifkind: No one doubts that for many years there have been serious problems of poverty in certain areas of Glasgow. The hon. Gentleman should acknowledge that the renaissance that Glasgow is widely recognised to have enjoyed over the last 10 years has been for the benefit of all the people of Glasgow, including the hon. Gentleman's constituents. He should pay tribute to that development.

Sir Hector Monro: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the urban aid programme has been a great success not only in the major and inner cities but in country towns such as Dumfries? Will he do all that he can to encourage urban aid, towards improving not only the quality of housing, but the quality of life in those areas?

Mr. Rifkind: Yes. We have provided for a massive increase in the urban programme this year and for a further major increase next year. The programme is a successful way of reaching those pockets of poverty that still exist in many of our towns and communities. Therefore, it is right to concentrate through the urban programme the kind of support that can help to transform people's lives, their housing and employment opportunities, and the quality of life that they quite properly wish to enjoy.

Local Government Finance

10. **Mr. Douglas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the effect of changes in rebates for poll tax recently announced on the level of the poll tax in 1990-91.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Changes that have been made to the community charge, including the transitional relief scheme and the widening of the exemption for people who are severely mentally impaired, should have had virtually no effect on the community charge levels determined by local authorities for 1990-91.

Mr. Douglas: No matter how much the Minister and the Government tinker with this charge—the poll tax—it represents an onerous and unfair burden on the poorer

sections of the population. Those of us who seek to stand by those people, by withholding our payments, represent a very respectable tradition in Scottish democracy. We are in the season of Burns and I should like to paraphrase the great man. I put to the Government: "They'd break our backs for Maggie's tax, Such a parcel of rogues in a nation." The Government's policy will destroy the Union because the people of Scotland will not accept this unfair, unjust and undemocratic tax for which they did not vote.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Robert Burns was an excise man and knew all about tax.

Mr. Douglas *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must contain himself. *[Interruption.]* The Minister was quite in order in what he said.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman complains about the warrant sales system. I stress to the House that when the reform of the law—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) must not barrack the Minister.

Mr. Douglas *rose*——

Mr. Speaker Order. The hon. Gentleman must sit down.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: When the law reforming warrant sales went through the House in the last Parliament, neither the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) nor any Opposition Member voted against that legislation which removed the most objectionable features of the system. The hon. Gentleman spoke about unfairness. It was monstrously unfair when only 40 per cent. paid rates and that system could not possibly endure. The hon. Gentleman overlooks the fact that well over 1 million people in Scotland are receiving rebates which are of great assistance to them. The reforms on transitional relief should in due course benefit up to 500,000 people.

Mr. Gow: Is not the system of rebates for the community charge considerably more generous than the rebates for the old system of domestic rates?

Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Gow: Is my noble Friend aware that many of us would like him to answer questions more frequently than he does?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I can tell my hon. Friend that those on income support receive 80 per cent. rebate and that their income support has been increased to take account of the fact that they have to pay the other 20 per cent. There have been reforms, and when anomalies arise we shall take steps to make sure that they are ironed out and removed, as we have done with difficulties arising for people with Alzheimer's disease.

Mr. Maxton: Will the Minister confirm that the transitional relief scheme that the Government introduced with great publicity last year will help only 10 per cent. of poll tax payers in Scotland and that the average rate per qualifier will be £25 a year or 50p a week? Was it not all just one massive con trick designed to delude the people of Scotland into believing that the poll tax was fair? Does he appreciate that the only way in which he can help the poor in Scotland is to get rid of the iniquitous 20 per cent. minimum payment as the first step towards getting rid of this grossly unfair tax?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The fact that up to 500,000 people will benefit is not something to be sneered at in any respect. Labour Members should set an example by paying the community charge rather than saying that they will defy the law.

National Health Service (Staff)

11. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many doctors, dentists and nurses were employed by the National Health Service in Scotland in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* currently.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There are at present 87,000 doctors, dentists and nurses in the National Health Service —9,000 more than when we took office in 1979.

Mr. Leigh: Does the Minister agree that those figures show the success of the Conservatives in recruiting considerably more doctors, dentists and nurses due not least to the fact that we have increased nurses' pay by 43 per cent. over and above inflation and doctors' pay by 36 per cent. over and above inflation, compared with a cut of 21 per cent. in real terms under the last Labour Government? Does he further agree that that shows that we not only have the will to improve the NHS but that, unlike Labour Members, we provide the ways and means to ensure that it is improved?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree, and my hon. Friend is right to point out that there are more nurses and doctors in the Health Service. He is also right to point out that not only have we recruited more nurses and doctors and increased their pay over and above inflation, but we have reduced the working week for nurses and introduced a system of grading that ensures that nurses are able to pursue their careers while maintaining contact with the patient. That is a record of which to be proud and one which the Labour party cannot hold a candle to.

Mr. Bill Walker: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will have noticed that following the altercation that we had some moments ago, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) has now left the Chamber, having made use of the television cameras—*[Interruption.]* Is that not an abuse of the rules of the House——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I thought that the whole House had agreed that we should proceed without any thought being given to the television cameras.

Mr. Watson: Now that the Minister has answered the shamefully planted question from the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh)—who has never seen the inside of a Scottish hospital in his life and is never likely to—may I ask the Minister to deal with the current issue? Will he comment on the fact that there is now no dietician at Gartnavel hospital in Glasgow to deal with diabetic patients as a result of the cuts that have been made in the NHS in Scotland? Will he address that problem, which is a day-to-day issue that my constituents are bringing to me?

Mr. Forsyth: If the hon. Gentleman is concerned about the position in a particular post, he should take that up with the general manager of the Greater Glasgow health board, who I am sure will be able to offer an explanation. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was here when my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) pointed out that as a result of the programme of competitive tendering, which the hon. Gentleman opposed, Greater Glasgow health board is recruiting additional staff in precisely the areas concerned. The hon. Gentleman has received a copy of the report showing that that has been a success. There are more staff in the NHS as a result of the investment that we have made. From time to time there will be vacancies, but there are far more resources available than there ever were in the past.

Health Boards (Expenditure)

12. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the number of health boards where annual expenditure is likely to exceed their budgeted expenditure in 1989-90.

Mr. Rifkind: One health board has indicated that its actual expenditure could exceed budgeted expenditure in 1989-90.

Mr. Darling: The Secretary of State will be aware that Lothian health board is one of the best funded in the country, yet its members—hand-picked by him, mainly because of their loyalty to the Conservative party—have said that they cannot make ends meet because they are so underfunded. Does not that show to the Secretary of State the dire straits that the Lothian health board and health boards generally are in? What does he intend to do about that? Does he further accept that the inquiry that he announced, being carried out by Mr. Cruickshank, is being viewed with some scepticism and that it would be better to have an independent inquiry to look at the health board funding rather than to have a public brawl between officials?

Mr. Rifkind: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has confirmed that Lothian health board is one of the best funded in the country. Other boards that are less generously funded have maintained their expenditure within their budgets, so it is not unreasonable also to expect that of the Lothian health board.

There has been an independent inquiry by an independent firm of accountants, which today reported to the chief executive. The report suggests that there have been serious failings in the board's management and reporting systems. We shall be discussing those matters with the board to ensure that the necessary steps are taken to rectify those problems. However, we must do so in a way that does not damage the interests of patients in Lothian, which I believe to be paramount.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that any service, such as the National Health Service, that is demand led must be managed efficiently, effectively and properly and devolved at local level—that is, regional health board level? If that does not happen, it will not be surprising if it runs into difficulties, because that is what happens in a demand led service.

Mr. Rifkind: I have nothing but praise for the work of the health boards, including the Lothian health board. I am sure that we are all concerned that, during the current year, certain problems appear to have led to the board's being unable to contain its expenditure within its budget. The priority must be to ensure that that failing does not lead to any damage to the interests of the patients. That will be the priority of the chief executive of the NHS in his discussions with members of the board and its staff.

Mr. Eadie: Is the Secretary of State saying that the Lothian health board is guilty of financial mismanagement? Are not its members mainly his appointees? Is he aware that, despite what we have heard today about the great increase in nursing staff, I have received a letter from a constituent who works in the Princess Margaret Rose hospital claiming that nurses are worried that they may be made redundant soon because of closures within the hospital? Will nurses in the NHS in Lothian be made compulsorily redundant?

Mr. Rifkind: I am happy to reassure the hon. Gentleman on that matter. As I said last week, there is no question of hospitals being closed or of other crisis measures being taken because it has become apparent that there has been overspending within the Lothian health board area. We wish to discuss with the board, in a considered, sensible and sensitive way, how it can bring its expenditure under control. I have already given the assurance that no hospital, including the Princess Margaret Rose, is in danger of being shut because of the problems that have arisen.

National Health Service (Staff)

13. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many doctors, dentists and nurses are employed in the National Health Service in Scotland; and by how much their pay has increased since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There are about 87,000 doctors, dentists and nurses in the Health Service in Scotland. That represents an increase of about 11 per cent. on the position in 1979. Nurses' pay has increased by 43 per cent. over and above inflation, and doctors and dentists' pay has increased by about one third.

Mr. Hind: Is my hon. Friend aware that 23 per cent. more is spent on health care for each Scottish voter than for each English voter? Does he agree that the efficiencies that he has introduced and the Government's prudent management of the Health Service in Scotland—especially through the introduction of competitive tendering—have enabled 11 Scottish health boards to increase the number of doctors and nurses of all disciplines, including mental handicap and community nurses, thereby improving the standards of health care?

Mr. Forsyth: We are endeavouring to improve the standard of health care in Scotland. There are a number of plans for new initiatives, some of which have been mentioned today, including cochlear ear implants, which were mentioned by the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes). There is always a challenge in the NHS, and this Government have met that challenge. It would help us to meet the needs of patients if Opposition Members would accept the need for good efficiency measures in the Health Service, which are as much a part of patient care as is ensuring that there are the conditions and the resources required, which has been this Government's record.

Mrs. Ray Michie: Can the Minister tell us how doctors and nurses will continue to be employed in Oban unless he can explain what has happened about the new hospital which was first promised in 1972 by a Conservative Secretary of State, and promised again in 1986 by the Minister's predecessor? Is he aware that the people of Oban are fed up with promises that are not kept and with threadbare assurances that planning is going ahead when the site for the hospital has not even been purchased? Will he give a start date and a completion date?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Lady will be aware that I have given approval in principle to the establishment of a new hospital in her constituency in Oban. I should have thought that she would welcome that. If the hon. Lady is concerned about progress on the hospital, she is free to write to me or seek a meeting with me. In the period since the general election, when I have been health Minister, I do not recall her seeking a meeting to express concern on the matter. I assume that that is because she knows that in her constituency we have been prepared not only to invest in a new hospital in Oban but to make substantial investment in the facilities at Campbeltown, which is part of a major investment programme in the Health Service in Scotland as a whole.

Scottish Economy

14. **Mr. Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the Scottish Trades Union Congress to discuss the Scottish economy.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. and learned Friend met the general council of the Scottish Trades Union Congress on 10 November 1989 when a number of matters affecting the Scottish economy were discussed.

Mr. Graham: When will the Secretary of State stop squirming in Cabinet and fight for the steel industry of Scotland and for new investment? Will the Secretary of State assure the House and Scotland that he will fight for the jobs at Bishopton Royal Ordnance factory which the Government propose to move from Bishopton to another part of the country, involving the loss of 26 invaluable, highly skilled jobs in my constituency? The workers in that factory fought hard for their jobs and the Secretary of State should stand by them. If he is not prepared to fight for Scotland, I am.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman will welcome the fact that as a result of the offer of Government assistance, some 500 jobs at the Royal Ordnance factory in his constituency were saved.

Mr. Dewar: Will the Minister discuss with the STUC the report prepared for the European Commission by the university of Louvain, which looks specifically at Strathclyde, among other areas, and which condemns the Government's lack of preparation for 1992 and draws attention in particular to our inadequate technological base? Against that background what possible defence is there for the ruthless cutting of regional preferential assistance for industry in Scotland, which, under the Government, has fallen in real terms from £350 million to £150 million, a damaging decline which yesterday's public expenditure White Paper confirmed will continue?

Mr. Lang: As usual, the Labour party judges the success of a policy simply by how much taxpayers' money is thrown at it. The reality is that Scottish industry is preparing for the single European market. Our exports into Europe have been increasing substantially. West Germany has now overtaken the United States as our biggest export market. Over half of Scottish exports go to Europe, and Scottish manufacturing exports per head exceed those of the rest of the United Kingdom by 28 per cent.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Will my hon. Friend tell the STUC when he next meets it that self-employment in Scotland has risen by 50 per cent. since 1981? Does not that figure give the lie to much of the nonsense that we hear from Opposition Members?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right. That is a reflection of the increased confidence in the business community. Many more people are willing to set up in business for themselves.

Local Government Finance

15. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest estimate of the number of people who are in arrears with their poll tax payments.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: While no overall figure is yet available, it would appear that the proportion of people in arrears with their community charge payments is broadly the same as under the rating system last year.

Mr. Canavan: In view of the Secretary of State's insulting personal remarks about me, is the Minister aware that the reason why many people such as myself, who can afford to pay the poll tax, choose not to do so is because we are standing shoulder to shoulder in solidarity with people who have no choice, because they cannot afford to pay it? As there are about 500,000 of us throughout Scotland and only 200 sheriff officers, how does the Minister intend to enforce the collection of the Tory poll tax? Would it not be simpler for the Government to abolish it completely—and to abolish warrant sales while they are at it?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As a Scottish Member of Parliament, the hon. Gentleman is very well able to pay the community charge from his own earnings. It is for the council concerned to decide on the most appropriate method of collection, whether it be by arrestment or any other legitimate method. I see no reason to reform the warrant sales law, particularly as, when it went through Parliament, neither the hon. Gentleman nor any other Labour Member was prepared to vote against it. The hon. Gentleman's action in refusing to pay the community charge is grossly irresponsible. If enough people followed his example, either services would suffer or there would be redundancies among the local council's work force.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will the Leader of the House clarify the Government's intentions with respect to the exchanges in the Chamber that followed the Division at 7 o'clock last night? On behalf of the Opposition, I and a number of my right hon. and hon. Friends pressed for an urgent oral statement, by the Secretary of State for Defence in the first instance, about the Colin Wallace scandal and the information released yesterday by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces that the House and right hon. and hon. Members had been misled both in parliamentary answers and in correspondence. No statement has been made today, and it is important that we know now from the Leader of the House what are the Government's intentions.

I make it clear to the Leader of the House that, although in the first place a statement from the Secretary of State for Defence may be appropriate, this sordid affair has wider implications than simply matters concerning the Ministry of Defence. Right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House are concerned about the integrity of the House and of hon. Members, and clearly we need an opportunity to debate also those much more serious and wider implications.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that I should call the Leader of the House first.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Geoffrey Howe): In the light of the exchanges that took place in the House last night, the matter has been further considered. As the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) points out, the background extends over a long time. In the light of that consideration, I am able to tell the House that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will make a statement to the House tomorrow afternoon. I shall say nothing beyond that today.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is not for hon. Members to question the Leader of the House by way of a point of order. I call Dr. Cunningham first.

Dr. Cunningham: The announcement made by the Leader of the House will be welcomed by all right hon. and hon. Members. I ask him to consider and to discuss through the usual channels how the House may proceed. I reiterate that, although in the first place we expected and welcome the decision that the Secretary of State for Defence should make a statement about the implications for his Department and its responsibilities in the matter, the House should have an opportunity to debate also the wider issues involved.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I must make plain what I should have made plain before. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence is currently in Washington, and he will be making his statement tomorrow at the first opportunity. I cannot indicate the scope of his statement, or how the points raised by the hon. Gentleman may be dealt with. The House must wait until my right hon. Friend's statement has been made.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As a former Law Officer, the deputy Prime Minister will certainly appreciate the role of the Law Officers. May I ask whether Mr. David Calcutt's inquiry will benefit from the services of outside lawyers, or whether it will be dependent on "internal" civil servants from the Ministry of Defence? Could he clarify—*[Interruption.]* Anyone who knows about the matter knows that——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have all heard what the Leader of the House has said: a statement is to be made tomorrow. It is difficult for him to give definitive answers about such matters before he has heard the statement.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it on this matter? Is it for me or for the Leader of the House?

Mr. Leigh: It is for you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Very well.

Mr. Leigh: As you know, Mr. Speaker, today is an Opposition day and a number of hon. Members wish to speak in important debates. We have received the clearest possible assurance that a full statement will be made tomorrow, at the earliest opportunity. Can we now move on? Opposition Members are trying to extend the discussion on the wrong occasion.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman only repeated what I have just said.

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Leader of the House for saying that the Secretary of State for Defence is to make a statement tomorrow, but I urge him to recognise that the issue is much wider than it appears. It affects Members of Parliament—including me, as it happens—and the parliamentary Labour party has expressed grave concern about the current developments. Can the Leader of the House say what procedure may be used to enable the matter to be more fully investigated in the House?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot anticipate all the questions that may or may not be put to my right hon. Friend or to others, and I certainly cannot at this stage answer questions such as that asked by the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme).

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is not a matter for points of order. It has not been raised with me; it was raised last night in the House, and the Leader of the House said then that he would tell the House today what he proposed to do. It is perfectly legitimate for hon. Members to seek further clarification, but let me repeat what was said by the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh): until we have heard the definitive statement it would be extremely difficult, if not wrong, to ask the Leader of the House to give detailed replies.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is the Leader of the House aware that the issue being put to him now does not concern the Ministry of Defence statement, which is an internal disciplinary matter between Mr. Wallace and his former Department? It is a constitutional question, which I touched on last night and about which I wrote to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the right hon. and learned Gentleman. For more than 20 years disinformation has been issuing from Government——

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: "Sit down."

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Benn: The Government have now admitted, for the first time ever, the existence of disinformation that has branded and blackened the reputations of the right hon. Members for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), and for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), two former Prime Ministers—Wilson and Callaghan—my right hon. Friends the Members for Salford, East (Mr. Orme), and for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees), the former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Colin Wallace should be brought before a Committee here, just as Colonel Oliver North was brought before Congress, to give evidence free from the threat of prosecution under the new official secrets legislation.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: For the avoidance of doubt, I responded to a point of order raised in the House last night, and returned to the House this afternoon to respond to a point of order raised by the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham). Because I had given no notice of a business statement, I intended to respond to remarks that I understood would be raised as a point of order, and I have intervened on a point of order to tell the House that which follows from the undertaking that I gave last night. There will be a statement tomorrow afternoon.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. By no stretch of the imagination can a matter such as this be the subject of points of order; to me they are not matters for the Chair.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it a point of order for me?

Mr. Favell: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Many Conservative Members are fed up to the back teeth with the bogus points of order raised by the Opposition. My right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House has already said that there will be a statement tomorrow. That is the time to raise questions. In the meantime, is it not about time that you, Mr. Speaker, laid down the rules—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I say to the whole House that when the Leader of the House makes a statement which in effect announces a change of business hon. Members have a right to question him.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): Further to the business statement made by the—*[Interruption.]* You informed us that it was a business statement, Mr. Speaker. If it is not a business statement, I cannot ask my question.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I repeat that the Leader of the House has made a statement about a change of business tomorrow. As it is a matter of grave concern to both sides of the House, it is legitimate for right hon. and hon. Members to put questions to the Leader of the House about matters that he can answer, but not about the statement, which he does not know about.

Mr. Rees: When Ministers do not seem to understand what the Leader of the House has done, it is very difficult for us to act on it. I am glad that the Secretary of State for Defence is to make a statement on this important issue tomorrow and we look forward to it. However, it has implications for the Northern Ireland Office which do not seem to matter to some people. There are also implications for other Departments. When one aspect is dealt with tomorrow, other Secretaries of State should be present because there are other issues to be raised.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have called those hon. Members who are directly concerned with the matter because they were involved. *[Interruption.]* Order. I think we should now move on.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): On a totally different point of order, Mr. Speaker, of which I have given you prior notice. On 12 June last year the House agreed the Select Committee report on televising the proceedings of the House. By agreeing that, we agreed to a degree of flexibility, provided that any variations were consistent with the reasonable assumptions which were made at the time the experiment was authorised. At the end of the main text there is a summary of conclusions and resolutions. In essence, those resolutions are the licence for broadcasters and the Select Committee. There are 87 such recommendations and conclusions. No. 31 states:

"Panning shots along the Benches should not be used."

You may have noticed in the news media today——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Question No. 214 on the Order Paper today in the name of the hon. Member for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page) is on this very matter. There is a Select Committee on the Televising of the House. If the hon. Gentleman has any complaints about the way in which the televising of the House is being operated, he should put them to the Select Committee. I cannot deal with them.

Mr. Marlow: You, Mr. Speaker, will have seen that we have had advance notice of the answer to that question. The advance notice says that the cameras shall be allowed to roam. If so, that is a degree of flexibility beyond the reasonable assumptions in the report, one of which states that panning shots should not be allowed.

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me; it is strictly a matter for the Select Committee on the televising of our proceedings. The hon. Gentleman would get a better answer from that Committee than he could possibly have from me, because I have no responsibility for it.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: In response to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), may I say that the report of the

[Sir Geoffrey Howe]

Select Committee which was approved by the House last year emphasised the rules that were issued for guidance were

"for the start of the experiment. They might need to be modified in the light of experience during the course of the trial period."

It was made clear that it would

"fall to the Select Committee to adjudicate . . . over the interpretation of the guidelines and to consider any reasonable modification which may prove necessary during the course of the experiment."

As the House would wish, the Select Committee has had the matter under continuous review. On Monday it reached some conclusions about certain modifications which were the subject of an answer to a written question on today's Order Paper.

I can assure my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North that the request for panning—one of the requests made by the forum—was not a request to which we acceded. If my hon. Friend studies the reply, he will discover the modifications that the Select Committee has approved and which I have reported to the House as soon as possible, consistent with the original report.

Mr. Marlow: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I do not see how it is possible to have a further point of order on that subject. The hon. Gentleman has been answered by the Leader of the House.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to bring to the attention of the House a very important matter relating to the proceedings in a Committee upstairs this morning with regard to the Official Secrets Act 1986 and the prescribing of certain organisations.

The Minister of State told me during the debate in Committee that the Comptroller and Auditor General, who as you know, Mr. Speaker, is an Officer of the House, would not have his status changed to that of a Crown servant. The importance of the point is that, if the Comptroller and Auditor General becomes a Crown servant under the order that was debated in Committee this morning, we would be hampering seriously the Public Accounts Committee. I know that that would be a matter of serious concern to hon. Members on both sides of the House. Therefore, I should like you, Mr. Speaker, to look into the status of the Comptroller and Auditor General in relation to the order this morning and the Official Secrets Act 1986.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Perhaps I can help hon. Members by saying that I will certainly look into the matter.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I was a member of the Standing Committee to which the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hill, West (Mr. Randall) referred. I am afraid to say that his account of the proceedings was not in accordance with what the Minister said. I am sure that that will be perfectly clear to you, Mr. Speaker, when you examine the matter.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order arising from Scottish Question Time. During Scottish questions, which you may recall took place a short time ago, I, my hon. Friends, the Members for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) and for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) and others tried to raise issues of vital concern to our constituents relating to questions that we tabled two weeks ago. I wanted to raise the matter of the Stranraer to Euston sleeper. I tried to raise the matter on suitable questions earlier, but I was not called, as is your right, Mr. Speaker, and we did not reach my question No. 21.

Scottish Question Time is my only opportunity to raise constituency matters on the Floor of the House. However, a large number of Conservative Members from south of the border with no constituency interests asked questions. I realise that this is a United Kingdom Parliament, but you have a responsibility to allow us an opportunity to ask constituency questions. I am not suggesting a language test, but I hope that you will bear this matter in mind when you call hon. Members during Scottish Question Time.

Mr. Speaker: I am aware of the desire in the House to make quicker progress at Question Time. However, that inevitably means fewer supplementaries and, so far as the Chair is concerned, this is constrained with the number of Front-Bench spokesmen. I do not criticise that, but I must bear it in mind in the interests of Back Benchers.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I will take Mr. Winnick. I hope that it is not on the point that we have already dealt with.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I should like your guidance. As you know, the Secretary of State for Defence is to make a statement tomorrow. Many hon. Members would like the opportunity at that time to deal with allegations that have been made about the way in which the Security Service had been and perhaps remains out of control. The Minister who will respond tomorrow is not the Prime Minister or the Home Secretary. Allegations and substantial smears have been made, and they must be answered. Will you ensure that we will be able to widen the issue of allegations about the Security Service? If not, the Home Secretary, or the Prime Minister, who is the head of the Security Service, should be on the Front Bench to answer questions.

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps I can give guidance to the whole House on this matter. Tomorrow there will be an opportunity not only to question the Prime Minister at Prime Minister's Question Time but to question the Leader of the House during business questions. Of course, there will then be the statement itself. There will also be Northern Ireland questions. There will be plenty of opportunities to deal with this matter.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not answering any further points of order on that issue.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it on another matter?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Yes, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that, following the Christmas recess, I returned to the House and raised the matter of the commercial interests and directorships of Conservative Members of Parliament. Since that date, which is almost a month ago,

I have sat through every Question Time and almost every statement in the Commons, and I have risen in my place on more than 300 occasions to be called on supplementary questions. It is being said in my constituency that it appears that the Speaker is carrying out sanctions against me by refusing to call me on supplementary questions—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is an unworthy charge to make against the Chair; the whole House will accept that. I do not think that, in general, the hon. Member is deprived in any way. He is regularly in the Chamber, and he has every opportunity to participate in our debates and at Question Time. He needs only to see his computer print-out, which I will gladly send him.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I call Mr. Jonathan Aitken.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: My constituents want to know why I am not being called—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not carry out sanctions against anyone.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: You have not told me yet, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I call Mr. Jonathan Aitken.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Through you, I raise with the Leader of the House, the fundamental question whether the Secretary of State for Defence is the correct Minister to make the statement tomorrow. I draw to your attention the fact that a briefing that was given by the Prime Minister's press secretary to journalists today indicated that the Prime Minister herself might have been misled by previous statements made to her by civil servants as a result of which a parliamentary answer was given.

First, if that is correct, and if the security services are involved, as seems to be the general assumption, are you aware that in the Security Service Act 1989 there is no ministerial responsibility for the security services on the part of the Secretary of State for Defence? Therefore, why is the Secretary of State for Defence to make the statement? Secondly, if a wrong parliamentary answer was given by the Prime Minister herself, surely it is not necessarily within the ambit of the Ministry of Defence for the statement to be made. It seems to raise far wider constitutional questions. The Leader of the House should at least consider whether a different Minister should answer these questions tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me. The whole House accepts that it is a serious matter which will need careful consideration. Let us leave it until tomorrow.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not taking any more points of order on that subject.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I should like to raise a matter of which I have given you notice—the great anxiety about the future of Kashmir and the danger of civil war there. You will know better than most hon. Members that tens of thousands of British citizens are of Kashmiri origin and that thousands more have settled here and have lived here for many years. They are extremely anxious about the safety of their relatives and friends and are desperately worried about the future of Kashmir.

I should like your advice, Mr. Speaker, on how you can be given authority to write to the Speakers of the Indian and Pakistani Parliaments expressing the hope of British citizens of Kashmiri origin and your belief that every effort should be made to bring about a peaceful solution and to secure the future of Kashmir. How can the House give you authority to send such a message?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member knows that in such matters I am the servant of the House. It is not for me to initiate actions such as he suggests, although I share his anxiety.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can you confirm that it is your job as Speaker to examine breaches of privilege in the House and that they are no longer raised on the Floor of the House but are put in writing to you for a judgment on whether such a breach has occurred? There may be breaches of privilege in the statement tomorrow. I ask you to bear that in mind because, if there are, I and, I believe, several other hon. Members will write to you.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member knows that if a breach of privilege is alleged he should write to me. No doubt that will happen. Indeed, I have already received one letter on the matter.

Mr. Marlow: Further to the point of order raised by my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House. He drew attention to paragraph 98 of the Select Committee report, which is part of the subsidiary text of the report. Within the report various items have been highlighted and transferred to the summary of conclusions and recommendations.

The Leader of the House spoke about the powers of the Select Committee, which are subject to the will of the House. The House agreed fundamentally with the summary of conclusions and recommendations, which takes precedence over paragraph 98. It says:

"Panning shots along the Benches should not be used."

On behalf of the House, will you look carefully at the report and the proposals of my right hon. and learned Friend and give the House your advice on the matter tomorrow? I submit that the Select Committee seeks to exceed its powers.

Mr. Speaker: I shall certainly look carefully at the report. We all have our views on the impact of television on our proceedings. The hon. Member heard the reply of the Leader of the House. He should take up the matter with the Select Committee or during business questions tomorrow..

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have listened carefully to what you said about the way in which the televising of the House is being changed. You have to keep an eye on it. You have had more than a little difficulty today. I think that there is a way out of it. You could kill two birds with one stone by allowing the cameras to zoom in close on the Prime Minister so that she can make a statement to clarify how she was misled in the Colin Wallace affair and we can ask her questions.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member is ingenious, but that is not ingenious enough. We should move on because we have a heavy day before us.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. To start our proceedings every day with——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask hon. Members to sit down.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No.

Mr. Heffer: It is about——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the hon. Member to sit down while I am on my feet.

Mr. Heffer *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Will the hon. Gentleman please sit down? I am on my feet.

I must advise the House that it disfigures our proceedings to start every day with half an hour of points of order—*[Interruption.]* Order. These are not matters of order. They are matters of disagreement across the Chamber. They are not matters on which I can give any opinion.

Mr. Heffer: Yes, you can, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall take only those matters that are my responsibility. I cannot take any others.

Mr. Heffer: My point is about the list, Mr. Speaker. You have a right in relation to that because you are the one person who can speak in our name. The hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) talked about the "panning" of the House. As you know, Mr. Speaker, I was not in favour of any of it, but if we are to have the panning of the Floor of the House, we should not allow that panning to go only as far as the Gangway because, if that is the case, none of us below the Gangway will ever be seen.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I can give the hon. Gentleman some very good news. I now perforce watch television at breakfast time and frequently see the hon. Gentleman. I do not think that he need worry.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): May I seek your guidance, Mr. Speaker? Earlier this afternoon you told the House that it would be possible to have the Colin Wallace affair fully ventilated during the statement tomorrow. However, it is already clear from the exchanges in the House that not only the present Government but previous Governments over the past 20 years have been deceived and misled and that when they have come to the House to advise the House, they have misled the House.

How on earth can the House and the country believe that this whole affair can be fully ventilated by restricting our deliberations on it to a statement of one hour made by the Secretary of State for Defence, who is not completely responsible because the matter also concerns Northern Ireland? Surely we should have a full and detailed debate on this matter at the earliest opportunity, and it should be referred to a Select Committee of the House.

Mr. Speaker: I have no idea about how this will proceed tomorrow—*[Interruption.]* Well, until we hear the statement it is impossible to say what may happen in the future.

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): I have received a letter from the Minister of State for the Armed Forces which tells me that the allegations that I raised in the House about the forging of CIA documents and about the use of Army officers to plant hoax bombs are now true. I understand that there is to be a statement tomorrow from the Secretary of State for Defence. That is not good enough. I raised this issue with the Prime Minister and I have received denials from the Prime Minister. I know from my own research that an entire dossier, listing every one of the allegations, was delivered to the Prime Minister on behalf of Colin Wallace in November 1984. The House will want to know why that——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is quite likely that the House will want to know—and I shall probably want to know—but what is the point of order for me?

Mr. Livingstone: I am trying to ask, through you, Mr. Speaker, that we have the Prime Minister here to answer our questions because she is the main beneficiary of this treason and she has been the main architect of the cover-up.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not make allegations of that kind.

Mr. Livingstone: It is true.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call Mr. Mullin.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): It will be within your recollection, Mr. Speaker, that on 6 May 1987 the Prime Minister made a statement to the House in which she denied categorically every one of the allegations that have now been confirmed in yesterday's answer by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces. May I reinforce the points that have been made by the hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) and by my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) to the effect that the Prime Minister should be the person at the Dispatch Box answering questions on this subject? Would it be in order for you, Mr. Speaker, to use your good offices in a way that I am sure you could to ensure that the Prime Minister is here to address us specifically on that subject?

Mr. Speaker: It is not a matter for me, but I am sure that what the hon. Gentleman has said has been heard.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Let us move on.

BILL PRESENTED

Harbours, Docks and Piers Clauses Act 1847 (Amendment)

Mr. Michael Shersby, supported by Mr. Barry Sheerman, Sir Bernard Braine, Sir John Wheeler, Mr. Steve Norris, Mr. Robert Maclennan, Mr. John Cartwright and Dr. John Blackburn, presented a Bill to repeal sections 79 and 80 of the Harbours, Docks and Piers Clauses Act 1847: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 2 March and to be printed. [Bill 65.]

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Ordered,

That European Community Document No. 9934/89 relating to health rules for products of animal origin be referred to a Standing Committee on European Community Documents.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

Mr. Michael Marshall (Arundel): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it about a completely different matter?

Mr. Marshall: No, it is not, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Well, then, I cannot hear it.

Mr. Marshall: I believe that it would be helpful, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Well, if it would be helpful——

Mr. Marshall: I have listened to the exchanges this afternoon and wish to say simply that Mr. Colin Wallace is my constituent. It is essential that we have a statement from the Secretary of State for Defence tomorrow. I believe that that is a step that we need to consider before we look at other matters. I wish to put that on the record, having been involved for the past seven and a half years in making representations on behalf of my constituent.

Mr. Speaker: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman. I did not realise that Colin Wallace was his constituent.

Newly Qualified Drivers

4.4 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to impose restrictions, in respect of cars with engines of over 1000 cc, upon drivers for a period of 12 months after they have passed the test for the full driving licence; and for connected purposes.

In the past 20 years, there has been a revolution in motoring. Improved living standards have ensured that there is a far wider car ownership. Instead of one car per family being the norm, it is now more likely that two or even three cars are owned by one family. Furthermore, advances in technology, design and engine power ensure that cars are far more sophisticated and powerful than they were then. The driving test has failed to keep pace with the times. Noticeably there is no provision in the driving test for motorway driving. There is also no written examination, which many might consider to be beneficial and an improvement. There is also a belief that, as in certain European countries, a number of hours of driving should be completed before drivers are eligible to take the test.

In Great Britain, more than 28 million people have licences to drive motor cars. The figures for the latest available year, 1988, show that 1,039,000 people passed their driving test. Of those, 73 per cent. were aged between 17 and 25, 21 per cent. between 26 and 40, 5 per cent. between 41 and 60 and 0·3 per cent. over 60. In the same year, 184,000 motor car accidents involving personal injuries occurred. On top of those figures, one can add the 3,427 people who were killed in accidents involving lorries, motorcycles, and mobile and stationary objects.

To put the problem into perspective, overall, in 1988, 5,000 people were killed and more than 300,000 injured in road accidents of all types. In the under-25-year-old age group, there were almost 1,000 deaths and 60,000 injuries. If my mathematics are correct, in that single year nearly 500 of the constituents of every hon. Member were either killed or injured as a result of motor accidents.

The social cost of these horrific figures is in excess of £4 billion. I am reassured that the Department of Transport is extremely concerned about this and is constantly taking action to help to ensure that our roads are safer, with a plethora of positive initiatives and actions. However, my proposed Bill would add to the Department's initiatives and open the debate on what more can be done.

Part of the problem emanates from the fact that inexperienced drivers are given, as soon as they have passed their driving test, the same privileges and rights as someone who has held a licence for over 20 years and gained experience through driving over the years. That is a mistake. In theory, a 17-year-old can, on his 17th birthday, pass his driving test, leave the test centre and drive away in a Porsche or a series 7 BMW. This is crazy, because it is obvious that such a time scale gives nobody the experience or understanding of driving a car with such a high performance. If such a youth got into difficulties, he would not be able to cope. The first purpoee of my Bill is to restrict all newly qualified drivers to driving cars of only 1,000 cc for the first 12 months after passing a test so that they can build up the required confidence and experience when driving. Secondly, my Bill would seek to make all newly qualified drivers, up to 12 months after passing their tests, drive with plates marked R for restricted or N for

[Mr. Simon Burns]

novice—similar to plates used in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. Other drivers would then be aware of their relative inexperience.

I understand from press reports in the past few days that the Department of Transport is considering this proposal and introducing a P plate. I do not want to quibble with the Secretary of State for Transport about different letters of the alphabet. Any relevant letter should be used to attract the attention of other drivers.

Thirdly, there has been a serious problem of boy racers showing off on joy rides. They pile their cars full of passengers and race up and down the roads. That has led to far too many accidents involving death and personal injury. The third part of my Bill would go some way towards alleviating that problem by restricting the number of passengers whom they can take in their cars to two, of whom one must be a fully qualified driver in his own right.

Fourthly, my Bill would effect something that I know my hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic is considering as a matter of urgency—the banning of newly qualified drivers from sitting in cars with learner drivers, thereby allowing the learners to drive on the highway. They are not mature or experienced enough to take on such responsibilities.

The last two parts of my Bill include constructive ways of ending these tragedies and the activities of boy racers.

I do not pretend that my Bill will reach the statute book by the end of this Session, but I believe that, if it draws attention to the problems and raises the level of discussion so that people bring in new ideas to reduce the injuries and deaths on our roads and to produce an improvement on the past two decades, it will have been worth while. I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Simon Burns, Mr. David Porter, Mr. David Evans, Mr. Anthony Coombs, Mr. Jerry Hayes, Mr. William Hague, Miss Ann Widdecombe, Mr. Bob Dunn and Mr. Douglas French.

NEWLY QUALIFIED DRIVERS

Mr. Simon Burns accordingly presented a Bill to impose restrictions, in respect of cars with engines of over 1000 cc, upon drivers for a period of 12 months after they have passed the test for the full driving licence; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 9 March and to be printed. [Bill 67.]

Orders of the Day

OPPOSITION DAY

[5TH ALLOTTED DAY]

EC and Eastern Europe

[Relevant documents: European Community Documents Nos. 9090/89 on aid to Poland and Hungary, 10788/89 on medium-term financial assistance for Hungary, 9716/89 on economic aid to Hungary and Poland, 8879/89 on Commission indemnities to the European Investment Bank against losses under loans to Hungary and Poland, 9127/89 and the un-numbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 10th November 1989 on extension of the Generalised System of Preferences to Poland and Hungary and the un-numbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 10th November 1989 on levy reliefs on certain agricultural products.]

Mr. Speaker: We now come to the first of the Social and Liberal Democrat motions, that on the European Community and developments in eastern Europe. A considerable number of right hon. and hon. Members want to participate in this important debate, and I ask them all to keep their speeches brief in the interests of the whole House.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will have noticed that a number of European Community documents are listed on the Order Paper. I understand that they have not been requested for this Opposition day, although they may well be convenient for it. I seek your assurance, Mr. Speaker—I hope that the Minister will respond to this point—that the Government are not attempting to use time allocated to the Opposition to put down what are essentially Government documents so that they can then say that they have been considered and there is no need to debate them in Government time. That would be an abuse of Opposition time.

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that that will have been heard by the Minister.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Francis Maude): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. As I understand it, it was not at the initiative of the Government that the documents were added to the motion for debate.

Mr. Speaker: I remind the House that we should restrict our debate to the motion on the Order Paper.

4.14 pm

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) for raising that important issue. It would indeed amount to contempt of this House, or at least contempt of the procedures of the House, if this debate were to be used for a discussion of European Community documents. I shall look into the question of who asked that these items be put on the Order Paper, but my understanding is that it certainly was not my party or, indeed, any of the other Opposition parties.

I beg to move,

That this House welcomes recent progress towards liberal democracy in the countries of eastern and central Europe; endorses progress towards the political and economic integration of the European Community; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government urgently to recognise that this country's future depends on Britain playing a full and wholehearted role in the development of the new democratic Europe.

I am bound, at the start, to say that I am somewhat surprised that the Government have not been able to find sufficient agreement—in the Conservative party, I presume—to put down an amendment to this motion, even though many parts of it are entirely contrary to what we understand to be Government policy. Indeed, I hear that there is a possibility that the Government will not even seek to vote against it—again, presumably on the grounds that they cannot find any agreement about their policy on these vital matters. I hope, in case the Government should argue that their policies are in accordance with the motion, to demonstrate that the facts speak entirely to the contrary.

This motion is designed to encompass two factors. The first factor concerns the developments in eastern Europe; the second, and essential, factor is Britain's relationship to the new developments in western Europe—the movement towards closer economic, monetary, political and social integration. Hon. Members will not be fulfilling the terms of the motion—certainly not its terms—or its spirit if they merely use this debate as a chance to expatiate grand visions about eastern Europe. Those have to be set in a context, and that context is our approach to Europe itself.

We on the Liberal Democrat Bench make no apologies for bringing to this, the oldest and, many believe, the most introverted of the democratic parliaments of Europe the issue of the new democratic Europe that is now emerging before our very eyes. Naturally, people will be concerned to discuss their view and their vision of Europe, but I want at the outset to establish that this is a matter of the deepest practical importance to every citizen of this country. It is not just a matter for visions; it is a matter of practical politics.

On the environmental front, we know only too well that the European dimension is what has forced this Government to face up to the problems that now confront us as a part of Europe and, on the question of emission controls, has led the way in creating a cleaner atmosphere, often actually obstructed by this Government. On North sea pollution, it is the same story.

The Berlaymont in Brussels has exposed this Government's failure—in the case of water, for instance—to take the necessary action to create a cleaner environment. We know also that it is through concerted European action that we shall begin to tackle the huge environmental problems with which Europe as a whole will be confronted as a result of the moves in eastern Europe and the extraordinary levels of pollution that have to be coped with there.

We know too that, when it comes to the liberties of the individual, time and again it is the European Court that has had to be resorted to to defend the rights of British citizens, for whose protection our courts were too feeble, and for whom the lack of a Bill of Rights has meant an inadequate framewpork to secure civil liberties.

When it come to business, we know that small businesses and enterprises are, day by day, paying the price of high interest rates, because this Government have failed to address the advantages to Britain that would accrue from joining the European exchange rate mechanism of the EMS. We know that it is Brussels, and will increasingly be Brussels, that will tackle the issue of creating a free market—tackling monopolies and, indeed, exposing Government subsidies. Finally, we know that—crucially, in relation to 1992—it will be this country's ability to sink or swim in the open markets of Europe that will determine whether our nation and its industry and its economic base prosper or decline in the years to come.

We believe that Britain must join in the march towards European unity, towards closer economic, social and political integration, because that is the only way to ensure the long-term future of Britain's best interests. The failure of the Tory party and the Labour party to come to terms with the new Europe that is now emerging marks them both as parties of the past rather than parties of the future. The attitude of both parties is marked by confusion and division because they are equally uncertain about how to address the new moves in western Europe and how those will relate to the new moves in eastern Europe. They are equally split on that crucial issue.

This weekend, in what I can only describe as a masterpiece of euphemism, the Foreign Secretary tried to describe the split in the Conservative party as

"honest and friendly disagreements about details of our policy."

Was it "honest and friendly disagreement" about details of policy that caused the Chancellor of the Exchequer to resign on the issue of the exchange rate mechanism and the European monetary system? Was it "honest and friendly disagreement" that caused the former Foreign Secretary to be sacked because his views were dangerously pro-European and ran counter to the Prime Minister's personal antipathy towards all things European—or, as she would see it, all things foreign? Is it "honest and friendly disagreement" that has now led to a state of almost open war between the Prime Minister and Conservative Members of the European Parliament?

If that split in the Conservative party were confined to the nasty element—one might even say the Chingford element—of the Conservative party, I might be able to understand the Foreign Secretary's complacency in this matter. Of course, that is not the case, because the split runs right into the heart of the Conservative party, right into the Cabinet. We saw that clearly in the most eloquent and powerful resignation speech by the former Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Of course, Members on the Opposition Front Bench are no different. The difference between the hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), who speaks on Treasury matters for the Labour party in Europe, and the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) is as wide as the differences between Nos. 10 and 11 Downing street in the era when the Prime Minister was going through so much difficulty with the previous Chancellor of the Exchequer. The splits in both the Labour and Conservative parties have robbed Britain of a coherent policy on Europe. They are robbing this country of an influence on the development of European events and will rob it of the opportunities to benefit from the tremendous chances that are now opening up in Europe.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): It is easy to be consistent if one is totally naive, and easy for a party to be united in total naivety. Given an institution that has inflicted so much damage on the real economy of this

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

country, there is bound to be division in major parties about whether to go further and faster or whether to hold back. That is realism.

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman is a member of the Labour party, and therefore knows the real meaning of splits and naivety because they seem to have been almost a characteristic of his party over the past five or six years. The hon. Gentleman says that I am being naive and that what I am saying has nothing to do with real politics. We hear, do we not, that there are three reasons why the Conservative party and the Labour party regard it as important that Britain should stay in a minority of one out of 12 in Europe? First, there is the question of sovereignty. They are attached to an old-fashioned idea of the unitary sovereignty of the nation state. Neither of them realises the essential importance in the age in which we are moving of the concept of pooled sovereignty.

At least we are told that sovereignty is the reason. When one looks deeper, one wonders how on earth those parties can hold that position. In defence—nothing can be more crucial in terms of sovereignty—we have become quite accustomed over the past 40 years to the concepts of pooled sovereignty. We have also become accustomed to the idea that, by combining with other nations in NATO, Britain will have a better defence. We have become used to the idea that that is the very basis of the multilateralism that the Prime Minister consistently tells us is so important —not that that removes from her the capacity to be in a minority, even in NATO, on issues such as the modernisation of nuclear weapons.

For some time we have had pooled decision-making in foreign affairs. Yet in no way does that stop the Prime Minister from being isolated from our European partners from time to time on questions such as the way in which we should deal with South Africa.

The heart of the case advanced by the Labour and Tory parties seems to be that the single issue of economic sovereignty is the area where we may not in any way diminish the extraordinary sovereignty held by this nation and House over economic affairs. To what, then, would they wish us to return—to the sovereignty that the Labour party enjoyed in the 1970s when it had to go cap in hand to the IMF to bail it out, or the sovereignty that the Conservative party currently enjoys when it goes cap in hand daily to the speculators of the money markets to ensure that its economic policies can stand?

Is that the kind of sovereignty about which they are talking? Or is it the economic sovereignty which, in the 1960s and 1970s, made us prey to every small tremor of decision by what were then known as the gnomes of Zurich? Or is it the kind of sovereignty that the British Government enjoyed last October when, instead of observing the gnomes of Zurich, we had to stand on the edge of our chairs to await the decision of the faceless men of the Bundesbank? What an extraordinary degree of economic sovereignty is that.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): I am fascinated by much of what the right hon. Gentleman says, but I wish to recall to him the history of his party. He must have read about the great conflict between Lloyd George and others. Great divisions occurred in the Liberal party because of the reality of political power and the need to make decisions.

Those who have had to make decisions know that decision making is not always a simple matter. One is faced with a series of choices. Sometimes one makes the right choice, sometimes the wrong one, but either way one must make a decision. The reality of power rests precisely on that point. Much as I agree with much of what the right hon. Gentleman says, it is about time that the Liberals lived in the real world instead of in some fantasy world.

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman makes his point with characteristic pungency. Four times in the last 40 years Britain has been invited to make a real choice on Europe, and three times, whether under Labour or Tory Governments, the wrong choice was made. This country has suffered greatly as a result of those wrong choices. The hon. Gentleman cannot argue that that is naivety, or that we were living in some stratospheric world in which those choices did not matter.

Our failure to join Europe is one of the fundamental reasons for the underlying economic weakness of this nation. Heaven forbid—if the hon. Member for Walton is talking about real politics—that Britain should, for the fourth time, make the wrong choice and be left behind, because I do not believe that our economy, industry and society could tolerate another wrong choice on Europe.

Mr. John Gorst (Hendon, North): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that in foreign affairs it is highly desirable that we in this country have a bipartisan approach? He rightly points out that there is a spectrum of opinion on both sides of the House, and no doubt he believes that his party sits fair and square in the middle of politics—or at least that claim might be made. Does he think that it would be preferable to bridge the gap between the parties rather than try to extend it even more? Will he in the rest of his speech be suggesting how we can have a bipartisan approach?

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point about bipartisan approaches. I agree that they are to be commended, except when a bipartisan approach is, as in this case, wrong. The hon. Gentleman is also wrong to suggest that we are in the middle of the Conservative and Labour parties. We are not: we are out ahead of them, where we have been consistently for the last 40 years on Europe. What my party and its predecessors have said about Europe has become reality. We are talking of a political agenda which we currently occupy, but I predict that the Labour and Conservative parties will have to move to it in the coming year or two, or Britain will pay an ever higher price in the future.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I want to make it absolutely clear that the policy that the right hon. Gentleman is attempting to criticise in no way represents the reality of Labour party policy. As he speaks with the support of about 4 per cent. of the electorate, I wonder whether he can confirm that he also speaks with the support of the hon. Member for Rochdale (Sir C. Smith) who, on a number of previous occasions, has disagreed with the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Ashdown: My hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Sir C. Smith) will make his own points. The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley

(Mr. Foulkes) cannot even get many of his Back Benchers to go along with the Labour party's incredibly flimsy line on the exchange rate mechanism.

Sir Cyril Smith (Rochdale): I have been sitting here, listening quietly and behaving myself, which I always do. Suddenly, I hear that I disagree with everything that my right hon. Friend the leader of my party has said, and that I have done so on numerous occasions.

I challenge the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) to produce any statement or speech that I have ever made in which I have disagreed with my party's stance on Europe. I have disagreed with my party on many other matters, but that is not what the hon. Gentleman alleged. He said that I disagreed with my party's stance on Europe, European affairs and the European monetary system. That is not true. I agree with every word that my leader has said today.

Mr. Ashdown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his clearly expressed support. If the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley had the slightest drop of integrity, he would withdraw his accusation. However, no doubt I and the House will have to wait in vain for that.

The second objection of the Labour and Conservative parties relates to the creation of a European super-state. I agree that that is a danger, but it is my view and that of every other member state that we must struggle towards a new political distribution of power. Part of that is the concept of pooled sovereignty in Europe, but the other and most essential part is the passing of power back to our communities, and the establishment of Parliaments in Wales and in Scotland is an essential part of that distribution of power. Of all the European nations, West Germany is the most devolved. It has no difficulties with the idea of pooling some of its sovereignty at European level. Why should we?

The third objection of the two main parties is that they do not want to give power to the Eurocrats in Brussels. Again, if that were a reality rather than a myth, I would agree with it. I want the establishment of an accountable bureaucracy at the Berlaymont in Brussels. How do we do that? We do it not through the Council of Ministers, but through strengthening the powers of the European Parliament and making it accountable to our elected representatives in Europe. With extraordinary, breathtaking contradiction, both the Labour and Tory parties say that they are afraid of being part of the European Eurocracy and opposed to increasing the powers of the European Parliament.

It was with a lifting heart that I read in paragraph 10 of the Socialist manifesto the wonderful words, with which I could not disagree:

"The more important the Community becomes, the stronger the European Parliament will be. The continuation of Europe must not be left in the hands of the bureaucrats and Ministers alone: it must be a people's Europe."

Amen to that. However, there is a footnote:

"The British Labour Party disagrees and does not accept paragraph 10."

I hope that, when the spokesman for the Labour party in due course catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he will be good enough to explain to the House why the Labour party wants to keep power in the secret Council of Ministers, with the bureaucrats in Brussels, and not hand it out to the citizens of Europe as a whole.

The importance of addressing the question now being put on economic and monetary union and the Delors committee report is vital. Therefore, when I went to Brussels last week I was alarmed at the derision in which everyone in Brussels holds the extraordinary Treasury plan to accomplish economic and monetary union by a process of 10 competing currencies. As we move to the intergovernmental conference in December, it is clear to most of us who observe the scene that, if by that stage Britain has not joined the European exchange rate mechanism, or at least stated a date on which it intends to join, we may wave goodbye to any influence by the Government in the work of the IGC over the next year.

The irony is that the Treasury scheme, the spatchcock arrangement of 10 competing currencies, is no more than an extension of the exchange rate mechanism that the Government have so far refused to join. The double irony is that that system, rather than the economic and monetary union proposed by Delors, would lead to the very domination of the deutschmark which the Government say they are most afraid of.

My party does not believe every word of the Delors report. We take the position that there is a need for monetary union in Europe but agree along with every other nation except Britain, and most of the private views expressed in the Commission as well, that there is no case for the economic straitjacket which the Delors report proposes. But that is a matter of argument about the detail, not the principle. At all events, we shall be left behind in the discussion. There can be no question about the fact that we accept the need for monetary union.

Central to that issue is the question of a central bank. Again, neither I nor my party has any difficulty in accepting the concept of a central bank in Europe, constructed along approximately the same lines as the Bundesbank. The United Kingdom is isolated on that issue too: we know that both the Tory and the Labour parties are opposed to the idea of a central bank. Why? Because they will do anything to maintain in their own hands the power to fiddle the economy before an election so as to win votes. It was the Prime Minister's capacity to debauch the British economy before the last election which has been the fundamental cause of many of our economic problems today.

In making that statement about the importance of a central bank, I am not alone, because it was the view expressed in the House by the last Chancellor of the Exchequer. He believes, as I do, that we have nothing to fear from the concept of a central bank and a good deal to gain if it gets politicians' sticky hands off the capacity to distort the economy just before an election to win votes, leaving the country to pay the price later.

Another former Minister, a former Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, Sir Leon Brittan, said in a speech in Reading on 19 January that he believed that European monetary union and the central bank, which is at the heart of that proposal, provide

"a rock of low inflation and sound money at the heart of Europe."

When it comes to the choice between low inflation and sound money that the Prime Minister is always telling us about, we note that, if there is any possibility of her power being taken away, that power must come first and the proper management of inflation and the creation of a sound economy come second.

The truth is that this spurious concept of economic sovereignty is at best specious and anachronistic, and only

[Mr. Ashdown]

a crude front for the Government to express their anti-European ideas and for the Labour party to express its equally isolated and out-of-date policy.

Labour is now telling us that it is in favour of the exchange rate mechanism and wants to move towards it. Labour has done a good job of persuading the British people that it has a more positive attitude to Europe, but its conditions for joining the ERM vary only slightly from those of the Government. The Government argue that we cannot join the ERM until inflation is down to something like West Germany's level, while Labour argues that we must first ask West Germany to inflate its economy and risk its inflation increasing to our level. The truth of the matter is that there is no difference between the two—they are both clever and rather erudite ways of saying no.

There is a severe danger that Britain will be left behind and isolated in the process of monetary union. There is a will among the 11 other nations of Europe—though whether it will endure for a whole year's intergovernmental conferences is another matter—to go ahead without Britain. The establishment of monetary union will raise the whole question of a democratic deficit, which my party is committed to tackling by increasing the established powers of the European Parliament.

As to the social charter, it is interesting that Labour has now found something with which it is prepared to agree. I often think that Labour only decided that it was in favour of Europe when it realised that the Government were against it. Nevertheless, the Opposition now ascribe at least to this aspect of the European concept, perhaps in the hope that they will be able to get legislation through Brussels that they would never get through this House.

I think that they have the wrong end of the stick, because the social charter, or plan for action, is based only on broad principles. I would like to see the social charter developed into a citizen's charter. Our nation would face considerable danger if we allowed the establishment in Europe to operate the kind of corporate statism that ran Britain in the 1960s and 1970s. It is a Government's job to ensure a quality of delivery to the citizen. The social charter should be about defining the citizens' basic entitlements under that system, not be concerned with handing down blueprints for every individual country to implement.

We must not allow the social charter to lead us back to the bad old days of the corporate states. We should approach the task through a series of definitions, broad principles and entitlements, and leave national Governments with the flexibility to enact them.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Many of my right hon. and hon. Friends agree with some of the right hon. Gentleman's propositions, such as those concerning the social charter and the exchange rate mechanism. There had been divisions in all the major political parties over the years over our involvement in Europe. However, the right hon. Gentleman's speech is otherwise disappointing. Huge changes are occurring on our continent that require a visionary approach for the future, not a look back to the past. The right hon. Gentleman's petty party politicking speech does him a disservice and gives no honour to this House, which should look forward to the new Europe that is now being born—not argue and be divisive about the events of the past.

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman may recall that I began my speech by emphasising that one cannot approach the problems of eastern Europe unless one sets them in the context of developing integration in western Europe. The hon. Gentleman brings me to the related issues of eastern Europe. Incidentally, I hope that we shall soon start to call it central Europe.

The extraordinary events of recent months, which unleashed the power of the free citizen and overturned even the most brutal tyrannies and dictatorships of eastern Europe, place upon western Europe a necessity to continue with its own integration. I shall tell the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) why that is so. People such as the Prime Minister, who argue that Britain should backtrack and undo the whole process of integration and convergence in western Europe, are unwise and propose a policy that is positively dangerous. No other voice in eastern or western Europe expresses the view that is taken by the Prime Minister—and, by implication, by Labour—that the right thing to do now is to halt the process of integration.

Every other voice in the established capitals of western Europe and the new voices of eastern Europe believes that western Europe's growing integration is essential in tackling the problems ahead. The argument as to whether we should widen or deepen the European Community is nonsense. The two are not contradictory but complementary. It is only within the framework of a more closely integrated western Europe that we shall be able to overcome some of the problems unleashed in eastern Europe.

Further, in the fact of the collapsing economies of the emerging democracies in central Europe and the rocketing inflation that they face, and in the light of the power vacuums being created as the eastern European empire recedes, it takes a mind extraordinarily ignorant of history and peculiarly steeped in the illusions of British power to propose a return to a variation of the competing nationalism that afflicted Europe in the 1930s.

Central Europe is escaping from Socialism, but it is not aspiring to Conservatism. Certainly it is not aspiring to Thatcherism and to the new materialism that it breeds. I have not heard on the lips of a single person who has come through the Berlin Wall from East Germany the word "Conservative". The words I hear time and time again are "liberal" and "democracy". Those are the words on the lips of the people now seeking freedom, who want a system of politics that is built on human and political rights, the value of community, and a properly representative Government. As they call for those things, so will our nation have to answer a similar call. We must look to our own reforms to deliver the same.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): As I understand the Liberal Democrats' defence policy, if the right hon. Gentleman's party inherited Trident as a fait accompli, it would retain it to use in nuclear disarmament bargaining. If that is so, which of the central European cities would the Liberal Democrats target with Trident? Will they include President Havel's Prague or Warsaw—or Moscow, given that Boris Yeltsin achieved such a convincing majority in the recent elections there? The right

hon. Gentleman's views on Trident have undergone a process of development, but I think that they have developed in the wrong direction.

Mr. Ashdown: I shall refer later to matters of security.

How can we assist the process of reform? We must acknowledge that along with the huge opportunities it presents come immense dangers. It will require great imagination, a good deal of forward thinking, and enormous sensitivity to achieve stability out of profound change. It is important to acknowledge also that each of the emerging central European democracies is different, and that none of them can be treated the same.

The model that we should look to is that of a western Europe deepening its unity—strengthening its integration—to create an increasingly powerful magnetic pull, drawing the emerging democracies of central Europe—each adopting its own pace and a path of its own choosing—to a destiny that brings them much closer to the European Community. Some will be part of the Community; some may stay separate from it for some time to come.

This is a time for pragmatism. It is not a time for grand designs or for the handing down of blueprints, but a time at which we should use all the organisations available to us—and all the possible routes—trading agreements, articles of association and perhaps the establishment of a model such as that used by the European Free Trade Association—to bring about a closer relationship with the Community. Perhaps the European Council in Strasbourg put it best when it stated that the Community's job was to become

"the cornerstone of a new European architecture, and in its will to openness a mooring for a future European equilibrium".

We in western Europe face a tripartite task. The first part is the provision of short-term aid—and I am bound to say that both the Government and the EEC have acted with commendable urgency in responding to a pressing need. The second is the development of long-term assistance to increase the economic prosperity of the nations concerned: that will involve key elements such as lines of credit and managerial assistance, of which both the Government and the EEC seem well aware. The task is so great, and the sums involved so massive, that Governments should not be the sole providers; we must try to create a climate in which private industry will begin to invest.

We shall need a broad framework in the West within which that can take place, along with democratic economic stability in the East. The third part of the task is to assist democratisation, which—at first sight, and a very short time after its initiation—seems to be developing effectively.

I turn now to security matters. The peace of Europe in the past 40 years has been assured by two huge standing armies—armed to the nuclear teeth, eyeball to eyeball, on the brink of war and daring each other to flinch. All that appears to be over, thank God: we should now start to work with some urgency towards establishing a new means of securing the peace of what will be a Europe with a new shape.

We must accept the likelihood that that new shape, when it finally emerges, may well not include the stationing of United States and Soviet troops on what is currently described as the territory of Europe east and west. The task before us is nothing less than the rebuilding of the edifice of collective and common security in Europe, and the setting up of what may come to be known as a European regional security agreement.

Let me emphasise that the process should not—must not—include the precipitate dismantling of either NATO or, in so far as we have any influence over events, the Warsaw pact. This is not a time for unilateral action, but a time for working in concert with our European partners. I believe that—at least during the transitional phase, which may last for some time—the structure of NATO and, in so far as it holds together, that of the Warsaw pact will be vital.

First, they will form the medium through which we execute the agreements on multilateral disarmament that will be the precursors of the new shape of European security. Secondly, they will provide the one fixed point in an otherwise fast-moving world, from which we can develop economic and political integration with the nations of the East. Without that security backdrop, the process would be much more difficult.

Thirdly, the two structures will provide an essential superstructure behind which we shall have to construct the new European security arrangements. As I have said, the precipitate dismantling of that superstructure would destabilise an already difficult and delicate process.

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): Is the right hon. Gentleman really suggesting that the Hungarians, who were invaded by Soviet troops in 1956, and the Czechoslovakians, who were invaded by Soviet troops in 1968, are not right to ask for those troops to be withdrawn? Does it not constitute a natural expression of the public rejection of Communist ideology—particularly Soviet Communist ideology—for the symbols of that ideology to be withdrawn? In those circumstances, of course the Warsaw pact will change.

Mr. Ashdown: I am certainly not saying that. As the right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well, those two nations have asked the Warsaw pact troops to withdraw, and they are doing so. I did not say that they should stay. I said that the structure of NATO and—in so far as we could assist the position—that of the Warsaw pact would, in the interim, be best maintained rather than precipitately dismantled.

Mr. Foulkes: Why?

Mr. Ashdown: There are three reasons. First, they will provide the means and the mechanism for us to proceed with disarmament; secondly, they will assist as a security backdrop for the political and economic steps that must be taken; and, thirdly, they will provide the framework on which we can erect new structures.

Mr. Wareing: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not. I have been speaking for some time.

I do not believe that the creation of the new security framework can be taken at as casual a pace as we might wish. Behind that process is the insistent imperative of German reunification. One of the tragedies of the current position is the fact that the European and German clocks are ticking at a different pace and at different times, a difficult situation to which we must, however, react.

Mr. Gorbachev has told us—he said it again yesterday—that German reunification will arrive, and that there is

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nothing that we can or should do to stop it. The Soviet Union clearly thinks that reunification is all right, provided that the new Germany is neutral. But a neutral Germany would destroy the cohesion of NATO. All that emphasises the urgency of the conference on security and co-operation in Europe, particularly basket 1. We shall need not only to progress on disarmament, but to begin to build the new European security structure. As a diplomat who was involved in the Helsinki CSCE process, let me make a plea for the voice of Europe to be co-ordinated and clear: it certainly was not on the last occasion.

I have discussed a number of issues in my speech. I hope that today's debate will be wide enough to encompass both what Britain should do to establish its part in western Europe and how, through western Europe, it can play its part in developments in the East. The new democratic Europe that is now emerging, East and West, presents the key framework within which our nation must build its future.

Europe provides the litmus test that will identify Britain's political parties as parties of the future or of the past. For Labour and for Tories Europe is the crucial fault line, for both parties are equally infected with notions of post-imperial nationalism; each is impaled on outdated ideas of sovereignty, and each is incapable of rising to the challenge of a new democratic Europe that is now altering the shape of world power before our very eyes.

Liberal Democrats recognise that our future in Britain is inextricably bound up in the new democratic Europe. We perceive that this is an historic moment for all of us, and we are determined that Britain should be part of the tide that is now sweeping Europe, rather than being left behind in a stagnant backwater. We understand that Europe must be Britain's destiny: that is why I commend the motion to the House.

4.59 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Francis Maude): Let me begin by dealing with the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) about the European Community documents which were tagged to the motion for today's debate. I should make it clear that it was an initiative by the European Legislation Scrutiny Committee to which the Social and Liberal Democrats acquiesced and it in no way replaces the need for those documents to be properly debated in the fullness of time. It was not a Government initiative.

The right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), whose speech occupied the past 45 minutes or so, expressed a little surprise that no amendment was put down by the Government or by the official Opposition. It should be no surprise that the Government have no quarrel with the motion and welcome the chance to debate it. It should be no surprise that we welcome recent progress towards liberal democracy in eastern and central Europe and that we endorse the progress towards integration of the European Community because we are deeply involved in shaping that progress. All our actions show that we recognise that our future depends on

"playing a full and wholehearted role in the development of the new democratic Europe."

The right hon. Gentleman seems to believe that with fiendish cunning he has devised a motion that will expose all sorts of deep divisions in all sorts of parties. He could just as well have put down a motion saying that the House believes in motherhood and apple pie. The motion is about as challenging and probing as the "doughnut" with which he surrounded himself when he made his speech.

It is rather disappointing that in debating what are really quite great matters the right hon. Gentleman spent so much of his speech seeking to exploit narrow partisan domestic political issues. Perhaps it is inevitable that when we speak of recent events in eastern Europe we all seek fresher and ever more vivid words. We all strive against the certainty that our rhetoric cannot reach the level of the events that we have watched. After all, we have witnessed the 1989 revolution which was as profound and decisive as those of 1789 and 1848. The revolution has been mostly peaceful but sometimes bloody, driven throughout by the courage and passion of millions of our fellow Europeans who were unbowed by decades of tyranny and whose spirit survived the slow poison of the unconfined power of the state. It is wholly proper that the House of Commons should honour those who have fought for the freedoms that for us are routine. After all, the House was established so that the state should submit itself to the same rule of law that governs our people.

The epic phase of the revolution is probably now complete. It has been glorious and it has brought forth its heroes, but it was only the beginning. Democracy cannot be created overnight. We are only now beginning to accept the difficulties of running free elections when none have been held for decades; where democracy is only a folk memory—tenaciously held but not easily realised. No one believes that democracy will be entrenched as result of one free election. The world will be looking for the full recognition of human rights protected by the rule of law. The rule of law is also essential for economic freedom to develop precisely the market approach which each of those countries has espoused and there is so much to do. The work has been started but it cannot be completed quickly.

What is needed in eastern Europe today is no less than the recreation of civil society. Marx predicted the withering away of the state, but Communism sought to achieve the exact opposite—the withering away of society and the total domination of the state. Now eastern Europe has rejected Communism and wants capitalist structures, and the economic success and prosperity of the West has been a beacon. However, a market economy goes hand in hand with genuine democracy. Every day eastern Europe tells us that we cannot have one without the other and that political reform needs to be sustained by real economic change.

In the Soviet Union perestroika has demanded political change. Fundamental to that will be giving free rein to the laws of supply and demand so that prices are set not by bureaucrats but by customers paying for goods and services that can be supplied to them. Enabling that to happen in a modern market economy requires a sophisticated apparatus. A legal framework must give investors the confidence to invest. Businesses need to understand accounts and there must be real banks, operating on commercial, not political, criteria. It may not sound popular, but if they want the rule of law, they have to have lawyers. In East Germany there are only 600. Any western country of equivalent size would have well over 20 times as many.

Of course, in the old East Germany there was no use for lawyers. The authoritarian state took the decisions, and no

lawyer could help the citizen. A whole new generation of skilled people will be needed as part of the essential infrastructure of a free society. But where western societies have professional people serving the citizens, the old tyrannies had the Stasi serving the state. They do not need the Stasi any longer. They need solicitors, accountants and engineers. They need bankers and entrepreneurs with skill and flair. Free societies need their Petticoat lane, as well as their Speakers' corner. But the only markets in eastern Europe so far have been black markets and the gulfs between East and West are huge.

In West Germany, 7 per cent. of households have two telephones. In East Germany, only 7 per cent have a telephone at all, and those are party lines. To set out the size of the task is not to be depressing or to sound gloomy. The eastern European economies face an awesome task. But if their problems are to be solved, they must first be identified. By identifying the problems, we can judge how to respond.

Of course it is right that the Community should help, and it has done. Yet all the help that we give, as individual countries and together in the Community, cannot replace the determination to reform from within, and the determination to make those reforms endure. It is no kindness to suggest that our help can be a substitute for the iron determination that those countries will need.

There can be no reforms without pain, no learning without suffering, no progress without risk. We cannot do more than ease the pain, speed the learning process, hasten the progress and reduce the risk. We cannot do more but we can do that, and we are.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said when she visited Poland in November 1988 that we would not stand idly by if the Poles embarked on real political and economic reform. Well, they did that; and we have not been idle. The United Kingdom took the lead immediately in marshalling western support for Poland and subsequently for the other emerging democracies.

First, our own response to the changes has been quick and generous. We were first to provide technical assistance. In June last year we announced the establishment of a know-how fund for Poland. It has now been increased to £50 million. It is designed to provide the skills needed by the Poles to establish new political and economic structures. Other countries have now set up similar funds, but we pioneered the formula.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Did the Minister see the rather distressing television programme on Channel 4 showing the know-how process in action in which a member of the Conservative party was instructing some aspiring Members of Parliament from Budapest in how to write a manifesto? The lesson was on the lines of copying the Government's 1987 manifesto in which they promised to maintain child benefit and pay it as now. The Conservative party member explained that such a promise could mean anything at all.

The know-how funds are certainly necessary, but I am rather alarmed at the suggestion that the best thing we can give newly-democratised countries is a plague of lawyers that would be as welcome as the biblical plague of boils. In arranging those know-how funds, should not we teach them the best of our democratic system rather than the sophisticated arts of cheating and lying?

Mr. Maude: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman feels that the best contribution he can make to the debate is of that quality.

We are providing technical advice in banking, accountancy, commercial law and other essential areas. The Poles have sought our help in restructuring their aged industries. They have seen our success in breaking down state monopolies and creating competition through privatisation. While Opposition Members remain obstinately opposed, reformers in the East are embracing British Conservative ideas with enthusiasm and they recognise that that is an area in which we have terrific expertise from which they are keen to profit.

All that is targeted and practical help with real benefits for the Polish people. Grand gestures alone shorten no queues. We are also training Polish managers, and colliery managers from Poland will be visiting the United Kingdom to study the techniques used by British Coal. We may be able to help in those areas, but we are especially well-placed to help in those areas that are the life-blood of a market-based economic system and we have already committed more than £2 million to those efforts.

The Poles have also asked us for help in various non-economic areas. We are helping with local government reform, with the training of journalists and broadcasters and we are bringing members of the new generation of Polish politicians to this country for political seminars. I am grateful to those hon. Members who helped the organisers of those seminars to receive the first group of visitors last year. Thanks are due also to the BBC and to the British Council. Thanks to their skill we can help the Poles.

We have also set up a £25 million know-how fund for Hungary and the first of that money will be spent in April. Last week we announced that the know-how effort will be extended to cover East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Romania. We have shown the Community the way.

At a very early stage in the progress, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister urged the United States, Japan, West Germany, France and our other Community partners to respond equally quickly and generously to those east European countries that were firmly committed to reform. The Community responded magnificently and it has already provided aid, trade and lending assistance to Hungary and Poland and more is promised. We have played a major role in stimulating the many forms of unilateral help which Poland is now receiving.

Mr. Waving: It is highly commendable that our Government should provide assistance in eastern Europe. However, I believe that we are miles behind the West Germans with regard to aid and trade assistance. The Minister has referred to the aid that is being offered. Does that come from the existing Overseas Development Administration budget? Are resources being diverted from the Third world or, as should be the case, are we increasing the percentage that we spend on overseas aid, perhaps up to the level it was under the last Labour Government? Are new resources being found to assist the Poles, the Czechs, East Germans and the other peoples in eastern Europe?

Mr. Maude: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the money to which I have referred is extra money. It takes nothing from the existing aid budget. The hon. Gentleman referred to our efforts compared with efforts in other

[Mr. Maude]

countries. This country was very quick and imaginative to find ways to provide immediate practical help for the emerging democracies, and we will continue to do that. The right hon. Member for Yeovil has recognised that.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Maude: No, I want to make progress if I may because we are already some way into the debate.

At the Paris summit of the Group of Seven last July, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister pushed very vigorously the proposal that the European Commission should co-ordinate western assistance to Hungary and Poland. From that grew the Group of 24, the OECD countries, through which a huge amount of assistance is now being provided. That led to a $1 billion Polish stabilisation fund which was crucial to the structural reform of the Polish economy. Ours was the first contribution to that fund and it permitted the fund to come on line when it was needed.

We have urged that the G24 exercise should be extended so that the same co-ordinated western effort can support Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Romania and East Germany. We have looked ahead to how the Community should develop its relations with eastern Europe.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has suggested to his ministerial colleagues in the Community the criteria for such an enhanced relationship. First, support should be appropriate to the level of practical and economic reform being put in place in each of those countries.

Secondly, political reform needs a political response and we should be ready for a full political dialogue with eastern Europe. Those countries should be encouraged to accede to the European convention on human rights. They should be welcomed as full members of the Council of Europe as soon as they qualify. They should develop links with national Parliaments and there could be a particular role for the European Parliament.

Thirdly, we should be open to a future relationship which neither leads to nor excludes membership of the Community. The Community has taken up the challenge magnificently.

Comparisons have been made with the Marshall plan. However, it is worth noting that the total aid so far pledged for each person in Poland and Hungary is already roughly that provided by the United States to western Europe under the Marshall plan. We will begin work on the new programme as soon as we practically can.

That the European Community responded quickly and generously is a measure of its growth and maturity. That the United Kingdom led its response is a measure of our central influence within the Community. Some have said that reform in eastern Europe poses a dilemma for the Community. Should it deepen or broaden itself? We see no such dilemma. It must do both.

There has already been integration apace. Quite properly, in December the Community set the completion of the single market as its top priority to make European union increasingly a reality for our people.

Mr. Garel: In addition to the three criteria which my hon. Friend has already spelt out, should not there be a fourth criterion to take account of the possibility of a breakdown in any of those countries as a result of political or social unrest leading to riots or even civil war? Although no one wants that eventuality, it is not impossible. Will the aid which my hon. Friend has described continue to be pumped into those countries if there is a protracted civil war?

Mr. Maude: My hon. Friend raises a possibility which we all earnestly pray will not occur. It is possible to envisage circumstances in which that might happen, and if that occurred the donor countries would have to consider their actions. However, we have made it clear that our aid depends on proper political and economic reforms. The aid is not unconditional and it is intended to entrench the reforms. The circumstances which my hon. Friend postulates would be inconsistent with those reforms continuing.

I was referring to the priority which the Community set unanimously in December in which it subscribed to the completion of the single market. We have seen measures to reduce air fares, to free travel, to increase consumer choice and to reduce costs. Those measures are genuinely intended to create a citizens' Europe to which the right hon. Member for Yeovil referred.

People increasingly see that our single market is being founded on the rejection of centralism, without bureaucracy or prescription. We are seeing a genuine people's Europe emerging, not a bureaucrat's or politician's Europe. We are seeing a single market which entrenches precisely those virtues of liberal markets that our neighbours in eastern Europe are seeking.

We are seeing the growth of political co-operation in the Community with no loss of sovereignty, but on an agreement that the 12 nation states should act in unison to make their common voice more powerful than individual voices could ever be. We are seeing the growth of economic and monetary integration to reduce costs, to help business and to take forward the integration of Europe. In all those profoundly important areas, Britain has led and we are showing the way forward.

I sometimes see headlines claiming, "Britain on the sidelines". However, they come only from people who do not know which way the Community is going. They come from people who do not know the touchline from the try line. If they were looking in the right direction, they would know that we are not on the sidelines—we are ahead and that is where we will stay.

The single market is following the pattern set jointly by ourselves and by the European Commission. It is being driven forward by our joint determination. Political co-operation was our initiative and we have been determined to see it succeed. In economic and monetary union, no country is more advanced than ours. No country has implemented more of stage I of the Delors report than we have. We are the only country to have put forward our own proposals for further development. Integration is proceeding apace, within the treaty of Rome.

The Single European Act provides great scope for further integration, involving no further transfer of sovereignty, and encroaching no further on this House's powers. Within our treaty as it stands, deepening of the Community there can be, and there should be. But there must be broadening, too. This is no time for introspection —no time to turn inward.

Our neighbours and our allies clamour to draw closer to the Community. We must respond to that. There must

be an enhanced relationship with the countries of the European Free Trade Association. We want closer links, and faster. We have led the way. The Community must make agreements with each country in eastern Europe, to suit each case, and to reflect the different and changing needs of each.

On the "Europe beyond the Atlantic" to which the Prime Minister referred in her speech at Bruges, we should go forward with the proposals for the new transatlantic partnership that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary set out last week.

There are those who urge that the Community should enlarge. That will not happen in the near future, nor does it need to. But, having seen an end to one division of Europe, the Community should not create another.

I do not think that the Community can insist for ever that Europe will be divided between its present 12 members and the others. If others wish to join and can meet the Community's demanding standards, we should not prevent them.

As I said at the start of the debate, it is significant that amendments have been tabled neither by Her Majesty's Government nor by Her Majesty's Opposition.

Mr. Ashdown: The Minister has not yet outlined the Government's policy on monetary union as proposed by the other 11 members. Will he spend a moment on that topic before concluding his speech?

Mr. Maude: The right hon. Gentleman was not present in November, when we had a full-day debate on economic and monetary union. Had he bothered to turn up and listened to the views of the House of Commons on this matter, he would have realised that, as is so often the case, he and his party are the only ones in step—everyone else in the House of Commons is out of step with him.

I will tell the right hon. Gentleman precisely our views. We can make huge progress towards economic and monetary union without changing the treaty and without the need for an intergovernmental conference by implementing stage I of the Delors report, on which we are moving forward faster than any other country in Europe. We have precisely set out our proposals for moving beyond that in the Treasury paper. I assume that the right hon. Gentleman has seen it and has understood it, although that is by no means certain. He will have seen that we have set out how progress can be made, not more slowly but more quickly than under the Delors report, and with no further encroachment on the powers of the House, towards which the right hon. Gentleman takes a remarkably cavalier view.

If I criticise the motion, it is only that it urges the Government to do what they are already doing and have been doing for some time. I believe that the present success of the European Community owes a great deal to our leadership, to our determination to secure proper reforms, and to our readiness to look out as well as in.

We have helped to fashion a Community that has been a beacon to eastern Europe. We are now leading its response to the changes that have swept through eastern Europe. The Europe that we aim at is a Europe of nations, without nationalism—a Europe of diversity without division. We shall achieve it.

5.23 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): The Labour party greatly welcomes the opportunity for the House of debate the European Community and eastern Europe. Apparently, it is the one subject on which the hon. Member for Rochdale (Sir C. Smith) and his leader agree. I must apologise to the hon. Member for Rochdale if I have missed that uniqueness.

Although the House discussed an almost identical topic just over a month ago, events in eastern Europe have moved and are moving so rapidly that much of what was said then has already been overtaken by those events.

I shall deal briefly with only two principal matters. As the Minister rightly said—for once I can agree with him—the membership of the exchange rate mechanism, the powers of the European Parliament, economic and monetary union, the social charter and many of the matters that were raised by the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) have been discussed many times. The Government and the Opposition have clearly outlined their policies, but, unfortunately, the right hon. Member for Yeovil was not able to grace the House with his presence.

I shall deal with the three interrelated matters of the transition from Communism to democracy—the deepening and widening of the European Community, and German unity—and then I shall say a few words about defence implications.

Opposition Members unreservedly welcome the end of Communism, and the overthrow of tyrannies in eastern Europe, and the courage of people who have stood up against tyranny—particularly young people, students, intellectuals and others. Therefore, it is a travesty for some mischievous Conservative Members to try to equate Communism with democratic Socialism. Socialism and liberty are inseparable. It is an insult to democratic Socialists the world over who have fought and died for freedom and democracy to imply otherwise.

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): Will the hon. Gentleman define Socialism as he understands it, and explain where Socialism and liberty have survived jointly?

Mr. Foulkes: I said that I would be brief. It would take much longer to do what the hon. Gentleman asks. However, I will see him afterwards—he and I are good friends—and I shall go through the examples.

The people of eastern Europe are certainly rejecting Communism, but, as the right hon. Member for Yeovil said—rightly, on this occasion—they are equally certainly not opting for Thatcherism. They are not opting for an unrestrained market. Instead, they are opting for a mixed economy, as J. K. Galbraith said in an excellent address at my old university at Edinburgh only last week. This spring we will see a welcome procession of democratic elections from March until June as democracy blossoms in eastern Europe. Opposition Members unreservedly welcome that.

However, the transformation from Communism to democracy is not easy. Elections cannot be delayed for too long, because instability during the hiatus between the end of Communism and the elections could become uncontrollable. Equally, we accept that time is needed for new parties to be formed and to organise. There is a dilemma facing people in each country in eastern Europe.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is no need for Labour Members to be on the defensive? We fought against Stalinist tyrannies. For example, last year we went to the East German and Czech embassies, protesting at arrest and detention. From the very beginning of the Labour party, we have been opposed to every form of dictatorship or totalitarian rule. Is it not the case that Tory Members have often defended dictatorships—for example, Hitler and Mussolini before the war and the Greek colonels since, not to mention what is happening in South Africa? It is they who should be on the defensive when it comes to democracy, certainly not ourselves.

Mr. Foulkes: My hon. Friend is correct. We are also continuing to oppose tyranny in China, where it appears to be business as usual for Conservative Members. However, Opposition Members still recall the young student who stood up against the tank and fought for democracy. We do not erase that picture from our minds too quickly. I am not apologising in any way.

As the transition from Communism to democracy takes place, eastern European countries will need our help. Opposition Members welcome the know-how funds, and we are playing our part in them. The Secretary of State recently announced their development and expansion to other countries. However, the pace of events in eastern Europe is overtaking the capacity of the know-how funds to offer help. We urge the Government to move their efforts up several gears and several levels.

Mr. Maude: I remind the hon. Gentleman of what I said. We have just extended our know-how effort to embrace all the countries of eastern Europe without a limit on funds.

Mr. Foulkes: I said that we recognise the extension of the funds. I shall come to that in a moment and give some explanations.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) has called for a new Marshall plan for eastern Europe. Such an initiative was endorsed by professor Susan Strange in two recent articles in the *International Herald Tribune*. She said that it should involve a central fund for credit, trade assistance and other help of that nature. Major economic assistance from Britain and other western European countries should be co-ordinated. Such assistance should be determined largely by the newly elected Governments in eastern Europe. I hope that, in his reply, the Minister will tell us that he is prepared to move beyond the important technical assistance of the know-how funds to much wider, broader and fundamental assistance.

The new Governments in eastern Europe should be allowed to develop their own democratic, economic and social systems and to protect and develop their countries' cultural identities. It is vital to avoid new forms of dependency, such as we have seen, develop regrettably in the Third world. As my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) rightly said, it is vital that our help to eastern Europe should not be at the expense of our assistance to the Third world. That assistance will be even more important with the development of the economies of eastern Europe. Because I have known the Government over the past 10 years, I fear that, despite their assurances that new money will be made available, the planned increases in assistance to poorer countries may be forgone and assistance to other areas may be squeezed. I urge the Minister to assure us that that will not be the case. I warn him that we shall watch it carefully.

Britain has much to offer eastern Europe because of our experience of pluralist democracy, free access to the media, autonomous trade unions and a plethora of independent non-governmental bodies which are all still relatively vigorous in spite of—in some cases, because of—the ravages of the past 10 years. The message from both Conservative and Opposition Members should be that we are eager and willing to offer many types of assistance to the emerging democracies.

We also support the initiatives of the European Community as an institution to assist eastern Europe. We have watched with interest moves towards closer political and economic links between east and west European countries. East Germany is a special case, and I shall refer to it later, but elsewhere in eastern Europe democracy will need to be established and consolidated and economies developed and stabilised before integration into the Community can be contemplated. Clearly, other forms of association are both possible and desirable.

In Germany, the events of the past few weeks have been the most dramatic of all. Parties and unions in both East and West Germany are already joining in all-German federations. Some 3,000 workers who live in east Berlin have taken part-time jobs in the West. They earn more than they would by working full time at home. Last Saturday, at an amazing event, the great West German, indeed the world Socialist leader, Willy Brandt, addressed a tumultuous throng of 100,000 East Germans. It has become clear that the boundary between East and West Germany no longer exists. German unity is inevitable and we must work with that inevitability. Britain can take a lead in responding positively to that.

As a democratic Socialist, I welcome the leading role that the SPD is playing in establishing a new Germany. It is important that the leadership of Germany show its acceptance of the 1937 borders with Poland and the Soviet Union in order to reassure the leaders and the peoples of those two countries.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): The hon. Gentleman endorses the policies of the SPD. Will he comment on some of the implications of the victory of Oskar Lafontaine in the Saarland at the weekend? He appeared to win through an opportunist attempt to stir up feeling against East Germans coming into the country.

Mr. Foulkes: I endorse the SPD initiative and the new moves towards East Germany. I refer specifically to Willy Brandt and I make no apology for doing so.

I wish to move on rapidly to the defence implications of events in eastern Europe. I fear that the Government's response to developments in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe is both misguided and misjudged. The Soviet Union has already announced in 1988 that it will reduce its army by 500,000 troops. A similar number in Warsaw pact countries have an uncertain future. The conventional forces in Europe treaty will eliminate two thirds of Warsaw pact tanks and thousands of aircraft.

We all know that the Soviet Union is preoccupied with internal divisions and urgently needs resources to be transferred from expenditure on arms to boost its economy. Increasingly, the Soviet Union is becoming a

most unlikely aggressor. Yet the unbelievable response of the British Government, announced in the expenditure review yesterday, is to add £1 billion to our defence expenditure next year, with real increases in spending over the next three years. The British Government are increasing arms expenditure, unlike Belgium, the Netherlands and even the United States of America.

The Labour party believes that there is an urgent need for a wide-ranging defence review to cut expenditure and take account of the greatly diminished threat. Perhaps the Minister could confirm the report in *The Times* today that the Prime Minister is to head a Cabinet meeting to look into new defence strategy. If that is the case, we welcome it in principle but we have some doubts about the attitude of the person who will head the committee.

The right hon. Member for Yeovil spoke about continuing the existing pacts. Beyond that, the Labour party believes that the new architecture of Europe will need an entirely new system of security. We welcome the initiatives of Mr. Gorbachev and Mr. Mitterrand to consider a pan-European security system involving all 35 countries in a new Helsinki process. Although we welcome the Foreign Secretary's rhetoric about turning tanks into tractors, we cannot see evidence of it in Government expenditure plans or the Prime Minister's statements.

We urge the Government to go even further than the Foreign Secretary's rhetoric and turn missiles into machines. It is grotesque and unacceptable while revolutions are taking place throughout Europe for the Prime Minister to press ahead with modernising short-range nuclear weapons. At whom are they targeted —Vaclav Havel, Lech Walesa? Perhaps if the hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) catches your eye, Mr. Speaker, he will tell us. He is one of the remaining cold warriors in Europe.

The Prime Minister buries her head in the sand. That not only wastes resources and maintains tension but delays the forward planning necessary in the arms industry to diversify in order to protect and maintain employment in more socially useful production.

Finally, unless our present Government stop trying to make petty party political capital out of the monumental events in eastern Europe, broaden their vision and end the suspicion that isolates them as Europe's sole remaining cold warrior, Britain will have failed to play the positive part in these monumental developments in Europe which our background and history should determine that we play.

5.39 pm

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): The right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) is to be congratulated on tabling the motion, topical as it is in relation to the momentous events that are now revealing themselves throughout Europe. I suppose that he is to be admired for doing so with arguments which, although not entirely acceptable to me, have the deferential support of his hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Sir C. Smith), because for any Liberal leader to secure that characteristic deserves memory. The right hon. Gentleman said that he thought that it was time for taking a view and a vision of Europe.

I apologise for the fact that I shall not follow some of the more detailed argument of the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes). Instead, I shall put to the House one or two general propositions that are properly the property of Back-Bench contributions to the debate, liberated as we are from the more cautious considerations of the Foreign Office or its shadows.

I should like to reflect on the visionary comments of a generation ago, when the present European Community was being established, when it was much in the mind of Jean Monnet some time after the war, before the Messina treaty and the Rome arrangements were undertaken. He said:

"In my view Western Europe is a vacuum, on either side of which are two great dynamic forces of Communism and American Capitalism."

From that analysis a whole concept has developed of a continental state that comprises western Europe with a high degree of economic and political integration to match the existing defence arrangements that had been essayed in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. I do not make this comment in any sense of hostility, but whatever the virtue and validity of that analysis at the time of its making, it reveals nothing of the Europe that we now see. It reveals nothing of the Europe that preoccupies this debate and the debate outside the House and nothing of the kind of institutions that are more appropriate for what is now emerging.

Therefore, I should like to share with the House my own observations of the two great characteristics that I think will cast their shadow—or their inspiration—over European debates in the immediate years ahead.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the fact that the Europe of today bears no resemblance to that described by Monnet is very much due to the implementation of Monnet's vision of the structures of Europe that should take the place of that vacuum?

Mr. Biffen: I am not trying to be clever, but the answer is yes and no. I have a qualified agreement with the Monnet analysis and a qualified acceptance of the present characteristics of western Europe as derived from the treaty of Rome and the changes that it secured. However, that is only a partial answer. So many other factors have operated outside Europe that have had inevitable hammer-blow consequences on the way in which we have developed that any answer given to that question must be much more than a mere couple of sentences, as the hon. Gentleman must know.

I now turn to the two characteristics that I think will cast a shadow. The first is the reunification of Germany. Most hon. Members will accept that that reunification has been impending. There may have been arguments about the timing and about the modalities, but most hon. Members are past believing that two distinctive Germanys, operating to different economic, social and political judgments, are in prospect for the next decade. If we accept that German reunification is to be a reality of the new Europe, I hope that we shall do so with a full heart and not grudgingly.

In my judgment, the behaviour of the German Federal Republic since the second war has been wholly exemplary. The fact that it has not sought to exercise a political authority in any sense commensurate with its economic clout, but has preferred to operate in partnership with France, should not deny us the belief that German politics operates with great maturity. They need no patronising comments from people in this country or elsewhere.

[Mr. Biffen]

I have not been a particular Germanophile. My right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine), who was in his place a moment ago, has a great record of association with German parliamentarians, so I am happy to place on record the fact that I am making these comments in his spiritual presence.

One can always try to unravel history to the advantage of one country or another, but I believe that the decision after the first war in the Versailles treaty provision 231 to identify German guilt for the first war is exactly the kind of insensitivity that haunts those who come after the authors of such attitudes.

I observe a new, dynamic and cohesive force—cohesive in its own internal disciplines—now existing in central Europe, with new opportunities to direct its energies. "Drang nach Osten" is a phrase that will come back to us as we see German economic penetration to the East, German aid to the East and the recreation of traditional German ambitions towards the East.

As I make my second observation in the presence of the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), I confess that I had already formed my argument before reading Conor Cruise O'Brien's article in *The Times*. I make that point in self-defence. Although German reunification may be generally accepted, there are still great areas of dubiety, and I entertain great pessimism for the future of Mr. Gorbachev and the Soviet Union as currently constructed. I believe that the nationalism that has been released in the Warsaw pact countries will return to be effective in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldavia, the Transcaucasian territories and possibly in the Ukraine. It is a formidable list, but there is plenty of circumstantial evidence for believing that those pressures are now at work in the Soviet Union.

When one reflects that 18 per cent. of the Soviet population is Islamic and that 40 per cent. of the current Soviet conscript draft comes from the Islamic republics, one realises the lack of internal cohesion in the Soviet Union today. One possible reaction is that Russian nationalism will arise in response to the Soviet Union's losses in the minority, in the Islamic and in the non-Russian republics. Some evidence of the nationalist movement Pamyat can already be observed. I do not want to comment on that because I can do so only tentatively, but we would be extremely foolish to suppose that the Soviet Union, as currently constructed, can enjoy an element of stability in the new Europe. We have not seen the end of that story and no one can be quite sure where it will conclude.

That takes me to the business of how the European Community and its institutions can adapt to meet that challenge. If I can plagiarise Jean Monnet, we need structures that can contain both a reunified Germany and possibly a humiliated, nationalistic Russia, which would be a potential danger on the eastern approaches. Therefore, in trying to secure the widest possible political co-operation, we should look at the institutions that we have today. My hon. Friend the Minister mentioned the Council of Europe and that is a start, but that wider political co-operation has to derive from the Council of Ministers and from the European Community.

The right hon. Member for Yeovil and the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley spoke of defence. At this stage, not much can be said that is constructive, but I have an instinct that the influence of the United States will gradually diminish in the military councils of NATO. Therefore, we have to think in terms of European collective security, covering the European members of NATO and the Warsaw pact. That challenge will require the most delicate essay in statesmanship. The future of Europe will be more related to collective security and the ability to live to the old political structures—I know not whether before 1914 or 1939—than to maximising economic growth. That is the language of yesterday's Europe, not the challenge of tomorrow's.

Trade is still the third cornerstone factor in the new Europe. As this debate has been initiated by the SLD, I shall quote the old Liberal adage that if trade cannot cross frontiers, armies will. That is adage enough to secure the efforts of the House to ensure the maximum trade operating throughout Europe, from the Atlantic to the Urals. However, let us be clear about one thing. That is not just the simple trade of the treaty of Rome. We are taking within our ambit countries whose economies are substantially different from those operating within the countries of the existing Community.

Let me give the House just one example. Both in this country and in western Europe we are increasingly laying major environmental charges upon our industry and commerce. A Bill on that matter is passing through Parliament this very Session. There is no such comparable environmental care in eastern Europe. Much of the industry there operates under the most reprehensible environmental standards. Despite that, we shall expect our industry and commerce to compete where there is no even playing ground. We have to find some way to increase and improve trade across the wider Europe that is now emerging.

There are no blueprints for these changes. There is no immediate revised treaty of Rome. It will be much more subtle and difficult. Those of my hon. Friends who have been to eastern Europe recently say that the countries of the Warsaw pact in the north are quite different from those in the south. Our whole mentality on east Europe and west Europe had better be replaced by one on north Europe and south Europe when we try to devise ways to cope with these changes. One modest, often neglected, mechanism that can reconcile such varying economies is flexibility in exchange rates. That is why what often seems to be the settled argument of last month or last year comes back to haunt us with new challenges and opportunities. At least the House is privileged to live in a time of challenge and opportunity.

5.53 pm

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): There is little doubt that historians will compare 1989 with 1848, and that it will be seen as the springtime of nations. We are seeing the revival of nationhood, and there is nothing wrong with that. I agree with the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) that we must welcome the unification of Germany and not be grudging about that. We are seeing the flourishing of nations. How we handle the emergence of a unified Germany is the most significant issue. How we handle it over the next few weeks and months will be particularly crucial. I have no doubt that this will change the nature of Europe.

I believe that a united Germany will be a member of the European Community. After all, since 1956 the protocol annexed to the treaty of Rome has made it clear that the DDR and the FRG were, for all trading purposes, to be seen as one nation. I believe that unification will take place far faster than any of us had imagined. It is right that that should happen, because that commitment to nationhood, and the wealth in the Federal Republic, can bind the two into a unified country far quicker than the pace of any of the changes that will take place in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland.

It is in our interests that a market economy and a true democracy are established in one of the countries that were hitherto Soviet Communist satellites as quickly as possible. That can be done in three years, and unification will effectively take place this year, although the constitution requirements may follow later. If that can be done, it will make it easier for Czechoslovakia, Hungary and even Poland to come into the European Community within the decade.

I do not know whether they will come into the Community. Much will depend on their determination to move to a market economy and the speed with which they can establish a real and genuine democracy. I agree with the Minister that democracy takes time to bed in. Such changes do not develop within a matter of months, and there are already worrying signs in Romania of the spectre of Fascism returning. We cannot be sure that any of these countries will find it easy to move—Poland, for example will find it hard to adjust to the market economy and will need all the help that it can get—but the fulcrum of these changes will be a unified Germany.

That unified Germany will be a member of the European Community, but how it sees its defence relationships is still an open question. It needs to be made clear to Mr. Gorbachev that we will not accept any country dictating the pattern of defence alliances. That is a matter for self-determination by a unified Germany. I hope that a unified Germany will remain a member of NATO, but I note that Hans-Dietrich Genscher said the other day that he thought that it would be impossible for a unified Germany to be a member of NATO. If it is not, I hope that it will be a signatory to the Brussels treaty, a member of the Western European Union and committed under that treaty to come to the defence of any of its fellow signatories.

I think that many Germans will be reluctant to give up the relationship with the United States that they know has been a central factor in their prosperity and security. We in NATO must look seriously at whether it is reasonable to ask a united Germany to have on its soil United States forces. After all, although we do not wish to have the Soviet Union dictating the pattern of German unification, and certainly not imposing neutrality, we have to take account of Soviet concerns.

If, as I believe, Soviet troops are withdrawn quickly from Czechoslovakia and Hungary, it is certainly in our interests that they come out of eastern Germany. It would be foolish to have a unified Germany with Soviet troops in the old part of east Germany and United States troops in the old part of west Germany.

It is open to argument whether it is right to provoke the Soviet Union by even trying to have United States troops in a unified Germany. Would it not be better for NATO, of its own volition—not as a result of an agreement with the Soviet Union or involving the Warsaw pact—to say that a unified Germany would not have US forces stationed on its soil, and thereby no nuclear forces either from the United States?

This does not mean, however, that the United States would pull out of a defence commitment to Europe. It is essential that we bridge the Atlantic. It is strongly in the interests of European development that the United States link its forces into Europe. American aircraft could still be deployed in the United Kingdom and in Italy. United States ships and submarines would still come into European ports and exercise in the western Atlantic and the Mediterranean. With smaller forces, Canada should also remain.

NATO will stay; the only question is whether Germany will be a member of it. I think and hope that it will be. But we must not offer the provocation of keeping US forces on the soil of a united Germany, given that the Soviet Union is withdrawing from all the satellite nations. A unified Germany without United States troops can still have the troops of Holland, Belgium and the United Kingdom stationed on its soil—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] That might be prudent, because it would allow the German army to be smaller.

One aspect that worries people about a unified Germany is the idea of its having a large force. Were the forces of East and West Germany to link, a massive army would be formed. Many Germans would prefer a more modest army, relying, through the WEU, on links with other countries such as Belgium, Holland and Britain. That makes sense, and it would link a unified Germany to the deterrent strategy of the WEU, which is nuclear as well as conventional. That would mean that the United Kingdom and France would retain their nuclear weapons and be able to exercise their nuclear-carrying aircraft at the invitation of Germany, should they wish to do so They could even station them permanently in Germany, but there would be no United States forces.

I hope that Germany will choose membership of NATO as well as of the European Community, although I would settle for membership of the WEU. I would be extremely concerned if a united Germany chose to be neutral. How we handle that question in the coming weeks and months is of fundamental importance. We must not be grudging in our political acceptance of the fact that a unified Germany will exercise its power responsibly. We must not be jealous of its economic strength, which will be needed in East Germany and which will be generously applied to other countries.

The European Community and the Government have already demonstrated a great deal of imagination and foresight in the way in which they have tried to deepen the commitment to a market economy and to pluralist democracy in the countries of eastern Europe, but much more will have to be done.

It is time we told Mr. Gorbachev that a European common home is alive and well and living in the European Community. If we want to build on the common home, we should enlarge the Community—of that there is no doubt—but the pace of enlargement remains open to question. We enlarged the Community from nine to 12 countries with political factors very much in mind. The economic development of Spain, Portugal and Greece had not progressed as far as we should have liked, but because we wanted to buttress the new democracies of those countries,

[Dr. David Owen]

which were emerging from Fascism, we took a political risk and enlarged the Community more quickly than we might otherwise have done.

We may find towards the end of the 1990s that the economies of Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland have not made quite as rapid progress as we should like, but we shall want to buttress their democracies by accepting them into the Community. There is no doubt that, if Austria wants to join after 1992, it will; likewise Norway.

None of us quite knows what is happening inside the USSR. I am afraid that I share the pessimism of the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North. The great danger in this country, in the media and elsewhere has been that of giving Gorbachev rave reviews even though he is in serious trouble in his own country. Gorbachev has not delivered the market economy—he has come nowhere near doing so. I am somewhat pessimistic about anyone's capacity to turn the Russian economy into a market economy. Nor has Gorbachev moved in any significant way towards democracy; but the nationhood of which I spoke earlier is certainly flowering in the USSR—the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, a phrase which Leszek Kolakowsky said contained a lie in every word. The Soviet Union has always contained nations forced into it and resenting that fact.

What shall we do about Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania? It will be very hard for any Soviet leader to allow those countries to become independent—two months ago, I should have said that they would never be allowed independence. Now, I am beginning to wonder. The Russian empire is in such serious decline that it arguably may not be able to hold republics such as Moldavia, Georgia and Armenia. They may all seek independence. We may be witnessing not just the decline of the Soviet empire but the dismemberment of the USSR.

What does this mean for the enlargement of the European Community? Instead of a Community of 24 or more nations, a wiser grouping might be a Community of about 16 nations, including Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and East Germany—because of unification. There might also be a Baltic community, comprising Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, Sweden and possibly Norway. That grouping might maintain a close relationship with the European Community. A Black sea community might also develop, comprising Romania, Moldavia, Bulgaria, Turkey, and Armenia.

I have never believed that Turkey is a European country. I know that associate membership of the EC is meant to carry with it a commitment to full membership, but we should not see Turkey as an early candidate for enlarging the Community. If we outline how we see the enlargement of the European Community, we can lay claim to its being the European common home. We can have trading and economic relations with the Soviet Union, which might join us in the Council of Europe, a good forum in which to come together. However, the pace of development should be set by the democratic nations —by us.

I urge the House not to get into the habit of thinking that these decisions should be taken in the framework of the conference on security and co-operation in Europe; or to believe that we have a vested interest in retaining the Warsaw pact, which is loathed by countries such as Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia. When they have attained their freedom, who are we to tell them to keep that organisation?

We must be self-confident enough not to be exclusive, but to open out our democracy all the time to a wider Europe. We must do so of our own volition and strength. There will be greater integration, but the European Community will respect nationhood. I hope that the federalists will stop seeking the end of nationhood and cease their drive towards a Community that tries to stifle the most basic political factor in our democratic development—the sense of belonging to a nation.

This is not the same as nationalism. Of course there are institutions in the EC that override nationhood: there is a pooling of sovereignty. We know how much we can poll at various times while retaining our nationhood. NATO had an integrated command structure, yet we retained our nationhood. We shall move towards greater European economic and monetary union. But we shall want to retain nationhood—and there is nothing wrong with that.

I have been a committed supporter of the United Kingdom's membership of the European Community since the first public political speech I ever made—in 1962. I have never been a federalist, and I resent the mood in Britain that, somehow, if one is not a federalist, one is not a European. I have arguments and differences with the Government about some of their attitudes to the European Community, but I will not be told that I am a bad European because I believe that the United Kingdom can retain its identity within a European Community.

Retaining identity will not result in a weaker Europe. We will not get a larger Europe by spurning nationhood, nor will we get a cohesive Europe if we hold on to the outdated views about national decision making. It will evolve. The evolution of the European Community is the most exciting thing that has happened. As it has been debated in this House, all of us have changed. I do not believe that 20 years ago the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North could have made the speech that he made today, and I doubt that 20 years ago I could have made the speech that I am making now. We have all adapted and changed.

In the European Community, we are building a unique structure. Forcing it into a mould marked "United States" would be ludicrous. It is utterly ludicrous to believe that, somehow, the European Community states will be like California, Montana and Oregon. The European Community that we are developing is unique, basic—[AN HON. MEMBER: "Bogus."] I hear someone say, "Bogus." I read in the *New Statesman* the other day an exact simile from Professor David Marquand, who likened the European Community development to California, Oregon and Montana. The fact of the matter is that the European Community that we are building will not be matched by any other institution in the world, because Europe has an identity of its own. It is the retention of that identity that will embrace central Europe, that will go wider than the Community of the 12. It is that which we should build —and build on the basis of a united Germany.

6.12 pm

Mr. Churchill (Davyhulme): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen). I certainly join him in his call to the NATO Allies in Europe—including a united Germany when it comes

into being, which, like him, I suspect will be sooner rather than later—to retain the commitment to the concept of collective security. It was the absence of that commitment in the 1930s that led this continent directly towards disaster. Further, I join the right hon. Member in his support for the concept of the United Kingdom and the other nations of Europe retaining their national identity within the scope of the European Community.

Everybody under the age of 50 has lived his entire life under the reality or the threat of world war. Suddenly the scene has been transformed out of all recognition. Without question, the changes that are taking place in the Soviet Union and the revolution that has taken place in eastern Europe in recent months are the most positive and encouraging developments of my lifetime. Never have the prospects for peace been brighter than they are today. For millions of our fellow Europeans a 50-year nightmare, at the hands of the Nazis and then of the Red Army and its police-state puppets is drawing to a close. For the first time, these betrayed and battered people have a prospect of securing control of their own destiny through the establishment of democratic governments and the withdrawal of the invader from their soil.

In this regard, the leader of the Liberal Democrats, most astonishingly, made it clear that it is his belief—I am not sure that it is a belief shared by his colleagues—that the Soviet occupying forces and the tanks of the Red Army should remain in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland. Since the day Gladstone gave the order for the bombardment of Alexandria, no more illiberal statement has been uttered by one who claims to be a liberal politician.

Mr. Ashdown: I can only assume that the hon. Gentleman was not listening. This calumny was put forward also by the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport, (Dr. Owen), and the hon. Gentleman knows that I quite specifically denied it. That is not my intention, nor were those my words. It is perfectly clear that those nations—Hungary, Czechoslovakia and others—who want the troops of the USSR to be removed should be able to require their removal. That is what should happen. What I said was that in the interim period, until we believe that new European security agreements which would accommodate, for instance, the matter of the reunification of Germany are possible, the two structures currently in existence—NATO and the Warsaw pact—would be best kept in place. That does not mean that there would be Warsaw pact troops in Hungary, any more than it means that the preservation of NATO—and the right hon. Member for Devonport said that it was not so—necessarily requires the retention of United States troops in Germany.

Mr. Churchill: I am delighted to have the right hon. Gentleman's clarification on that point. I think that few hon. Members followed him in his suggestion that it was desirable that the Warsaw pact should be maintained. That is what he said.

The implications of these developments are far-reaching for the future of NATO, which will have to rethink both its strategy and its deployment, and for the future of the two Germanys, where reunification is inevitable. I regard reunification as wholly desirable, provided—and it is an important proviso—that it is firmly based on democratic principles. Of course, the very prospect of German reunification will send shivers down the spines of an older generation in this country and elsewhere. However, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) said in his excellent contribution, the fact is that West Germany—the Federal Republic—has proved its democratic credentials, and there is no doubt that it could steer a reunified Germany on to the path of democratic development.

Of course, the implications of this revolution for the European Community are also profound. We must see that the horizons of Europe and of the Community are widened to include the nations of eastern and central Europe. We must welcome those nations—we do welcome them—with open arms as partners in the building of this free and democratic Europe, provided that it is their wish to join in that adventure. Those people, like Mr. Delors, who favour a European unity based on centralism will have to revise their views, as the people of eastern Europe are most unlikely to want to be involved in anything that smacks of central control from distant places. We must build a structure of European unity based on respect for the national sovereignty of member states as expressed through their national Parliaments. In that respect, I echo what the right hon. Member for Devonport said. That is the way forward in building a European Community from the Atlantic to the Urals.

I should like to address the immediate needs of the peoples of eastern Europe, especially in three particulars that stand out. First, millions of our fellow Europeans are literally starving and in urgent need of food aid on a far larger scale than that so far undertaken by the European Community. Secondly, the economies of many east European states are on their beam ends. Even at sacrifice to ourselves, we must extend large scale practical assistance on a Community-wide basis. Free enterprise must play a leading part in the regeneration of industry and commerce in eastern Europe.

Thirdly, Britain and the House have a special part to play in helping the nations of eastern Europe to build democratic institutions. Those nations are at a loss to know which way to turn in that respect, and if we fail to help them there is a real danger that anarchy or even Fascism will fill the void created by the failure and collapse of Marxist Socialism.

The House should call upon the Government and the European Community to redouble the laudable efforts that are already being made, because a special responsibility falls on us as Europeans more than on anyone else in the world, including the people of the United States, to rebuild the shattered nations of Europe on democratic foundations and to welcome them as equal members within the European Community.

Let us recognise that, while we are living in a time of unprecedented hope for the future, the two super-powers are going through a period of the most intense instability. That could easily make the world an even more dangerous place than it was during the period from which we have so recently emerged—the cold war. The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) would do well to recall that, in spite of the cuts in the Soviet defence budget to which he referred, the Soviet Union is today still spending as a proportion of its resources three times more on armaments and defence than the United Kingdom, and twice as much as the United States. It would be folly at this juncture for Britain and its NATO Allies to join in any mad rush to abandon our defences.

6.22 pm

Ms. Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): I am grateful for this opportunity to participate in the debate because it raises issues that are important not just for us or for Europe, but for the world. Like all hon. Members, I wholeheartedly welcome the emergence of democracy throughout eastern Europe and I was astonished and exhilarated by the pace of change.

In moving the motion, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) stressed liberal democracy and seemed to claim some special affinity between his party and the emerging democracies in eastern Europe. At the Conservative party conference the Prime Minister seemed to claim something similar, that the new freedom in eastern Europe had been inspired by events in Britain, as if somehow it was to be equated with bus deregulation.

Many of the emerging movements in eastern Europe have strong links with the Democratic Socialist elements in western Europe and indeed have been linked to the Socialist International. There are many good relationships in that context and I hope that they will be built upon in future. Perhaps, however, it is presumptuous and misleading for any one of us to claim a monopoly of friends in eastern Europe. If democracy is to mean anything at all, it will mean a variety of political movements emerging and no one strand outdoing all the rest put together.

The main thrust of my speech will be about the question of the new economic relationship between western and eastern Europe. Eastern Europe, if we include the USSR, has a population of 420 million. If that market becomes more open, and certainly, in the long term, if the people there are to become more prosperous as we all hope, the consequences for world trade will be far-reaching. What will be the prospects for British industry and the British economy in that new economic situation?

I fully recognise the economic difficulties in the countries of eastern Europe. When I talk about opportunities for British industry, I well understand the difficulties of eastern European countries in finding cash for expensive imports. That is why opportunities for British industry should be grasped within the co-operative framework of aid and trade about which many hon. Members, I am glad to note, have spoken. A Marshall aid type operation has been referred to. I am aware of the PHARE programme launched by the group of 24 which will assist economic restructuring in Poland and Hungary. I am delighted to know that that programme is being extended to the other countries of eastern Europe.

Quite rightly, one of the issues raised several times in the debate is the need for eastern Europe to receive help on the environment. I wish that the Minister had given us a few more details, but I am glad to know that co-operative action to try to repair environmental damage is one of the priorities that the group of 24 is addressing. The environment is certainly an important priority area.

The Communist regimes that have governed eastern Europe have been among the last environment-friendly regimes that the world has ever seen. I am sure that we all read with great concern the accounts in the press about the huge extent of environment damage in eastern Europe. Apparently 12 million people in Poland live in what is referred to as ecological "emergency" areas. It is reported that in Czechoslovakia 70 per cent. of rivers are polluted by mining wastes, nitrates, liquid manure and oil and that 75 per cent. of toxic wastes in that country is dangerously stored. It is also reported that 50 per cent. of forests are dying or damaged.

Recently I read an article in the press which referred to the black snows of Transylvania. A joke was that in one of the towns in the region a white car that entered at one end of the town emerged as a black car at the other. Horrific accounts such as these show the extent of the environmental problems facing eastern Europe. A massive effort is needed.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): I am happy to endorse what the hon. Lady has said. Is she aware of Mr. Gorbachev's comments two weeks ago when he suggested the establishment of a green cross that could be used in parts of eastern Europe such as the Ukraine where 300 villages have been evacuated in three separate regions as a result of the continuing effects of Chernobyl? An international green cross could be established to pool common European resources so that we could fight some of the environmental disasters that are occurring.

Ms. Quin: That is an interesting and important suggestion to which the countries of western Europe and the international community should give serious attention.

A massive effort is needed to improve the environment in eastern Europe and that effort is certainly beyond the present financial capacity of the countries concerned. The West must help with environmentally friendly technology and equipment. I should like to see Britain in the forefront of that movement, but, despite the brave words of the Minister, we are a long way behind many other countries in that respect.

When we look at the various joint ventures that have been agreed between western industry and industry in eastern Europe we see that the West Germans, the Scandinavians, the Americans and the Japanese are all very active. Recent accounts certainly bear that out. Our trade balance with eastern Europe is worrying. We are in deficit with the USSR, East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia and even Romania. There has been a dramatic deterioration during the Government's term of office, but especially during the past five years.

I read today that Tokyo was expanding its branch offices throughout eastern Europe, so we have to make up a considerable amount of mileage and the Government need to do a great deal more. That is not only my view; it was the view expressed a year ago in the excellent report of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry on trade between Britain and eastern Europe. We cannot afford to sit back, although we should adopt the aid and trade co-operative approach.

I wish to quote from the Kreisky report, which was published last year and which referred to an economic programme for the whole of Europe. It stated:

> "Environmental protection will be as important in the next decade"—

that is, this decade—

> "as national defence was in the previous decade . . ."

It also stated:

> "Environmental technologies will be more important than Star Wars technologies."

Those are the challenges of the new Europe, and that is where Britain should be playing its full part.

6.31 pm

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): I warmly endorse the speech of the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) and also other splendid speeches made during this short debate.

This is an exciting time to be alive in Europe. It is full of hope and promise both for the nations of the West and for those of the East. It is also a time fraught with some danger. In 1986, in a book about Poland, I wrote:

"If East and West are ever to enjoy a genuinely peaceful co-existence—which is what millions on both sides want—there will have to be an end to the nightmare of repression suffered by the once independent nations of Central and Eastern Europe. This may have to come step by step but come it must.

The alternative to removing the present injustices and building bridges of understanding and co-operation between East and West is the certainty that our grandchildren will be living well into the 21st century in two vast armed camps bearing a crushing burden of arms which they can only hope and pray will never be used, a state not so much of peace as one of controlled hostility."

When I wrote those words, I had no idea that change would come so quickly, as it has done during these past few months.

It was marvellous to see the Berlin wall come tumbling down. It is astonishing that, at long last, the Hungarians and the Czechs are now negotiating peacefully for the withdrawal of the Soviet occupation forces that have been in their countries for the past 45 years. It was symbolic of the new mood in Europe that even the Communists in Hungary decided to remove the Soviet-style star from the arms of their country and to replace it with the Holy Crown of St. Stephen. It was not at all surprising when a Member of the European Parliament representing a Bavarian constituency, who happened to bear the name Hapsburg and who speaks fluent Hungarian, was warmly welcomed on the streets of Budapest recently.

Poland led the way with the first free elections last June, the first defeat ever of a ruling Communist party and the emergence of the first non-Communist Prime Minister since the second world war. Hon. Members will know how, with other hon. Members from all parties, I have long campaigned for Polish freedom, holding that Britain above all owed a special debt of honour to Poland, for which we went to war in 1939 and which, whatever the reasons, we abandoned at the end of the struggle.

What has happened in Poland, since the end of Jaruszelski's dictatorship, has given us great joy. I wish to pay tribute to the Government for their ready and practical help for the Polish economy, which is struggling to modernise itself. I single out the know-how fund, which is the sort of developmental help that I would recommend elsewhere in the new circumstances of eastern Europe. Last year the Government authorised the sending of food, and declared a readiness to give additional aid once Poland had agreed an economic reform programme with the International Monetary Fund.

However, as the *Financial Times* said on 28 December, it is still doubtful whether the flow of international aid to Poland—and, we must assume, to the other eastern European countries—will be sufficient. The Poles understand what is required. Prime Minister Mazowiecki made it very plain in his speech on 11 December on Polish independence day—the first time, incidentally, that it had been celebrated since the war. He said:

"Let us at last take this fate into our own hands and we shall make Poland a normal country, a prosperous country, a country in which there will be a great deal of satisfaction and joy stemming from the fact that Poland really is our joint possession."

Their proud assertion underlines the remarkable speech of the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen). We are seeing the emergence of a Europe of nations, proud of their heritage and proud of the contribution they can make, if they are allowed, to the common good.

I heartily endorse what was said by my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) and the right hon. Member for Devonport about the inevitability of German reunification. I do not think that there is anything in that to worry us. It will take place within a democratic framework at a pace dictated by the Germans themselves, and I venture to suggest that it will come sooner rather than later. It is to be welcomed, and it should not frighten any of us if it is accompanied by the statesmanship and vision of which today's Germans are fully capable.

For example, there is a need to reassure the Poles that there will be no clamour to alter Poland's western boundaries, which were settled in 1945. Poland has suffered enough at the hands of the Germans, as well as at the hands of the Soviet Union. The Helsinki accord must remain sacrosanct. There can be no boundary changes in the new Europe, save by the consent of the parties concerned. I do not doubt that German statesmanship will rise to the occasion.

Elsewhere in central and eastern Europe the signs are also generally promising. Czechoslovakia has a new, inspiring head of state in Vaclav Havel. In 1983 I had something to do with helping to get him out of prison. That brave man could have purchased his freedom with the greatest of ease. He was then in prison for asserting that his country had dishonoured its signature on the Helsinki accord. If he had apologised to President Husak, he would have been released. He chose to remain in prison. It was only after ridicule from some of us in the West, aided by the BBC central European service, that finally the Czechs gave up and let him out. I salute the man; he is a great artist and a great human being. He symbolises the true spirit of Czechoslovakia, and we all wish him well.

In Hungary, considerable progress is being made towards modernising and improving the economy. The Government are encouraging private enterprise and examining ways of securing closer economic co-operation with the European Community.

Only in Romania is there doubt and fear. Here there is real cause for anxiety, as the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) and I discovered only last week. The Communist party there is entrenching itself in power. Only in Romania, of the eastern European countries mentioned in this debate, are the emerging democratic parties being harried by thugs brought in by the so-called Government from the provinces to terrorise their opponents. Hon. Members should consider the shameful events that took place only a few days ago just after the hon. Gentleman and I left Bucharest. There was shameful harrying of Cornelius Copuso, president of the National Peasant party, who had spent 17 years in Communist prisons. His party headquarters was ransacked.

The hon. Member for Newport, West and I made some modest speeches. We were greatly moved by our experience. I have never before in all my travels or political life witnessed what I saw in Bucharest. I saw a crowd of

[Sir Bernard Braine]

about 300, many of them young, kneeling in the snow and the slush, holding candles in silent vigil, before one of the three improvised monuments to the dead in a place where large numbers of people had been mown down by the tanks of the Ceausescu regime. They were described later by the Government as hooligans. The Romanian people deserve much better than they have got. Indeed, they may need another revolution before they are truly free. I mention that because it is difficult to see how it is possible to help Romania, yet help it must be given.

Mr. Alton *rose*——

Sir Bernard Braine: I would rather not give way, because I think that the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) is ready to reply on behalf of his party.

This has been one of the most interesting and stimulating debates that I have ever attended. This is the House of Commons speaking as one in favour of giving maximum aid, help and encouragement to the nations of eastern and central Europe struggling to be free. I look forward with confidence to our developing relationship with countries coming back into our common European home.

6.43 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): In the middle of October, in the course of a debate on the defence estimates, the Secretary of State for Defence told a somewhat surprised House that Mr. Honecker had resigned, and had been replaced by Mr. Krenz. There was among those who heard that news a sense of anticipation, but I think it is fair to say that none of us had any appreciation of the consequences. Indeed, had any of us attempted to predict what has happened since, we would have been received with nothing other than scepticism by those who were present on that occasion.

Truly, the changes in eastern Europe have been staggering beyond comprehension. Of course, they have not all gone smoothly. The euphoria of taking down walls is soon replaced by the harsh reality of political decisions, sometimes made by those who have had little experience in recent time of making decisions, and sometimes made by those who are unsophisticated and unused to the responsibility which has inevitably been thrust upon them.

The circumstances in eastern Europe, which are by no means common in each of the countries in which change has taken place, may yet get worse before they get better in our terms. One cannot ignore the emergence to a certain extent of nationalism. Any student of the history of the 19th century will recall that nationalism was a very bloody force in the politics of Europe at that time. Indeed, it had a carry-over into the current century. It is sometimes forgotten that the first world war was precipitated by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, something which in 1990 one would regard as highly unlikely to provoke the kind of conflagration that it did then.

Later, nationalism was to some extent subjugated or subdued by Fascism, and then by the spurious internationalism and totalitarianism of Communism. I accept, as the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) said, that there is nothing wrong with nationhood; indeed, there is a considerable amount to be said for it. But I believe that in these burgeoning democracies in eastern Europe we must take account of the risk of an emergence of nationalism which would be detrimental to the view of Europe which so many hon. Members have expressed in the debate.

I believe that our task is to ensure that parliamentary democracy is enshrined, entrenched even, in these countries and that they have at an early stage inculcated into them a sense of international interdependence. We will do that best by giving them such economic assistance as we can, but perhaps more significantly by giving them political encouragement, and by being receptive, welcoming and, I suppose to some extent, tolerant of their efforts to replace totalitarian regimes with regimes which accord with our view of parliamentary democracy.

As the debate progressed, there was little doubt that in the minds of most hon. Members the single most significant question is the unification of Germany. I think most now accept that there will be unification. It could hardly be otherwise. All the political parties in Federal Germany have as part of their constitutions the aim and objective of unification, and the constitution of Federal Germany makes special provision for citizens of what we call East Germany to become citizens of the Federal Republic.

If we did not recognise it, the reality would soon overtake us, because the people of East Germany would simply vote with their feet, having voted with their bulldozers and their hands in the period around Christmas. I do not believe that we should be apprehensive about the prospect of a unified Germany. The democratic traditions which were put in place in Federal Germany after the war may not be particularly long-lived, but they are well entrenched. One is legitimately entitled to say that in that time the people of Federal Germany have behaved in all respects as if they accept, recognise and hold dear those democratic principles.

One must also remember that, unlike the 1930s, what is happening in East Germany is not the setting up of a dictatorship but pulling one down. It would be most curious if the people of East Germany, having got rid of one form of totalitarian government, were enthused to embrace another. Federal Germany is already the most dominant economic power in Europe. That is recognised by the United States of America in the special relationship which President Bush clearly feels with Chancellor Kohl.

I believe that the circumstances which now present themselves with regard to the unification of Germany should be seen as an opportunity rather than an obstacle. We want to channel the new political assertiveness which is undoubtedly in Federal Germany into the European Economic Community, but we also want, and are entitled to ask, Federal Germany and those responsible for East Germany to make it clear that they have no territorial ambitions beyond the existing boundaries of the two countries.

The existence within a stronger Community of a unified Germany can only be to its advantage. I hope, like the right hon. Member for Devonport, that such a Germany will remain in NATO. However, between now and the time when that important decision is taken, we shall have to acknowledge that political circumstances have changed so much that, for example, the deployment of a successor to the Lance missile in the Federal Republic of Germany is not politically unacceptable. The notion that such a

weapon might be stationed in that country with a view to firing it at targets in Poland, Hungary or East Germany is totally inappropriate to the new political order.

There has been discussion as to whether or not NATO and the Warsaw pact should remain in existence. We have some influence over NATO, but not over the Warsaw pact organisation, so if it decides to disband there is nothing we can do. However, if we are to move towards a new order of security in Europe as a whole, that may be achieved more easily if negotiations can be conducted between two existing structures. That does not detract from the right of the people of Hungary or of Czechoslovakia to request that Soviet troops be removed from their country—and let us hope that such a request would be acceded to.

The eastern bloc countries—as we have known them—will all develop at a different rate. Their political sophistication and economic development will all advance at different speeds. I do not believe that it will be necessary for the Community to have a European equivalent of the Lomé convention, but it should be flexible enough to offer each of those countries—as they develop to the stage at which the rule of law and parliamentary democracy is accepted—an association with the EEC both for the economic advantage that will bring, and, more significantly, the political stability that it will undoubtedly create.

Mention was made in the debate of the kind of Europe that people want to see. The word "federal" has been cast about, but I sometimes think that all such labels should be rejected, although they may give comfort to constitutional lawyers. The most amusing part of the debate was the notion that there are not yet sufficient lawyers in eastern Europe. Perhaps that might be our first export. I can think of a few candidates, both north and south of the border, excluding myself, who are capable of bringing a suitable range of skills and attributes to bear on the lapsing totalitarianism and bureaucracy of eastern Europe.

However, it is not necessary for the satisfaction of constitutional lawyers to describe one's attitude to Europe in terms that lawyers regard as important when explaining matters to their students. The pace of development within the Community will undoubtedly be different at different times, and it will depend on the collective will of all its members—not just the United Kingdom. There will be times when the Community will want to move more quickly because that is the collective will.

The circumstances that we have debated, particularly as they affect the EC, ought to create in us a sense of anticipation and a feeling that here is a moment of great opportunity—perhaps several moments. The Minister gave an account of the Government's contribution, and although the letter of what he said may have been recognised by our partners in Europe, I wonder whether they recognised the spirit of his remarks.

I and other right hon. and hon. Members feel strongly that Britain, as one of the Twelve, is often dragged into a collective decision. Instead of arguing for a collective decision and trying to improve it, too often we are seen as being dragged unenthusiastically into agreeing to a compromise. While it is right that differences over important matters should be permitted and perhaps even encouraged, and although the pace of movement will always be subject to the keen attitude that people take towards important issues such as the sovereignty of this House, it is undoubtedly the case that too often we are seen as grudging participants in the European process.

If that impression is allowed to persist in the new circumstances of eastern Europe, it will serve not only the EEC but the interests of this country very badly. We have the greatest influence when we are seen to be enthusiasts for the European process. If this debate has done nothing else, it has brought home to many people, both inside the House and outside it, that a remarkable opportunity is available to us—and I hope that the House will collectively decide this evening to grasp it.

6.55 pm

Mr. Maude: With the leave of the House, Mr. Speaker, may I say that one of the greatest of the privileges that I have enjoyed during my short tenure in my present post—six months that have seen a revolution across Europe—has been the opportunity to participate in several debates concerning matters that go much beyond the frontiers of the 12 existing members of the European Community. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) said, they have shown this House at its best—able to look for the most part beyond narrow partisan politics and to devote its collective and considerable expertise and wisdom to examining the uncertainties that have unfolded before us, and to prospect the future, to see how events may change.

Today's debate has been very much one such debate. I regard myself as greatly privileged to have heard the contributions made—especially those of my right hon. Friends the Members for Castle Point and for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen), my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill), and the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen). They all brought to the debate their formidable experience, wisdom, clarity and insight, which has better informed all those among us who must examine how our country can help decisively to shape the future.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North referred with a glancing blow to the caution that necessarily attends those of us who are, however temporarily, at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. He was right to refer to that caution, but it is right also that we should exercise it, particularly at a time when Europe faces of necessity a period of instability. That instability exists for the very best of reasons, because for the past 40 years eastern Europe has paid a terrible price for its enforced stability. It is inevitable that we should deal with the new situation cautiously, sometimes looking carefully—perhaps excessively carefully—before we tread. I make no apology for that.

It is inevitable that we should treat with caution also the unification of Germany, to which almost every speaker has referred. That is not to diminish in any way our commitment to that unification, based on self-determination. However, I re-emphasise the unanimous decision of the 12 European Heads of Government at the Strasbourg Council, that when unification takes place, it must have regard both to the interests of those directly affected by it and the treaties and agreements that it will affect. As I have said, that does not diminish the commitment of all 12 member states to Germany's reunification, should it emerge from the process of democratic self-determination.

Inevitably, much of the debate has focused on the European Community and the way in which it should develop. I sensed a fairly widespread view that we should

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not proceed helter-skelter into further institutional changes. I agreed profoundly with the right hon. Member for Devonport when he said that it was not necessary to be a federalist to be a good European; no one needs to believe that rapid further changes should be made to the treaty of Rome to be entirely committed to the European Community and to making it a success.

The Government are committed to making the Community a success, and we have contributed centrally to its present position. That is why I found it hard to recognise the reality in the speech of the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), who said that we did not seem to be taking part in the discussions. The single market—the single factor that has made the most difference to the success of the Community—is fashioned after the pattern that we have described.

Mr. Ashdown: Go to Brussels.

Mr. Maude: It may have escaped the right hon. Gentleman's attention that I do occasionally go to Brussels. I take part in the discussions, and I can tell the right hon. Gentleman without immodesty that our influence on their outcome is profound. The fact that he does not understand that is a simple demonstration of how far removed he is, and will remain, from the reality of the discussions.

Perhaps we have looked into the past more than we should have, but we have also looked ahead. That is proper at a time when we should not let our caution diminish the joy and pleasure that my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point described in his profoundly moving speech. At a time of necessary and inevitable instability, now that the tyrannies have gone we should be readier to build than to dismantle; but this time we should build to last.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 215, Noes 9.

Division No. 59] **[7.02 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alton, David
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chapman, Sydney
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fearn, Ronald
Fishburn, John Dudley
Flynn, Paul
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Sackville, Hon Tom
Salmond, Alex
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Wheeler, Sir John
Wilshire, David

Winterton, Mrs Ann	Tellers for the Ayes:
Winterton, Nicholas	Mr. James Wallace and
Wood, Timothy	Mr. Archy Kirkwood.

NOES

Beggs, Roy	Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Cohen, Harry	Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Cryer, Bob	
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*	Tellers for the Noes:
Meale, Alan	Mr. John D. Taylor and
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James	Mr. William Ross.
Skinner, Dennis	

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House welcomes recent progress towards liberal democracy in the countries of eastern and central Europe; endorses progress towards the political and economic integration of the European Community; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government urgently to recognise that this country's future depends on Britain playing a full and wholehearted role in the development of the new democratic Europe.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wonder whether the fact that no amendment to the motion had been tabled, and therefore the process of the vote was very short, caused some confusion among Labour Members. I was very surprised to go into the Division Lobby on a motion which invited the support of the whole House for democratisation in Europe, yet Labour Members were unable to bring themselves to vote for it. That is the new model Labour party.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): The hon. Gentleman knows that that is not a point of order, but he has got his point on the record.

Small Businesses and the Self-employed

7.15 pm

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): I beg to move,

That this House believes that the undermining effect of high interest rates combined with the impact of the Uniform Business Rate and revaluation in England and Wales, will have a catastrophic effect on small businesses and the self-employed; further believes that the effects of bureaucracy, employee poll tax defaulters and the late payment of debt will increase the number of bankruptcies within the small business sector throughout the counties and regions and nations of the United Kingdom; and urges Her Majesty's Government to take immediate steps to extend the relief associated with the introduction of the Uniform Business Rate, to take the opportunity of the Budget to improve the fiscal climate for small businesses and to enter the Exchange Rate Mechanism of the European Monetary System in order to improve the economic environment within which small businesses and the self-employed operate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Taylor: I welcome the opportunity afforded by the Liberal Democrats to debate the needs and difficulties of small businesses. Just before the debate the Minister told me privately that he also welcomed today's debate because we rarely have the opportunity to discuss these matters. The Liberal Democrats tabled the motion because we believe that there are important issues, developments and difficulties facing small businesses and we wanted to give the House the opportunity to debate them. I hope to suggest some practical measures to relieve the difficulties that small businesses are experiencing.

The Government claim that a number of advances for businesses have taken place since they took office. We certainly acknowledge that there have been advances for monopolies and the privatisation of monopolies. There have also been some advances for other businesses—I would not wish to pretend otherwise—but recently the Government have created significant difficulties, particularly for small businesses. In election after election the Government described themselves as friends of small businesses, but business men and women tell me that the Government's present policies prove them to be anything but that. It would be interesting to see an opinion poll showing the reactions of small business men to the pressures of interest rates, business rate changes and new bureaucracy and red tape that are being imposed on them by the Government.

The economic situation is worsening for businesses of all sizes, but small companies that are particularly vulnerable to those changes and are in a relatively weak position to negotiate with banks and to defend themselves against those changes suffer especially. After 10 years of Conservative government which were ushered in on the grounds that we had to tackle inflation and promote competition, we now have an inflation rate comparable to that which obtained at the end of the Lib-Lab Administration. For all that Ministers say, our competitiveness cannot be described as good either, for we have a record trade deficit—the only obvious accurate way of measuring whether our businesses can compete effectively with businesses abroad.

The latest quarterly report from the Confederation of British Industry suggests that Britain is once more on the brink of a recession. We are smitten with high interest rates and high inflation. For all the Government's boasts about

[Mr. Taylor]

new businesses, there was an increase in business failures in 1989 for the first time in five years. The latest CBI survey shows that business failures in 1989 rose to 18,000, which was a 10 per cent. increase over 1988. The CBI also states that we may see a substantial rise in bankruptcies, a further 1 per cent. rise in inflation and a £2 billion shortfall in investment, all due to the Government's policies. That is hardly a sign that Thatcherism has overcome the inherent weaknesses in the economy.

From a Government to whom they once looked for support, small businesses now face the uniform business rate, revaluation, continued high interest rates, skill shortages, increased administrative burdens and an unsustainable exchange rate. The National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses states that high interest rates are proving a huge burden on small businesses. They create a climate of uncertainty and make it harder for those businesses to expand.

The federation cites a number of examples of the way in which businesses have been hit. For example, a small manufacturing company with six employees in Berkshire is behind with orders. It cannot reinvest in new equipment and is having to turn down orders. A 20-year-old family business in Mid Glamorgan is prepared to state publicly that it is threatened with liquidation within two years if interest rates remain at the present level or are raised.

I have spoken to business men in my constituency and I am aware of a dramatic change over the past few months in their attitude to the Government. Local businesses have called a meeting in my constituency on Saturday evening because they have been made desperate by the Government's policies. Those are the problems that small businesses face in this enterprise culture.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): When the hon. Gentleman spoke to small business men in his constituency, did he find that they valued the fact that his party—under one name or another—helped to keep the Labour party in government for four years with all the great "benefits" that that Government gave to small businesses which were closing down then far quicker than they are now?

Mr. Taylor: Small businesses look back on the influences that the Liberals were able to exert on that Labour Government. They are aware of the cuts in inflation that happened then. They are also aware of the fact that the Liberals managed to have a Minister responsible for small businesses appointed to the Cabinet. That Cabinet post has disappeared and the responsibility has been moved from the Department of Trade and Industry to the Department of Employment. Obviously the Government do not consider small businesses to be a vital part of our industrial base or its power house. They regard them simply as a vehicle for employment legislation.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): Since the Liberal party was the power house at the time, will the hon. Gentleman explain why currently there is an increase of 1,200 new small businesses every week, while under the Lib-Lab pact there was a decrease of 100 businesses a week?

Mr. Taylor: One of the peculiarities of the Government's boasts about the growth in businesses is that they ignore the fact that the businesses that are created are often tax shelters and not real businesses. Other people trying to create real new enterprises, for example, through the enterprise allowance scheme, find it increasingly difficult to do so. People trying to maintain their self-employed status are also having difficulties.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Does my hon. Friend agree that the only fair way to judge the statistics about small businesses is to look at all the figures, including the number of liquidations? Does he agree that bankruptcies and liquidations among small businesses are running at record levels and that that is a direct consequence of the Government's economic policies that are crippling the small business man's cash flow?

Mr. Taylor: Many people have told me that they are threatened with bankruptcy and liquidation—*[Interruption.]* Small business men will not respect Conservative Members if they laugh as I describe their problems. Small business men will also not be amused by the Government's shilly-shallying and ducking of the measures that could reduce inflation and interest rates.

The Government must seriously consider the need to join the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system. That policy option is staring the Government in the face. Whenever a Minister leaves the Cabinet, it seems it is only a matter of days before he announces publicly that we should have joined the ERM of the EMS, although the Minister was not allowed to say that while he was in the Cabinet. That stubbornness is illogical and it is not supported by the serious economists and business groups. It is also patently damaging to the prospects for British business in Europe and to our ability to play a full part in developments in Europe.

The Liberal Democrats have consistently favoured membership of the ERM. The Conservative party has said consistently that it favours membership one day, but it sets blocking conditions, and every time the Cabinet meets we know that membership will not be on the agenda. Unfortunately, the Labour party's position is no better as it ducks and blocks the issue. We hear fine words, but no real intention to act on them.

The most important step that we can take to help businesses in this country at the moment is to reduce interest rates. We can do precisely that by joining the ERM.

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): The hon. Gentleman will recall the White Paper which the Government published five or six years ago entitled "Lifting the Burden". It listed certain burdens on small businesses. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the vast majority of those burdens have now been lifted as a result of Government legislation. However, one burden—statutory audit for small companies—has not been lifted. What is the policy of the hon. Gentleman's party on that?

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I wonder what the Government's policy on it is.

Mr. Taylor: Perhaps the Minister can tell us later what the Government's policy is. I intend later to outline a number of measures that I would like to introduce to cut the red tape and bureaucracy which currently face businesses.

The problems of interest rates have been debated endlessly in the House. Therefore, I want now to turn to

considering the blow falling on many businesses, especially in the south and south-west, caused by the introduction of the uniform business rate and revaluation.

For all Ministers' claims, the UBR will have devastating consequences for small businesses. Indeed, the largest part of my mail bag comprises letters about the UBR. In introducing the UBR, the Government have moved the initiative away from small businesses back to the Inland Revenue. The changes cut the links with local councils and they remove the right of local businesses to appeal after six months, and that latter change is inexplicable because only the Inland Revenue will benefit.

A good example of the problems caused by the UBR and the revaluation can be found in a family hardware business in the heart of Truro. In my constituency, the UBR has meant an increase of nearly 10 per cent. over the old rating system. That extra money, which is being levied from our local businesses, is to pay not for extra local services, which perhaps those businesses could accept, but for cuts in rate levels in other parts of the country where service levels will continue to be protected. Taking money from one of the poorest parts of the country to fund areas with high levels of services is regarded by people in my area as quite unacceptable and inexcusable.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): What would the hon. Gentleman say to small businesses in my constituency? They are facing difficulties, not from the UBR which, on present rateable values, would be lower than the present rates in Somerset, but from the revaluation. Would his party abolish them or postpone the revaluations still further?

Mr. Taylor: If the hon. Gentleman gives me a moment, I shall answer his question.

The proposed transitional relief scheme goes some way to helping small businesses. It was precisely because I foresaw the massive difficulties when I served on the Committees that considered the Local Government Finance Bill and the Local Government and Housing Bill that I have consistently pressed for transitional relief measures, and we have only gradually seen the Government start to introduce them. Today we have outlined a series of measures further to help businesses facing massive revaluation problems. First, we strongly believe that transitional relief should be applied to all businesses that exist in April 1990, regardless of whether they subsequently move their premises. There are several important reasons for doing that.

It will cause great difficulties for businesses that need to move, for whatever reason, to be outside the relief scheme as soon as they leave their current premises. That serves as a hindrance to business expansion and it will cause difficulties for businesses seeking to sell premises as buyers will be few and far between if relief will not apply to them. It will also hit businesses that are trying to trade down as a result of the increase in their rate bills. By moving to smaller premises, they may still end up paying the same or greater rates than they pay in their existing premises because they will not get transitional relief. Also, the people from whom they are renting premises will be put in a strong bargaining position.

Any decreases in rents that might otherwise have arisen from the changes will not take place because people involved in leasing premises and rent negotiations will know that if a business moves they will lose transitional protection. Most ironic of all is the fact that, although the Government have not extended transitional protection to them, a business moving to an office where it will gain from the changes will still get gains phased in over a period. It is a no-win situation. Every which way they go, it seems that they will have to pay more than they paid before. They cannot escape that. I wonder whether Ministers intended that or whether they understand the impact that it will have on small businesses.

Secondly, I call on the Treasury to contribute funds to ease the implementation process. I should like it to undertake a series of measures to help to ease burdens on companies that are being hit most by the revaluation process. I do not believe that there is any logic in doing that unless the Treasury is prepared to take on at least a part of the burden, otherwise other companies that may deserve to benefit from the changes will see their benefit put off even further into the future. It is an obvious moment for the Treasury to make a contribution to earning the money that it will claim from businesses at a later date. [HON. MEMBERS: "The taxpayer, the taxpayer."]

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): My hon. Friend is being interrupted by Conservative Members saying, "The taxpayer, the taxpayer," from a sedentary position. Would they like honestly to answer the question raised by the hon. Members for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) and so on? Would they prefer the taxpayer to assist the transitional arrangements, or would their constituencies, with an increase of more than 140 per cent. because of revaluation, prefer that there is no taxpayer assistance and that businesses should bear the whole burden? Unless they can answer that question, they should support my hon. Friend and our proposals.

Mr. Taylor: That is precisely the point that I have been making. My hon. Friend is quite right.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South) *rose*——

Mr. Taylor: I think that an eager volunteer wishes to respond.

Mrs. Currie: If the hon. Gentleman has heard me speak on this subject before, he will know that my local business people face substantial reductions in the business rate. We are very grateful. It means that at last we can see the regeneration of our area. As for the point that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) invited the hon. Gentleman to make on his behalf, putting 2 billion quid back into the economy all in one go in the way that was suggested would be inflationary.

Mr. Taylor: I have mentioned several non-inflationary actions that we can take. It is inflationary for the Government to pay off their debts because they dare not spend the money that they are currently attracting. That is a mistake, and they should not be engaged in it. Nothing is more important than building up and protecting our existing businesses. It is no good for the country to help at the margins of inflation if, in the process, the Government again bankrupt businesses that will provide the dynamo for solving current problems.

Mr. Hanley *rose*——

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley) *rose*——

Mr. Taylor: Conservative Members are seeking to intervene. I have given way a considerable number of times. I want to continue with my points on how we will tackle revaluation.

Thirdly, the relief scheme should be extended to cover more premises by adjusting the size of businesses for which transitional relief is available. Small business organisations have been pressing Ministers for that, and some have pressed for large increases, and possibly a doubling of the size of the premises involved. Although I would not necessarily argue for going the whole hog on that matter, we need increases. I suspect that all hon. Members are aware of businesses that have been hit and have been outside the small business category but yet, in every other sense, should surely be eligible for help.

Mr. Waller: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Taylor: I have already said that I wish to finish the points that I want to make on this subject.

Fourthly, relief should be increased. The limits on increases on rates—15 per cent. plus inflation for small businesses—should be further reduced to 10 per cent. Bearing inflation in mind, we are still talking about a crippling series of increases over a long period. Although some businesses can quite easily cope with such increases, others, mainly smaller local businesses with only one premises in town centres, are finding it extremly hard to cope. Frankly, there is little prospect of increasing their turnover or profits at a rate that would allow them to pay.

Fifthly, the transitional relief scheme should be extended to allow small businesses the necessary time to adjust. The present system covers most businesses. I applaud the Government for giving them some time to adjust. However, it does not allow for many businesses with large increases in their rates bills, which, even at the end of the period of transitional relief, will still find that they are faced with a large lump sum increase. During Prime Minister's Question Time last week, the Prime Minister said that the Government would look at that matter and might be amenable to extending the specified period. I hope that the Minister of State, Department of Employment will be able to elaborate on her comments and confirm that the Government will ensure that that is the case. That would provide a large measure of security to businesses that have been hardest hit by the changes.

Those proposals are positive measures to help businesses through the painful process of the introduction of the UBR and revaluation. However, they can only mitigate the effects of the UBR and revaluation. No amount of improvements can make ideal a system that was ill-conceived in the first place, though I put those suggestions before the House in the hope that Ministers will take some of them on board to provide a measure of relief.

We need, however, to review the system on which business rating is based. We should consider a system of land value taxation. That would broaden the base of the rating system and tackle some of the advantages that developers and speculators gain from the present system. As well as broadening the tax base, it would contribute to many other desirable improvements, such as the regeneration of our inner cities by removing the incentive for business men to hold on to inner city sites and not to develop them. It would also remove the fear that improving land and property would increase the rates burden and encourage improvement of buildings.

Administration would be easier because the system would not require intrusive checking on what improvements have been made. Crucially, the system would be run by local authorities. That would preserve an essential link between businesses and the community and ensure democratic local accountability. The uniform business rate destroys that principle and centralises power.

There should be an investigation into a rolling programme of revaluation to avoid lump sum changes and politically motivated delays which ultimately make the position worse. That is precisely what happens now. If we can overcome such delays through a rolling programme of revaluation, businesses will benefi..

Our proposals for the transitional relief scheme would bring great advantages to small businesses. Our preferred system of land value taxation, combined with full membership of the European monetary system, would create a programme for change that would give small businesses the backing that they deserve.

I said earlier that I wished to cover administration. I call on the Government to do three things. First, they should explain why, reportedly, Ministers will not support the Bill to be introduced by the hon. Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) on Friday to give companies a legal right to interest on unpaid bills. The phenomenal sums owed to businesses by major concerns and Government Departments are a disgrace. The Bill would provide a measure of relief from that.

Mr. Michael Mates (Hampshire, East): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for mentioning my Bill. I thought that it was a relatively modest measure which would cause no trouble across the party divide and would be of help to small business men. Unfortunately, it is now clear that the Government are not in favour of it. I suppose that the cynic in me will say that it is because I propose to apply the measure to the Government so that they pay their bills on time. I understand the Treasury's reluctance to accede to the Bill. I hope that both Conservative and Opposition Members will be here on Friday to show the massive support of small business men throughout the country for my measure, which is designed purely and simply to help them in these difficult times.

Mr. Taylor: I hope that many of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues will be present on Friday. After all, they are the largest group in the House. If his Bill is not passed, we shall ensure that it is in our programme for the next election. I hope that he can convince his party that it should be in its programme for the next election.

I have probably spoken for longer than I should have. I cannot cover all the points that I had hoped to cover, but I believe that the Minister will find that I and my hon. Friends have outlined a programme to help small businesses through their present difficulties, which have been caused by the Government. It would bring a degree of cheer to businesses around the country if the Minister would say that he was prepared to accept it.

7.44 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Mr. Tim Eggar): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"congratulates the Government on creating an environment in which enterprise and small businesses are flourishing, and urges the Government to continue pursuing the policies which have led to a record increase in the numbers of self-employed and new business formations, as confirmed by the increase in registrations for value-added tax.".

I begin by congratulating the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) and his hon. Friends on choosing this subject for debate. It is useful from time to time to have a discussion on small businesses and the self-employed. However, I regret the extraordinary wording of the motion. It completely ignores the tremendous success of the small firms sector over the past 10 years. That success shows in the business climate established by the Government's policies, which favours enterprise and rewards risk taking and initiative. The current climate is in dramatic contrast to that created by the previous Labour Government, supported, of course, by their Liberal allies. The climate of the late 1970s was one in which small businesses were held back by punitive taxation, record levels of inflation and excessive union power.

We took up the challenge to reinvigorate the economy by stimulating enterprise and encouraging innovation when we came to power in 1979. Over the past 10 years small firms have been, and will remain, a top priority for this Government. We have ensured that small businesses have been left free to get on with their role of creating wealth and jobs. The resurgence of small business in this country is described in the Employment Department's recent publication "Small Firms in Britain".

These are some of the facts. Self-employment has risen by more than 60 per cent. over the past 10 years to stand at over 3 million. The early signs are that VAT registrations in 1989 show a net increase of 80,000, an average net gain of over 1,500 businesses a week—nearly 25 per cent. higher than in 1988.

Mr. Alex Carlile: The Minister said that self-employment had increased. Of course, that is welcome. Does he agree that the strict rules imposed by the Inland Revenue on people who wish to be self-employed are restrictive and discourage self-employment? Many people work for one employer at a given time but would like to work for many others. The strict interpretation of the tax rules excludes them from doing that. I have written to Ministers about that on several occasions with no positive reply.

Mr. Eggar: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. With respect, it does not detract from the considerable increase in self-employment. A 60 per cent. increase over the past 10 years is a major achievement. I do not understand why the motion does not give recognition to the Government for their achievement in creating small businesses and increasing the number of self-employed.

I said that indications showed a net increase in the number of businesses of over 1,500 a week over the past year. To set that in context, we estimate that there were 80,000 new VAT registrations last year alone. Between 1974 and 1979—the period of the last Labour Government—the net increase in VAT registrations over the whole five-year period was just 85,000. Last year alone there were almost as many new registrations as during the whole period during which the Labour Government were in power. During that time the hon. and learned Gentleman and his hon. Friends claimed to influence the Labour party for the better.

The "Small Firms in Britain" booklet showed that, of the estimated 2·5 million businesses in Great Britain, 96 per cent. are small firms employing fewer than 20 people. These now account for 36 per cent. of non-Government employment compared to only 27 per cent. in 1979, and make an enormous contribution to the economy. In addition, nearly half a million unemployed people have also been helped to set up their own business through my Department's enterprise allowance scheme.

We have achieved those remarkable figures by reducing taxation, scrapping unnecessary controls and cutting red tape. We have left business men free to make their own decisions and to take the rewards with the very minimum of Government interference.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I do not in any way dispute the figures that the Minister has just given to show the increase in self-employment during the past 10 years, but does he accept that at a time of increasing unemployment—it has almost trebled since the time of the Lib-Lab pact—a large pool of people have been necessarily forced into self-employment because they have been forced out of employment?

Mr. Alex Carlile: That is the context.

Mr. Eggar: The hon. and learned Gentleman is wrong again—*[Interruption.]* Well, we have created nearly 3 million new jobs in this country since 1983. We now have over 1 million people more in employment or in self-employment than in 1979. The facts do not coincide in any way with the assertions made by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace). I realise that he is short of research assistants, but he should learn the basic statistics. The response to our policies for small businesses and the creation of employment has been tremendous.

The achievement of the small firms sector is the achievement of these thousands—and now millions—of people who have made the conscious decision to branch out on their own during the past 10 years. They have made their own assessment that the conditions were favourable and have identified the needs of the market and of their customers. Hundreds of thousands of individuals have taken the opportunity to put their ideas into action.

Mr. John Lee (Pendle): Would my hon. Friend care to comment on the fact that in this important debate on this important sector of the economy the Labour party has in the Chamber only its official spokesman, a Whip and one Back-Bench Member who himself is probably nearer a large than a small business?

Mr. Eggar: The vacant Opposition Benches obviously speak for themselves. While I was giving those figures for the net increase in business VAT registrations, I was indeed looking at the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) because he probably would have registered for VAT back in the early 1980s and so would not have featured in the net increase last year. The hon. Gentleman may wish to comment on that point when he seeks to address the House later.

As I have said, the Government have worked steadily to reduce the disincentives to business initiative that we inherited from the last Labour Government. Taxation has been reduced and simplified. Every Budget since 1979 has seen reductions in taxation of one form or another.

The reduction and removal of unnecessary and restrictive controls has been extended to other areas.

[Mr. Eggar]

Controls on prices, dividends and foreign exchange—so beloved of the Liberals—have all been abolished, and many other areas of legislation have been simplified. Since 1979 more than 2,000 Government forms have been abolished and Government statistical inquiries have been reduced by over 1 million. Every new proposal for regulation, originating in either Whitehall or in Brussels, is now carefully scrutinised for its likely impact on business costs.

New opportunities have been created for small business in the contracting out of central and local government services and in the liberalisation of areas such as bus services and telecommunications. This has enabled large numbers of new and expanding small businesses in these areas, and in others, to give better service and to create new wealth and new jobs.

Our policies for small business have not only set up the right economic framework within which small businesses can succeed; they have also created an enterprise culture and stimulated a marked change in attitudes towards small businesses over the past few years. Not only are there many more small businesses, but they are being set up by entrepreneurs from increasingly different and diverse backgrounds. The number of women who are self-employed has more than doubled over the past 10 years. Indeed, the number of women taking advantage of the enterprise allowance scheme has increased from just 11 per cent. of all participants in 1983 to over 34 per cent. now.

Furthermore, attitudes among young people towards business has changed to the extent that a recent MORI survey showed that 40 per cent. of young people were interested in running their own business and over a quarter —over 25 per cent.—fully expected to do so.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: Before the Minister moves on from the subject of women going into business, does he accept that, while large businesses can provide work place nurseries, that is not the case for small businesses? Does he agree that it would be appropriate to help women who want to go into business or who want to work by providing child care vouchers so that they can contribute towards the cost of looking after their children and so that we can make the position more equal between smaller businesses and larger businesses in terms of their ability to help people in that way?

Mr. Eggar: One option that is available to businesses of any size is to issue child care vouchers. Indeed, increasingly featuring in the enterprise allowance scheme are people who wish to start a business in helping and looking after children. I am sure that many more women will want to take part in creating businesses that set up creches. A number of options are therefore available to women, and businesses can take advantage of the scheme to which the hon. Gentleman has referred.

Mr. Taylor: The Minister has misunderstood me. I was suggesting that the Government should provide child care vouchers, not that that should fall on businesses because small businesses cannot become involved in the same way as large businesses. If the Minister is not prepared to accept that, does he at least accept that it cannot be right for such provisions to be taxed as they are at present?

Mr. Eggar: As the hon. Gentleman knows, tax matters are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. The hon. Gentleman's speech and his intervention have shown what is, I suppose, an expected lack of any understanding of government. He has put forward all sorts of ideas, but has totally failed to show how they will be paid for. It is not possible simply to provide Government with bits of paper without somehow funding the ideas on them. It is all very well for the hon. Gentleman liberally and democratically to hand out the goodies—but if he were to produce the research to support them, perhaps he would have a little more credibility.

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Eggar: I would rather not, but I will.

Mr. Paice: Well, in that case I am even more grateful to my hon. Friend. While he was commenting on the various points raised by the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor), did he pick up the slightly throwaway line about the introduction of a land value tax? Will my hon. Friend discuss the devastating effect that that would have on many businesses including agriculture—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."]—and farming—*[Laughter.]* Well, perhaps that answers the point if the Social and Liberal Democratic party has not thought the issue through. Every time a tax has been placed on land, such as the development land tax, it has caused inflation in the value of land.

Mr. Eggar: I am sure that my hon. Friend will wish to have fun exploring this point later in the debate, if he is lucky enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. However, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has pleaded with me not to comment on that aspect of the speech made by the hon. Member for Truro, because he is looking forward to dealing with it himself. I hope my hon. Friend will forgive me if I do not go down that avenue.

The Government's success in fostering the remarkable increase in business formation cannot be disputed. Our policy now is to build on this success and focus attention on the many businesses that were started up in the last decade and that are now facing the problems and opportunities of growth. We are determined to encourage those businesses that have the potential and the desire to grow, without abandoning our commitment to business start-ups. We need to encourage small businesses to identify their needs and seek advice, and to encourage individuals who already have the necessary expertise to provide it when small businesses ask for it.

In addition, we have identified gaps in the market provision of services and in the advice available to small firms, and we have gone out of our way to fill those gaps. The loan guarantee scheme and the business expansion scheme are designed to meet the particular problems faced by small businesses when raising finance. The Training Agency offers a wide range of training for start-ups and growing businesses with a £50 million plus commitment through business growth training. The small firms service and local enterprise agencies advise smaller businesses, while more specialised help is available through the DTI's enterprise initiative. Much of this help is delivered in partnership with the private sector.

The critical new factor in this process will be the setting up of the locally based and employer-led training and enterprise councils. I am surprised that the hon. Member

for Truro, who has one of the first TECs in his region, did not comment on that or on the commitment by many leading business men in Devon and Cornwall to making a success of it. Perhaps he is not aware of what is going on.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: The Minister is aware that I cut short my speech because of the shortness of the debate and my desire to let other hon. Members speak. There is a rather higher proportion of Social and Liberal Democrats here than of any other party. I would otherwise have dealt with TECs. Therefore, the Minister can now answer a couple of queries about them. First, would it not be possible to increase the role of small businesses in the TECs? Secondly, would it not be better to free them from the restraints of Government control? I have had feed-back from a number of people involved in TECs, and they feel that the TECs are far too directed centrally, and thus are unable to take as many of their own decisions as they would like.

Mr. Eggar: I am not sure how well the hon. Gentleman understands the position in his TEC. I think that he is aware that the distinguished chairman of it is also the chairman of a smallish company and I would have thought that that is an obvious sign of the importance that we attach to the TECs being assisted by small businesses. As to the flexibility that the TECs need, this matter has been discussed—I have done so myself on at least two occasions—with the chairman of his local TEC. The hon. Gentleman will find, if he inquires, that a number of concerns expressed by the chairman about flexibility have been met satisfactorily. We have responded to the points towards which the hon. Gentleman was edging, and he may be a little out of date.

The Government recognise that most small businesses face problems, either at key phases in their development or as a result of external factors. We recognise too that interest rates are causing problems to some small businesses, although it is important to remember that, at the same time, about half of all small businesses are in credit with the bank. Nobody wants high interest rates for a moment longer than is necessary. Hon. Members should be under no illusion that, in the longer term, a period of high inflation would do far more damage to the viability of small firms and their ability to plan than the level of interest rates.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Lee) referred to the absence of Labour Members. I am not at all surprised by this. That the Labour party appointed the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) as the Minister responsible for small business is a sign of the importance that it attaches to that sector. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said that the greatest achievement of the Liberal party was the sacking from that post of the hon. Member for Bradford, South. That is an interesting gain for the country, delivered through the Lib-Lab pact. If my memory serves me right, the hon. Member for Bradford, South gave other reasons for his departure from the Government, but I shall leave that dispute to him and the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed.

Mr. Beith: The Minister is putting words into my mouth, albeit in a genial way. I did not claim that as our most significant achievement. We forced the Government to appoint as the Minister with responsibility for small businesses somebody who understood what making a profit is about—the Right Hon. Harold Lever, and a very good job he did.

Mr. Eggar: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on that achievement. I suppose that one can put that in the positive side of the balance. I am rather more concerned about the tremendous damage done to the country during the period of the Lib-Lab pact. That is what really matters, as it had a dramatically adverse effect on small firms.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): My hon. Friend has spent two and a half minutes dealing with the hon. Member for Bradford, South but dealt with interest rates in less than 30 seconds. The problems facing businesses emanate primarily from high interest rates, and I hope that he will appreciate the great damage that these are doing to smaller businesses. I speak as someone who comes from a smaller business background, unlike half the hon. Members now present. High interest rates are crippling smaller businesses, adding to costs and making them less competitive against overseas manufacturers not only at home but in the export market.

Mr. Eggar: My hon. Friend's knowledge of, and expertise in, all matters that come before the House is well known.

Mr. Winterton: Too bloody sarcastic.

Mr. Eggar: I apologise to my hon. Friend if he misunderstood what I was trying to say. I said that we recognise that for some companies, although not for all, interest rates are a problem.

Mr. Winterton: Most of them.

Mr. Eggar: It is generally recognised that about half of small businesses are borrowers from the bank and about half are in credit with the bank. Therefore, it is logical to say that, roughly speaking, half of small businesses are not adversely affected by high interest rates.

Mr. Winterton: Try manufacturing.

Mr. Eggar: I do not want to get into a disagreement with my hon. Friend because I recognise, as I have said, that some small businesses are affected by high interest rates. However, allowing inflation to get out of control would be far worse for small businesses—be they manufacturing businesses or other small businesses. I am sure that my hon. Friend will make his own speech in his own way, and I shall listen with considerable care to the points——

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Eggar: If my hon. Friend insists.

Mr. Shepherd: I understand why my hon. Friend may want to slide over high interest rates, but the intention behind them is to dampen demand. A reduction in demand affects all businesses, and that is one of the ways in which small businesses are squeezed. So to state that 50 per cent. of them are not in debt understates the position. Perhaps my hon. Friend has not given sufficient weight to that.

Mr. Eggar: I know from conversations with my hon. Friend about his anxiety; he has particular expertise in the retail sector. Many small businesses in that sector are

[Mr. Eggar]

affected by high interest rates, in terms of borrowing and of lesser demand. I accept my hon. Friends point, but I was not trying to skate over the problem. It is only right to put that problem in context and I hope that I did so in a balanced way.

The Labour party's policy review shows that it is now even more hostile to small firms than ever before. Businesses would be required to pay a statutory national minimum wage—a recipe for destroying jobs and crippling fims as they are getting off the ground. All enterprises under the policy review, whatever their size, would have to contribute 0·5 per cent. of their pay rolls to a state training levy. Freedom to hire and manage staff would be effectively removed by a requirement to submit all personnel decisions to a joint union-employer body——

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): Rubbish.

Mr. Eggar: It is no good the hon. Gentleman laughing —that is what the policy review says.

Labour's policy would smother small firms and stifle individual enterprise. To consult Labour about small firms would be as useful and effective as seeking King Herod's advice on child care.

The Government will continue to encourage the small business sector. We shall continue to tackle the barriers to enterprise creation and to growth, whether they be in the form of attitudes to enterprise or of a lack of business knowledge and skills, or practical barriers in the form of red tape or restrictions on access to markets at home and in Europe. Conservatives do not only say that they are in favour of small businesses; we have proved by our actions and achievements that support for small businesses and enterprises is right at the centre of all our policies.

8.14 pm

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): We have heard a characteristically complacent speech by the Minister of State. It was interesting to see the little tiff about interest rates. The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) was right: the Government may want to take credit for blowing away lots of paperwork and Government inefficiencies, but the key problem facing small businesses is the crippling level of interest rates.

How long does the Minister think this level of interest rates will continue; and does he seriously maintain that only a small number of firms are affected by it? The small business sector, along with the wider business community, is facing a bill of an extra £3 billion if the rise from 7·5 per cent. to 15 per cent. continues for a year.

In view of jibes aimed at the Opposition today, I must point out that collective wisdom about small businesses has been invested this evening in my hon. Friends the Members for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) and myself. I may add in passing that this is the first time I have been able to imagine someone leading a Conservative march in my constituency, and to look over his shoulder.

The Opposition appreciate the contribution of the small business sector to growth and output and to employment. It was interesting that the Minister, who is usually courteous, would not allow me to intervene on a small difference of opinion between him and the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) about the Government's claimed jobs miracle since 1983.

I have a small challenge for the Minister and his able advisers. From the figures provided by the Department of Employment, particularly in the labour force survey, it is clear that, between June 1979 and June 1989, the net increase in employment in this country was 978,000; but 440,000 were double jobbers, and 470,000 were people on training schemes. By my calculation that leaves a net increase of 68,000 in 10 years. What does the Minister think of that calculation? Will he at last assure the House that these figures will be examined and that we shall hear no more nonsense about a jobs miracle made up of an odd collection of training places, part-time and poor quality jobs, double jobs and other dubious statistics related to self-employment.

The small business sector employs about 6 million people, or one quarter of the work force. It is obviously a fairly powerful section of employment creation. The Government have argued, using labour force survey figures, that within this sector 3 million people are self-employed. Our research reveals that of the 1·2 million people who entered the self-employed sector between 1979 and 1989, to make up the total of 3 million, 900,000 pay no national insurance contributions. I challenge the Government to provide another set of statistics to verify that.

Mr. Eggar: I shall be delighted to respond to the hon. Gentleman at length in due course. One of the reasons why his figures are wrong is that he used figures for the wrong year. It is some time since I looked at assertions that the hon. Gentleman published just before Christmas, but I think I am right in saying that he related figures applying to 1987-88 to 1989. I shall be delighted to set the hon. Gentleman right with the other reasons in due course.

Mr. McLeish: I am delighted that the Minister acknowledges that our document, which was the focus of such merriment among Conservative Members the other day, has been read by his advisers. But he will not get off the hook by suggesting that extrapolating the figures for 1988 to 1989 makes up for the enormous difference between the Government's assertions about job creation and the true figures.

I hope that the question of the self-employed and the doubts now surrounding the figures will be looked into. I am willing to accept that, as a result of the enterprise allowance scheme and other schemes, there are in self-employment a number of people who do not register in any of the Government's statistics and are only picked up from the labour force survey, on which figures the Government base their figure of 3 million.

In the past, the small business sector has certainly been the focus of a political knockabout in this Chamber. There are certain reasons for that. When one takes into account the fact that one quarter of the work force are now engaged in small business development and that those people contribute about 20 per cent.—an enormous amount—to the gross domestic product, one realises that it is incumbent on all parties in this House not only to take very seriously the achievements in that sector but also to look at the potential there for further employment growth.

Before looking at some of the concerns of the small business community at present, I want to refer to the hype

and rhetoric of the Minister of State. This is an area in which the Department of Employment too is becoming expert. It is intimidating to other hon. Members to have Ministers, in some respects, exploiting the small business community, using it to try to highlight what the deregulated market economy has produced.

But the Government's argument about small businesses falls apart when hon. Members such as the hon. Member for Macclesfield intervene to raise the question of interest rates. The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) also mentioned the uniform business rate. This is a saga of two halves. The Government have been shuffling papers for a decade. They have seen a rise in the number of self-employed people and an increase in the small business sector. But we must see a new relationship developing. This Government and any future Government must take the small business sector far more seriously than has been suggested by some of the comments that we have heard tonight. The new relationship between Government and the small business sector must revolve around the issues that actually matter.

We have talked about crippling interest rates, but there are a number of other matters. It used to be the case that in any forum the Government could call upon the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses to talk about issues and to reflect and support what the Government were attempting to do. In recent months, there has been a change in the attitude of those bodies. In my view, they now know that they were partly used by Lord Young during his sojourn in the corridors of power and by the Department of Employment, whose projection of what it is actually doing to improve the environment in which small businesses operate borders, at times, on the slightly dishonest.

Speaking at a seminar on corporate finance in the City on 24 May 1989, the Chancellor of the Exchequer outlined clearly what businesses need. He said that businesses needed three things from Government—first, a consistent framework; secondly, minimal interference; and thirdly, limited practical help.

Let us take the second issue first. Certainly we have now arrived at a situation of minimal interference, though I have to say that, when one speaks to people in small businesses about VAT and income tax, they put a different complexion on the situation. In March 1985, we had "Burdens on Business"; in July 1985, "Lifting the Burden"; in 1986, "Building Businesses—Not Barriers"; in 1987, "Encouraging Enterprise"; in 1988, "Releasing Enterprise"; and in 1989, "A New Tack on Red Tape". It is an annual event.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): It needs to be.

Mr. McLeish: The hon. Member says that it needs to be.

In the early days of the development of the small business sector, there were real problems about the amount of red tape involved. What we now see is a ritualistic attempt to engage the small business sector, to create the impression that the problems that it faces are related to much of that, without actually addressing the crucial issues that have been raised in this House by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Clearly, the first of these issues is the question of interest rates. The irony of crippling interest rates is that they actually hit the companies that are growing fastest. The Minister has made the point that the number of companies affected is small. In reality, however, the gearing ratio of a fast-growing small business is much more significant, and outgoings are much more significant.

If such a business is asked by this Government to participate by paying its share of the £3 billion increase in debt, surely that will have an impact on the business's growth potential and its ability to introduce new technology and to create employment—clearly something that is valuable for all of us.

But it is not only my opinion that high interest rates are hitting hard. I have here a press release from the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses. Issued on 10 October, and headed "High Interest Rates Hitting Hard, Say Small Businesses", it says:

"Mr. Bill Knox, Chairman of the National Federation of Self Employed, said 'Every percentage increase costs small firms £200 million. The real cost of money is at least 18 per cent. (15 per cent. plus 3 per cent. over base). This is how much businesses are having to pay to finance past expansion, to create new jobs, or even to survive. Small businesses are viewing the future with real concern.'"

Does the Minister view the future with the concern that the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses seems to have? I will give the Minister an opportunity to talk about interest rates, to answer the question that was posed by the hon. Member for Macclesfield: how long will small businesses have to endure this crippling burden? Is no hon. Member on the Government side willing to intervene and give me, with my limited knowledge, a lecture about when interest rates will come down? *[Interruption.]* I have given hon. Members opposite a chance to intervene, but all that I have heard is murmurs, and all that I see is grim faces.

Mrs. Currie: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that we should return to the situation that prevailed not so long ago, under a Labour Government, in which the rate of inflation was regularly over 20 per cent? One has only to look at the results. Far more firms were going out of business entirely than were coming into existence. These days, despite all the problems and the pressures that the hon. Gentleman has described, far more businesses are being created week by week.

Mr. McLeish: It is amazing that a party that has no future always wants to dwell on the past.

My concern—*[Interruption.]* Let me explain the point that has been made by other hon. Members about inflation rates. In no country of the developed world—and certainly not among our European competitors—would the Finance Minister, the equivalent of the Chancellor, use one heavy blunt instrument to attack financial and trading difficulties. That is the crucial test for this Government.

There is another measure. Despite what Ministers have said, the number of receiverships jumped by over 40 per cent. last year as the squeeze hit. As a postscript to that, let me quote from an article in *The Times* of 12 January:

"The survey also shows that three accountancy firms established a clear lead over all others in the receiving and managing sector. Cork Gully, the specialist division of Coopers and Lybrand, was appointed to 150 firms, Grant Thornton to 110, and Peat Marwick to 107"—

another set of statistics that the Government should be duly proud off.

The uniform business rate has been mentioned. I think that the hon. Member for Truro gave it sufficient airing and that therefore I need not to into great detail. While, in a very simplistic sense, the north will benefit signficantly

[Mr. McLeish]

and the south will have an extra burden imposed on it, it is quite clear, again from the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses, that the impact of the transitional payments will disappear. Their phasing in is an illusion in terms of the impact that they will ultimately have on small businesses.

I again ask whether the Government are truly the friends of the small business community. The business rate will start in April and it appears that people in small businesses will have to go to the local authority to determine the current position about rateable value. Discussions should be taking place with the small business community. Day in and day out, the Government lecture us and say that they are the true friends of the small business and that any other party, Liberal or Labour, that speaks or even hints at an interest in the small business sector is frowned upon. Things are changing, and it is easy to see why.

The Minister talked about training and technology. The key issues for the future of small businesses are not only output and employment growth but whether the nation and the Government can link together to ensure that product development and innovation and training can be properly applied. Many small businesses do not have the resources to carry out those important tasks.

Training and enterprise councils were mentioned. The Government say that, as friends of the small business, they welcome small businesses to TECs. Why is it that the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses put out a press release on 23 September which was headed:

"Small firms to lose out in Government training plans"?

The press release said:

"'We are concerned with the direction of training in Britain. Norman Fowler states that Training and Enterprise Councils (TEC's) will be big business. Our fear is that they will be for big business only', says Lyn Hadfield, Chairman of the NFSE's Training and Education Committee. 'The composition of the boards of TECs could well lead to specialised training for large companies at the expense of smaller firms.'"

It is interesting to note that the small business sector is lauded by the Government but never invited to the top table. It is crippled by interest rates and by the uniform business rate. It is supposed to be involved in training, but it will be excluded from virtually every TEC in England and Wales, and the situation is similar in Scotland.

Mr. Wallace: The hon. Gentleman has said that small firms have never been consulted. Will he comment on the fact that, as the poll tax comes into operation in England and Wales, employers will have to be involved in attaching the wages of employees? That unhappy burden has been placed on small business by the Government without the small business sector being consulted.

Mr. McLeish: The hon. Gentleman makes another valid point to add to our attack on the Government. The Government's attitude smacks of hypocrisy; we experienced a great deal of that in the Minister's characteristically complacent speech.

The Public Accounts Committee's eighth report on assistance to small firms said that the Government have machinery to do much more about training in small businesses. The training for enterprise concept is interesting, but the Public Accounts Committee criticised it because it was badly focused. There was no real idea of the return on the investment in terms of the impact that the scheme had on participants. If the Government value the contribution of small businesses, they should bring them into TECs and also discuss with them the extension of existing machinery in the Department of Employment to encourage small firms to expand their output and make a greater contribution not only to their employees, but to national welfare.

The nation requires a great deal of consensus on how we move forward in industry and on employment and economic performance. The National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses expects the Government to put forward policies that will help the NFSE. The firm statement to the Government is that crippling interest rates must be lowered. If they are not, the number of firms going into receivership will increase. Small businesses provide 6 million jobs—a quarter of Britain's work force. It also contributes one quarter of our gross national product. If the Government believe in small businesses, they must show that they want them to become involved by adjusting the TEC provision and making sure that they are allowed to speak to Government.

8.34 pm

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): The hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) and the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor), who has just left the Chamber—briefly, I am sure—were scraping the barrel when they tried to attack the Government's policy on small firms. Clearly that is their job, but I listened carefully to their speeches and I sensed that they were finding it somewhat difficult to mount the case that the Government have failed to encourage small firms and foster their interests. Any disinterested observer would see that mounting such a case is impossible.

My hon. Friend the Minister was right to say that the climate has been totally transformed. Of course there are problems, and I shall come to them shortly. Entrepreneurs would not start businesses if they were not prepared to deal with problems. That is what sets such people apart from a corporate man or someone in the public sector who has a rather comfortable life. The entrepreneur recognises that life is tough and that he has to solve problems. I am sure that my hon. Friends will agree that the Minister mounted a most convincing case to show that the small firms sector has been transformed. The climate is totally different. There has been a great deal of deregulation, but there is still a long way to go. Much good has been done and the number of complications faced by small firms has been greatly reduced. That should encourage us to go further.

Taxes have been changed. The hon. Member for Fife, Central made much of interest rates. I shall deal with that before my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) leaves the Chamber. I see that he has slipped back into his seat. I remind the hon. Member for Fife, Central that in 1979 the rate of corporation tax for small firms was 42 per cent. The hon. Gentleman may have forgotten that. It is now down to 25 per cent. and we have every expectation that it will come down again in succeeding Conservative Budgets.

The rate of taxation for the sole trader, the self-employed person, went up to a maximum of 83 per cent. and it is now down to 40 per cent. Many capital taxes

have been reduced, and that is important from the point of view of leaving money in a business so that it can expand. This is a serious subject and perhaps it was a little irresponsible of the hon. Member for Fife, Central to have political fun at the expense of the Government on the subject of interest rates.

There was a forest fire involving some of my hon. Friends a short time ago and my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield threw in a match to ensure that it was burning properly. However, he is quite right to say that interest rates are a problem for many small firms. My hon. Friend the Minister accepts that and does not need to speak for a quarter of an hour repeating that that is a problem for small firms. However, it is not a problem for all of them because we have to add to the equation the question of demand. Of course it is true that the high interest rates from which we are suffering will reduce demand. However, we must remember that we have had eight years of record growth and demand in the small firms sector. When that is coupled to the reductions in taxation and deregulation, it will be seen that it has contributed to a huge growth in the sector. We have run into the problem of inflation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) was right to say that inflation is the real killer. It is the worst of the two problems. I note that my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield is nodding. He is a wise man who nods only when he agrees. He was nodding when the Minister spoke about inflation. Had we allowed inflation to continue at 20 per cent. for five years, that would have removed all the capital from businesses. It is not a very difficult or complicated mathematical equation; even I can work it out. Inflation is the worst evil. It is worth dealing with it in the short term because it must not get a real grip on the economy. I doubt that anything divides my hon. Friend and I on that point.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I believe high interest rates to be a major contributory factor to inflation. There should be a more selective weapon to deal with inflation than high interest rates, which kill the goose that lays the golden egg —which is manufacturing industry and industry in general.

Mr. Grylls: That is my hon. Friend's view. In 1980 inflation was running at 20 per cent. If we had not tackled it, it would have been the worst conceivable evil. We dealt with it again when it rose by a small degree in 1985. It has risen again in 1989-90, and I believe that the Government's policies that succeeded in 1980 and 1985 will succeed now. Of course, it would be dishonest to pretend that that cannot be achieved without a great deal of pain.

I want to contrast Britain with West Germany. During the past eight years Britain has had a higher rate of growth, but West Germany has had lower interest rates, especially now. It is a question of balance. Some aspects are better in West Germany but some are better in Britain. Like other hon. Members, I travel around the country and meet many small business men. They all say, "We must not have inflation because that will kill us."

We shall have the Budget in a few weeks, and there is room for the Government to make further changes in taxation that will help the cash position of businesses. Although corporation tax for small firms has fallen from 42 per cent. to 25 per cent., for a new and growing business it still means that a quarter of its profit is lost in taxation. That is too much. There should be a lower starting rate, at least for the newer businesses in their most fragile years —perhaps the first three years. Perhaps there should be a new rate band from nil to £25,000 or £30,000 of profit. That would give small companies the opportunity to move on to the next stage of development so that they could expand their premises and take on more employees.

If too much is taken out of profit—and I believe that 25 per cent. is too much—how can a company grow? The only way that it can grow—and this comes back to interest rates—is to borrow, which in itself creates a problem. It would make much more sense if the Chancellor left more money in the businesses so that they could grow from their internal cash generation. I hope that that will happen.

Another longer-term measure would be to cut even further the inheritance tax rates for businesses. If we sincerely believe, as we do, in the enterprise culture—in the encouragement of people to take risks and invest their money in firms—firms should be passed on from one generation to another. Most firms do not reach their optimum size in only one generation. Inheritance tax has been reduced to 20 per cent., which is better than it was —it was awful—but if a firm with an asset value of £1 million, which is not a great deal in current terms, is to be passed on to the next generation, some £200,000 in cash must be produced.

I sometimes think that the Treasury believes that small firms have pots of cash in drawers just waiting to be handed over when the firm is passed on to the next generation. That does not happen. A well-run business uses its cash to develop and to advance. We must make the Treasury understand that. Some may say that firms can take all sorts of fancy measures, such as consulting accountants and lawyers, avoiding tax, transferring assets outside the seven-year rule and so on—but that is not the point. The one thing that most entrepreneurs cannot decide is when they will die. That is something that even the Treasury cannot get round. Of course, I am not referring to private money—that is a different argument —but businesses should be passed on without an inheritance tax liability.

Another area in which the climate has been transformed is the provision of general finance, especially through venture capital, the highly successful loan guarantee scheme and the enterprise allowance scheme for very small new businesses. However, there is still a gap and we would be wise to consider the practice in West Germany, where small businesses have loans totalling the equivalent of £4·5 billion at interest rates below the going rate, which is very low anyway. West Germany has prudently looked after the Marshall plan money, which is still allowing small businesses to borrow at special rates of interest. Of course, we do not have Marshall plan money in Britain, but it is an aspect that should be considered.

Multinational companies can borrow in the Euro dollar market at quite low rates, even with the high interest rates in Britain, but small firms have to pay the maximum rates. That is rather like telling young children to stand on their own feet, but when they grow up putting them in a nursery. We should consider ways to give growing businesses a leg up with special interest rates. We could also offer subsidies and so on, but they are complicated.

In 1988 about £1·5 billion of venture capital was loaned to about 2,000 firms, so it has been a successful innovation. The hon. Member for Fife, Central was not in the House in 1979, but the venture capital market was almost

[Mr. Grylls]

unknown. It is all new money. However, it has tended to go to firms with a high growth rate. Perhaps we should worry about the plodding firms such as the good, steady engineering companies that do not have a high growth rate and so are more difficult to finance.

I am sure that the problem of high interest rates will be temporary, and I hope that most of our firms can cope with them. It is a problem of today, but it will not be the problem of 1991. I am not suggesting that we should pat ourselves on the back because there is always more to do. The small business sector suffered 40 years of neglect until 1979 which cannot be rectified in just 10 years. It needs another 10 years of Conservative government to improve the climate in the ways that my hon. Friend the Minister explained so convincingly in his speech. I hope that very shortly we shall be given the opportunity for that further 10 years.

8.49 pm

Mr. Geraint Howells (Ceredigion and Pembroke): As a very small business man, Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I begin by declaring my interest, as usual, and thanking you for calling me in this important debate for the small business man. This country was built up by the vigour and enterprise of small businesses and the self-employed, but they are now being squeezed to death by the power of the big battalions and the lack of concern of the Government. My constituency has a higher percentage of self-employed than others. I am proud of their record. I know the problems at first hand, and I have become more and more concerned about the increase in pressure under which the self-employed work and live.

I listened with interest to the Minister, whom I respect in many ways. He must take more heed of what his hon. Friends have said about high interest rates. I should not like him to be sacked for not looking after the interests of small business men, but he should have a word with the Prime Minister because I believe that the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) would do a good job as a Minister responsible for small businesses and farmers.

Many hon. Members, like me, represent areas with a large number of self-employed. When I go back to my constituency in Cardiganshire and north Pembroke people never mention inflation, although it is a big problem. They always talk about high interest rates and their effect on farmers and small businesses. They may be wrong in thinking that high interest rates have more effect on their businesses than high inflation.

I have been in the Chamber since 7 o'clock. I think that only six hon. Members who have been here since the beginning of the debate were Members of the House in 1978. Human nature never changes. We always like to laugh at young Members who are up and coming politically, but I am ashamed that some Conservative Members laughed when my hon. Friend the Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) was trying to make a good case for the self-employed and for small businesses.

Mrs. Currie: That is because he is an idiot.

Mr. Howells: The hon. Lady did not help many small businesses when she was a Minister.

I do not blame Conservative Members if they want to criticise the Lib-Lab pact. They may criticise the Liberals as much as they like, but we are still here. May I remind them that our former leader, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), did something for small businesses that other hon. Members did not achieve. During the first few days of the pact my former colleague, Richard Wainwright, who was then the hon. Member for Colne Valley, and I met the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), who was a Minister at the time. I shall not comment any more, but we were not pleased with the result of our meeting. On our return we had a word with our leader. In his wisdom he suggested that he and others should see Lord Callaghan, who was then Prime Minister, and press on him the need for a Cabinet Minister to look after the interests of the self-employed and small businesses. That was achieved.

If Conservative Members disagree with what I have said, I can tell them about a letter that I have in my office from Lord Plumb, the leader of the Conservative party in Europe. He wrote to me at the end of 1978 to congratulate the Liberal party and Members of the Lib-Lab pact because the 1978 Budget had been the best one ever for farmers and small businesses. *[Laughter.]* There is no need for the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) to laugh. These are the facts of life.

The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice), who has left the Chamber, said that the Liberal party was in favour of rating agricultural land. Other hon. Members have expressed the same view over the years. I advise the hon. Gentleman to have a chat with his hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) who decided a few years ago to introduce a ten-minute Bill on the rating of agricultural land. I opposed him. I am delighted that the majority of Conservative Members came into the Lobby with me and the Bill was defeated.

Lest any other Members want to jump up to support the rating of agricultural land, may I tell them that I have a letter of apology from an ex-Minister of Agriculture because he and others had misled hon. Members about our policy. I hope that hon Members who have come to the House over the last 10 years will realise what we Liberals stand for. We will stand by our policies. Conservative Members should not laugh at what we have done over the years or at our achievements under the Lib-Lab pact, of which I am proud.

I have been a farmer all my life, as well as a small business man. Yesterday the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced an extra payment of 75p for the hill livestock compensatory allowance for sheep. Perhaps hill farmers in Cardiganshire will make a collection for the Minister so that he can help the Government out. I think my constituents would be willing to do that.

Investment in United Kingdom agriculture has fallen by 40 per cent. in the last five years. Full-time employment in the industry has also fallen dramatically, with the loss of some 60,000 jobs in five years. Right hon. and hon. Members speak often about the environment, but it is the farmers on the highlands and marginal lands of Britain who are really responsible for looking after it. It is a great shame that so many of them are leaving the land and the rural areas of Britain, never to return. They have been the guardians of the countryside for generations. It is a great pity that the Government are unable to help the people who have looked after the interests of us all for generations.

My hon. Friend the Member for Truro mentioned at the beginning of his excellent speech the Interest on Debts Bill that is to be introduced by the hon. Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates). There is great merit in his proposals. Dr. Emyr Roberts, the National Farmers Union deputy director for Wales, states:

"We very much welcome this Bill, which would help virtually all farm businesses. It would allow small and medium-size firms the statutory right to interest on overdue debts from central and local Government, nationalised industries and large firms. It would not affect small and medium-size businesses in their trading with each other, and a big company could not use it against a small firm."

At a time of high interest rates, it is vital that small businesses such as farms are paid promptly, as they cannot withstand payment delays in the way that large firms can. The NFU will urge all Members of Parliament to support the Interest on Debts Bill. I hope that, Ministers also will support the hon. Member for Hampshire, East and his Bill, which will do a power of good to everyone in agriculture and in small businesses.

High interest rates are crippling farmers, shopkeepers, bus operators, and everyone concerned with rural, urban and city life. I hope that, when he replies, the Minister will reassure all those affected by the Government policy of high interest rates that he personally will persuade his right hon. and hon. Friends in Government to lower interest rates this coming year. If he will, the people of this country will be delighted to hear that news. Let us hope that small businesses and small farmers, who have been the backbone of this country, and still are, will be helped sooner rather than later.

9.1 pm

Mr. Graham Bright (Luton, South): I welcome the fact that the topic for debate chosen by the Liberal Democrats is small businesses, because they have played a growing and more important role in the development of industry over the past 10 years. It is necessary not only to acknowledge that but to congratulate the Government on the work that they have done and to reflect on ways in which small businesses can be improved still further.

Like the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells), I am a small business man. That statement usually brings a laugh in view of my stature. The hon. Gentleman and I are similar in that respect. I have been a small business man for a number of years.

I was interested to hear about the Lib-Lab pact's one moment of glory, when it disposed of the small firms Minister. Mr. Harold Lever, without doubt, understood the problems of small businesses. The pity is that, while he was in office, and during the period of the Lib-Lab pact —and I am sorry to mention it again, because I know that it upsets Liberal Democrat Members—small businesses and business men still suffered increases in income tax, corporation tax, capital transfer tax and capital gains tax.

At the same time, legislation was introduced such as the Employment Protection Act 1975, which was nothing more than a form of appeasement to the unions. However appropriate it may have been for large firms, it imposed crippling requirements on small businesses. When debating the problems of small businesses, we must not only think of interest rates, because those problems cover a much broader spectrum.

It is surprising that the Liberal Democrats could not bring themselves to congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends on the steady rise in the number of businesses that have registered for value added tax since 1979. The Minister has already spelt out the enormous growth in self-employment, which has risen from 1·8 million to 3 million. We now have more than 2·5 million small businesses. It is partly because so many new businesses have been created in the past year—the weekly rate has increased from 500 to more than 1,500—that there have been more business failures.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North talked about farming. I do not farm, but I am a business man who, like a farmer, sows seeds, in the form of investments. Business men, like farmers, do not always get it right, and some of the seeds fall by the wayside; but they till the ground and work hard to protect those that take root.

Hon. Members cannot simply point to interest rates. Lack of management expertise, poor marketing skills and bad financial practice often cause companies to go out of business, and I pay tribute to the Government for their investment in the small firms service.

Mr. Alex Carlile: The hon. Gentleman gives the impression that only incompetent managers "fall by the wayside" because of high interest rates. Does he not agree that many good, sound, careful, competent financial managers have seen their businesses collapse because of the crippling rise in interest rates?

Mr. Bright: The hon. and learned Gentleman should have listened more carefully. I accepted that high interest rates caused problems, and I shall say more about that in a moment, but I also emphasised the fact that there are many other reasons for business failures. Failure in business is a horrible thing: we do not share with the Americans the culture that accepts that seeds must be sown if growth is to follow. It is easy for those who fail to blame interest rates without considering the facts.

One of the reasons why I praise the Government's contribution to the small firms service is that thousands of people have gone into business for the first time. It is not easy to run a business. There is a considerable difference between having manufacturing or engineering skills, or a flair for art, pottery or tapestry weaving, and having the marketing expertise to sell the product. Business men must understand accounts and cash flow or the company is likely to get into trouble. The small firms service has recognised that they sometimes need their hands held, and is able to guide them through difficult times. It has enabled many companies that would have collapsed in the past to survive and succeed.

Let me join in the spirit of the debate and make some constructive and positive suggestions. We still have a long way to go in assisting small firms, and I should like to see a change in administrative methods within Government. I have argued for a long time that the small firms division of the Department of Employment should be enlarged and should deal with the enterprise and deregulation unit, and that its operations should include the Development Commission and the Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas, which are now the responsibility of the Department of the Environment. I should like all the small business organisations to be brought together.

The hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) spoke about training. That is an important concern for small companies which are not attracting people with the right skills. Small businesses require people with multiple

[Mr. Bright]

skills because a small company cannot afford to employ, for example, a maintenance man, an electrician, a plumber and a carpenter; it has to employ someone who can do all those jobs. We should emulate the Japanese and the Germans and employ people skilled in multiple disciplines, particularly in maintenance. We should look at our education system, and encourage fifth-year pupils in secondary schools to take vocational courses for industry. We should recognise the needs of small businesses and not encourage people to seek work only in large companies. Some of the initiatives to bring education closer to industry, such as the city technology colleges, are extremely important.

Two areas in which the Government have actively helped small businesses are the loan guarantee scheme and the enterprise allowance scheme. We should attach to any money handed out under those schemes the obligation that the people receiving the money should undergo some training to make sure that they are equipped to run a business. The enterprise allowance scheme brought many people into business for the first time and managed to keep them in business for a year, but when the allowance was taken away many businesses failed. Perhaps it would be a good idea to examine the training facilities available and make it obligatory that people understand the basic principles of running a business.

I accept that we have done a great deal to help by doing away with form-filling and mountains of forms, but we should consider the number of inspectors and officials who call on small firms as they are the bane of small business men. There is a powerful case for a single statute modelled on the Rights of Entry (Gas and Electricity Boards) Act 1954, defining the rights of access for everyone to understand. Those who have rights of access should declare who they are, why they are there and what authority they have to visit the factory. I should like an enlarged factory inspectorate to deal with a whole range of issues rather than having so many people appear on site. There is often friction, and that is extremely confusing for small business men.

The question of late payment has been mentioned, but the House will have ample opportunity to discuss that on Friday. In my view, by delaying payment large companies often weaken their suppliers, and that is not in their interests. However, I am sceptical about the introduction of legislation as it would not necessarily work in favour of small business men.

We should do more to encourage local government to open up contracts for small businesses. There are still far too many bogus and dubious so-called health and safety grounds that stop small businesses getting involved in supplying local government. Small businesses should be taking over some of the printing and other local government services.

I began by congratulating the Liberal Democrats on allowing us to discuss this subject. As soon as they saw the possibility of small business men crying with anguish about the interest rates, they tried to jump on the bandwagon. I have every confidence that interest rates will fall. However, like my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, North-West (Mr. Grylls), I believe that we must consider the fact that large companies can borrow from abroad. Having talked to the banks, I can see no way in which that can be extended to smaller companies. We must consider that point carefully to see whether some special borrowing powers can be applied to small businesses to allow them to have a lower rate. There is nothing sacred about that, because many large businesses enjoy that privilege already. We are not trying to buck the system; we are trying to make the playing field level once more for small businesses.

I am confident that when people pass judgment on the Government the small business men will acclaim the past 10 years as being a period of enormous success for them, and the figures prove that.

9.16 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): If small businesses look to this debate for salvation or hope, they would be better employed going bankrupt. Only my hon. Friend the Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish), in his excellent speech from the Opposition Front Bench, displayed any understanding of the issue. Only he grappled with the problems. For the Government, the Minister turned a condescending sneer into a system of economics and Conservative Back Benchers whistled into the wind in an attempt to keep up their spirits as their majorities decline. They seemed only to say that, bad as things are, they would be worse under Labour. People do not believe that.

The Liberals have shown a unique skill in framing incomprehensible motions. Well, I call it a motion, but it is more of a skip into which they have shoved everything. Perhaps a skip is a bit big. It is more like a Tonka toy dumper truck into which they have placed all their quirks —interest rates, the uniform business rate, bureaucracy, debt and regular brushing of teeth. It is all there. The motion even includes several non-sequiturs, the most amazing of which is that they want the relief associated with the uniform business rate to be extended. So far as I understand it, that would mean the north subsidising the south. The Liberals appear to be claiming that the north should subsidise the south for some time.

I am no friend of the uniform business rate. However, I very much doubt whether the main topic of conversation on the Borders, in Berwick or in Southport is, "Good grief, what an awful time Harrods will have when the uniform business rate comes in. We must keep up our subsidy." If that is the extent of the Liberal's thinking on the matter, it is pathetic.

The other pathetic part of the ridiculous motion is that membership of the European monetary system is introduced as the Liberal's answer to everything. In the previous motion EMS was the answer to the situation in eastern Europe. They asked, "Are there problems in eastern Europe? Well, the EMS will solve them." The EMS is now the answer to the uniform business rate, to bureaucracy and to everything else. Why is the EMS not the answer to AIDS, the problems facing the National Health Service and vandalism?

The Liberals' view of the EMS is similar to a view expressed by Lord Randolph Churchill when he described Gladstone. Before the Liberal party became green, Gladstone used to spend his time at Hawarden chopping down trees. The Liberal faithful were brought round the grounds to catch a sight of the great man and they were all presented with a chip from those trees which they went home clutching. Lord Randolph Churchill asked, "What is Gladstone's answer to the problems facing the world?

Chips. What is his answer to eastern Europe? Chips. What about the poor? Chips." His counterparts today, Gladstone's teenage heirs, offer businesses a pamphlet on the EMS as those businesses head towards the bankruptcy courts.

The Liberals portray a pathetic understanding of the EMS. The exchange rate mechanism ties other currencies to the deutschmark and uses them to keep the deutschmark down. The central problem with trading in Europe is that the Germans are generating a huge surplus and that means that the deutschmark should rise if we are to trade fairly. However, currencies are used as guy-ropes to keep the deutschmark down. That is why the exchange rate mechanism has had such a deflationary effect on the economies of France and Italy, in particular, with unemployment at 2·6 million and 2·9 million respectively. There has been a depressing, deflating effect. They are forced to deflate to get down to West Germany's abnormally low rate of inflation. Full membership of the exchange rate mechanism would have exactly the same effect here. It would become an engine of deflation.

The Liberals want to enter the EMS, whatever is the exchange rate. When the deutschmark was 2·80 to the pound, they said, "Join the EMS". When it was 3·20 they said, "Join the EMS." Now it is on its way down again, they still say, "Join the EMS." They are not bothered. Yet the real problem is the valuation at which we enter. If we enter at an unsustainable valuation, it will not keep interest rates down. We would be forced to throw every engine of the economy, particularly interest rates—it is the only one that the Government have—into maintaining an untenable exchange rate. That is exactly the effect. Interest rates would not go down; they would fluctuate more wildly in the ERM. That is why the Labour party has very wisely suggested four conditions for joining.

A rate will be determined by competitors who have a vested interest in access to our market and who want us to be over-valued so that they can send us more of their manufactured goods, and cause our industry to suffer. That is exactly the effect of membership. Deflation would be the inevitable result. Deflation is the real enemy of small business.

Mr. Eggar *rose*——

Mr. Mitchell: I shall give way to another condescending sneer from the Minister.

Mr. Eggar: Is the hon. Gentleman in favour of our joining the exchange rate mechanism?

Mr. Mitchell: The Minister heard me say that the Labour party has suggested four conditions. Since I think that those four conditions are unattainable, that is my position.

Deflation inhibits the growth and development of small businesses. The Government's only achievement has been to make big businesses small and small businesses bankrupt, and to turn the unemployed into small business men by making them self-employed. That is their policy for small businesses.

The real problem for small businesses is that the economy is run not for the needs of business or for industry or manufacturing—not for making things—but for those who manipulate money. Big financial institutions are the main enemy of small businesses. Their attitude, not in advertisements but in reality, is to lend small business a brolly when it is sunny, to snatch it back as soon as it rains, and then to charge it for taking it back again. They would much rather buy estate agencies and banks in America, go bankrupt with them, and lend money to South America than lend it to small business in this country. That is the record of our financial institutions. If an economy is run for financial institutions, as ours is, it institutionalises over-valuation, because financial institutions' interests are in buying foreign assets cheaper and putting more money overseas than they are investing in this country. That is their record, and that is the way in which they run the economy. That is the way in which the economy has been run under this Government—for a high exchange rate, for high interest rates, and for the interests of financial institutions, not making things, selling things and surviving in a tough world.

We need an economy that is run for manufacturing, with a competitive exchange rate and cheap money, which allows business to invest, allows us to become competitive and allows us to export, which makes exports cheap and imports dear, and allows us to build national champions such as those that have been successful in competing economies, in particular those of West Germany and Japan—national champions to export. It is on the back of that that small business becomes prosperous and expands. It needs a healthy, competing manufacturing sector.

With deflation, small business shrinks. The Government began with a disastrous rate of inflation that crucified small businesses for four years and caused many of them to go bankrupt. They have never allowed manufacturing to expand its base so that it can do its job of supporting a national economy, provide jobs, generate growth, provide a surplus of spending power and provide the high-skill, high-wage economy that generates demand for small business. That is what it is all about.

The only way in which we shall have a successful small business sector is by having a successful economy. That is why there is such a high proportion of small businesses and why small businesses are so active in Germany and Japan. They have a successful manufacturing economy. That is what we have destroyed and undermined. Until we recreate that, it is no use the Government promising sops and diverting into side issues of more freedom, fewer inspectors—which was the suggestion from the hon. Member for Luton, South (Mr. Bright)—freeing business from controls and regulations and allowing them to fire staff, neglect training, and undermine the conditions in which staff work. Through all those side issues and the manipulation of emotive symbols the Government try to escape the fact that the economy is being run, not for industry, small business, survival, competitiveness and jobs, but for finance and deflation.

Under "Blabynomics", with the obsession of the previous Chancellor of the Exchequer with following the deutschmark, we should have had even higher interest rates. That was one Major gain from the change of Chancellors. It is now Government policy to let the pound fall while pretending to keep it up. They walk backwards towards a devaluation market pretending that it is not happening. Yet they are keeping interest rates too high —much higher than our competitors, higher than industry and small business can bear and far higher than investment requires.

With a trade deficit the size of ours, the pound must come down. Interest rates must come down, too, because we have to invest to survive. Unless we invest to rebuild

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and expand our industrial base, we shall not survive; it is as simple as that. It is no good the Government whistling in the wind and distracting small businesses from reality by the lures that they introduce.

This next year will be horrendous for small business. No one has denied that prospect tonight. The small business sector will be tortured by high interest rates. They will be prodded and their position will be made worse by the uniform business rate and higher charges for electricity, water and telephones to fatten up the privatised industries. Telephone charges are now far higher than those in most countries on the continent. Small busineses will be depressed by the decline in spending power as people grapple with inflation, as unemployment increases and as people fail to improve their wages. All that contributes to a general decline. One person's spending is another person's income: money circulates. The Government's policies are dedicated to deflating and squeezing the economy in a fashion which is reminiscent of the attitudes, jargon and lack of concern with which they went into the great deflation from 1979 to 1982 which was so ruinous to British industry and, particularly, for the small business sector.

We are, in business as in society, one of another. We advance together or we do not advance at all. One does not advance the interests of small business by allowing it to triumph over its workers, dodge restrictions, fire people and avoid its commitments to safety and training. We advance together with a healthy, prosperous industry which produces the skills, incomes and wages for people to spend in the shops on the products of small business, to activate the suppliers and small business so that we all grow together. That is true of the economy and of society.

That will not happen until we replace a Government who have been completely ignorant of the interests of business and industry and deferential to those of finance and money and those who manipulate money. We must replace them with a Government dedicated to the interests of jobs, expansion and growth and to working together for an expanding future in which we have a strong industrial base on which this country can survive, compete and hold its head high in the world. A Labour Government will rebuild the economic health and heart of Britain.

9.29 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): I am aerobicised after the activities of the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). The agility with which he leapt from one theme to another would have put Saul Samuelson at a disadvantage. Nevertheless, the hon. Gentleman tackled some important and great themes.

I began as a very small business man after leaving university with a single shop in Earl's Court road. It has given me a modest prosperity and has enabled me to come here. As is said, "Those who can, do—and those who can't, teach.", so here I am prattling on about a subject that I have always been cautious about approaching.

I have always observed that small business men are essentially independent. The nature of their independence and the character of their spirit is instinctively Conservative. They draw from two great traditions that have little to do with Socialism. Their spirit may derive from the dissenters, the Quakers, the independent religions or from the great Conservative tradition. Most of the people with whom I have come into contact in my working life have been in small businesses and have been modest dissenters, who strike out on their own and build businesses. They are instinctively Conservative.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman seems to be missing the point slightly. What I have found most common among small business men is that they hate being ordered around. What attracts them to different political parties and away from the Labour party is that they are mistrustful of the intervention of the state. They are far more anti-Socialism than they are aligned to any other political views.

Mr. Shepherd: I accept that anti-Socialism is a strong theme among independent business men. Fear, experience and a whole variety of reasons such as the attitude, "I am independent and do not wish to be bossed around" lies behind their thinking. I accept that, but the natural home of most business men I have encountered during my working life has been the Conservative party.

Mrs. Currie: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Shepherd: Perhaps my hon. Friend will forgive me if I do not give way, but I want to speak only briefly.

Mrs. Currie: Will my hon. Friend please talk about business women as well?

Mr. Shepherd: I hear my hon. Friend and note what she has said.

Instinctive Conservatism is important to many small business men who have therefore looked to the Conservative party for understanding. However, during the 20 years that I have been a business man, which includes the 10 years before I became a Member of the House, I have noted that the Government are not particularly mindful of little business men. They take them for granted. I have nowhere else to go—I am an instinctive Conservative. I know that, "Those who can't teach—and those who can, get on with it", and the Government have taken for granted the attention and attendance of many small business men.

I shall say little on this subject because, like most of us, before being elected to the House I had never written a letter to a Member of Parliament and had never been associated with the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses. I stood alone and the modest prosperity that I gained was by the efforts of those with whom I worked. Therefore, I am respectful towards that class of small business people.

I shall not deal with the wider subjects that have been raised, although I am grateful to the Social and Liberal Democratic party for initiating the debate. I shall consider just one narrow tax that the Government have stumbled upon and which is mentioned in the motion. I refer to the uniform business rate. I cannot imagine a Government choosing a tax without knowing how it will fall or where it will hit and pushing it through the House on assumptions that were manifestly wrong. It was paraded by my right hon. Friends the Members for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), now the party chairman, and for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave), who is now at the Foreign Office. The document is called, "Paying for Local Government". When one reads through what was written in ignorance and then sees what has happened, one realises that the distress is profound.

I first realised what we are about when the "Paying for Local Government" Green Paper suggested that the west midlands would pay more under the new system and that central London would pay less. I am a Member of Parliament for the west midlands and have seen the 'flu that hit our industry during the late 1970s and the early 1980s. I have also seen the collapse in commercial property values in manufacturing industry and it seemed to me that a tax predicated on that basis would lead to a reduction in manufacturing industry's overall contribution to domestic rates. I realised, therefore, that the idea had to be wrong.

I am a trader in London and have seen the march of commercial rents. The assumptions behind the Green Paper therefore caused me some confusion. The Government changed a locally based tax, predicated on the supply and demand of local shops to finance local communities, into a national tax and created a huge redistributive mechanism. That amounts to £1 billion in redistributed money, but they do not know where it is going and what effect it will have.

The Government should remember that the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 imposes two conditions on small business men. They already pay a premium to get their businesses. I have no covenant. I have no plc behind me. When I am bidding for shop premises, I am invariably the last person whom a landlord would have by preference. We have now converted our high streets into some of the dreariest in western Europe because all the shops are owned by plcs. Each high street is replicated and one can buy only from these plcs. This nation of shopkeepers, as Napoleon called us, is reduced to a nation of about five plcs. That undermines the vitality of small business men who fight for their markets. They hold on long after the managing director of a plc quits with his pay-off and retires.

I am conscious of the bleak circumstances faced by small businesses. Furthermore, rent reviews are only upwards. Once a rent has got somewhere, the terms of the lease ensure that it never goes down, despite the fact that small business men have to pay extra just to get the lease and often have to offer personal guarantees.

In these circumstances, the Government decided to set up an £8 billion tax, and that will affect our national economy. Let us see how it falls. The Government suggested that central London would be a beneficiary but, over and above what businesses there would have had to pay to local authorities under the previous arrangements, they will have to pay some £610 million, of which £190 million will have to come from shops and £230 million from offices. A £610 million tax is being imposed on central London—I am not talking about outer London—and that will have some consequences quite apart from rent and balance of trade consequences. How does the retailer or small business man, the accountant or solicitor in his little office, recoup his share of that £610 million that the Government, without knowing that they were raising it and without knowing where it would go, have imposed? He has to raise prices. Therefore, I am worried about the inflationary impact at the time of the worst inflation that we have known in the last part of this decade. The tax will incite inflation.

Outer London—a smaller region, with a lesser base for rateable value—will pay an additional £30 million, which is not much, but £15 million for shops. The south-east—another Conservative heartland—will pay an additional £270 million, with £120 million from shops and £80 million from offices. The area from which the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) comes—the south-west—will have to find another £60 million to distribute, £20 million of which will come from shops. Some £30 million will be shipped out of East Anglia—the Government did not know that—of which £20 million will come from shops.

Originally, I suggested that the Government go ahead with revaluation, because not many people dispute the need for that. However, I also suggested that they should not have redistribution until they had seen how the pattern fell and that they should be prudent. Instead, they embarked on this. As I have said, it will gee up inflation, but it will have other effects. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) seemed to think that Britain was ruled from the City of London, but most small business men will recognise his general point that overall prosperity helps every business. A strong and successful City of London is undoubtedly important to whatever Government we have—whether Conservative, Labour or, should it ever happen, SLD.

Furthermore, 1992 is coming and the Government have constructed the highest cost office operating area in the Community. The additional burdens on the City of London will make firms wonder why they should locate there. By this measure, with £900 million exported from poor regions—without knowing the consequences of it—the Government will affect inflation and that is the most damaging result. This £900 million has to be paid for somehow—usually by raising prices. That is just an observation on which hon. Members must make their own judgments.

I do not know how the north of England will be affected, but I have tabled a question to the Department of the Environment asking how local authorities will lose or gain under the tax. The question relates to flows in and out of local authorities. There will be some surprised yelps from Conservative Members representing northern constituencies when they realise that their constituencies do not gain. I am talking about a destabilisation of the national economy which may have an influence on inflation.

I have been cautious. I have asked the Government to look at the Landlord and Tenant Act, which ratchets up prices to the highest rent last paid, never reflecting downward drifts in rents. So the costs for retailers, accountants or small business men always stay at the highest possible level. I predict that many businesses in central London will collapse. I am sorry that the Government have rejected the case put by retirement salesmen. The capital of a small business is often in the business. When these men reach the age of 65, 70 or even more, all they have for their pensions lies in the disposal or sale of their businesses. By imposing an arbitrary date of 1 April the Government have reduced the value of these businesses.

I have said that I was a small trader. I started a shop in Sloane street, renting it for £5,000 in 1973, with a 20-year lease and a five-yearly rent review. By 1983, the rent had risen to £15,000, and the latest rent request is for £100,000. Valuation under the Government's uniform business rate is £121,000, which entails the payment of £40,000.

I am not retiring or selling the business, because my brother runs it now. The whole business is now valued at £310,000 under the UBR. We bought the business from a retirement sale. A business sold on that basis now would

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have a greatly reduced value because from 1 April a tenant in gainful possession of the premises would pay £40,000 in rates, which would affect the rental value.

All this will prevent and confuse redevelopment in certain areas. The Government must urgently consider improving the position of retirement sales, and I suggest that a review of the Landlord and Tenant Act would provide a stimulus for small businesses.

I have tried to present my suggestions in a friendly way and in a condensed manner. The Government, in short, must be more mindful of those who are natural Conservatives.

9.43 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): This has been a good and necessary debate and it has been clear that, but for my right hon. and hon. Friends, we should have had to wait a long time for it.

Because of the twin problems of high interest rates and the introduction of the uniform business rate, about which the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) has just spoken so eloquently, the Government would have been reluctant to introduce a debate on this subject in their own time. Despite the valiant efforts of the hon. Members for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) and for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), there has been a singular lack of interest on the part of the Labour party, which suggests that we would have had to wait a long time for the Opposition to take the initiative, as well.

This has been the first opportunity in this Session for our party to nominate the business for the day, and we have used it to debate this important subject. The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills pointed out, based on his contact with people in the small business and self-employed sectors, that they tend to be people with independent minds. Those in my party have a great deal of sympathy with such people. Many Social and Liberal Democrat constituencies have high percentages of self-employed people.

It is for that reason that we welcome the fact that there are more people in self-employment and in small businesses today than there were 10 years ago. Any development in that direction is to be welcomed. However, it is worth bearing in mind the fact that we still fall far short of the comparable figures in, for example, West Germany or the United States of America. So there is still some way to go.

What we have heard tonight from the Government does not give us much confidence that we are taking the right strides in that direction. The Minister, many times over, gave us the statistics for the increase—the welcome increase, I say once again. What he said was all very defensive: it was all about what had happened over the last 10 years. There was not really anything about the problems facing small businesses today, and less still about the problems and opportunities of small businesses tomorrow.

We heard too about the number of small businesses being registered, but we have to look beyond that. What happens after they have been registered? My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), in an intervention which was not answered properly by the Minister, pointed out, in respect of people who want to be self-employed—North sea divers, journalists, free-lance photographers, actors—that the Government are trying to make them not self-employed, to move them from schedule D to schedule E. Surely, under tax law, there must be some means of ensuring that people who want to be self-employed have their wish respected. The Minister did not answer that point. Perhaps he did not appreciate it. It is a serious point, and I hope that he and his Treasury colleagues will reflect on it.

One could also look at the barriers that the Department of Social Security puts in the way of those who wish to be self-employed. The hon. Member for Surrey, North-West Mr. Grylls) made a very valuable contribution. He referred to a number of areas in which the self-employed have problems—the increasing lack, these days, of venture capital being put into new small businesses; the need to look at the tax relief that might be applied to small family firms where profits are ploughed back.

The hon. Gentleman talked in terms of £1 million in the context of a particular small business. Many of the self-employed people in my constituency do not know what £1 million is like. A self-employed person who came to my constituency surgery last Saturday wanted to claim family credit. I have dealt with the cases of several self-employed people who find it increasingly difficult to claim family credit.

To his credit, the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Lloyd), when he was a junior Minister at the Department of Social Security, changed the rule that required audited accounts. Of course, that rule was nonsense in the context of self-employed people. One wonders who drafts these regulations. But now, even though accounts are allowed, and even though they have been properly prepared by accountants, they are very often sent back with umpteen questions.

One question that came to my notice in a recent case concerned the fact that farm insurance was not being allowed as a business expense, despite the fact that the farm was being insured as a business. Clearly some people in the family credit branch of the Department of Social Security do not understand what small business is about. That is another area in which a barrier is put in the way of people who want to enjoy self-employment.

The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills expressed very well the fact that, for too long, the Government and Conservatives have taken small businesses and self-employed persons for granted. In an intervention, I referred to what is happening over the introduction of the poll tax. Employers whose employees do not, or cannot, pay the poll tax will be expected to attach their wages. That will undoubtedly put a further administrative burden on small employers. Indeed, they are allowed to charge the employee £1 for the service—for actually making a deduction from his wages. Who in the world thinks that that will make any contribution to good industrial relations in small companies?

But there are so many other ways in which the small business man has to act as the Government's tax collector. In a recent article in the *Financial Times*, Professor Sandford says:

"The biggest unfairness associated with tax compliance is the disproportionate burden it imposes on small companies. What might be called the regressiveness of tax compliance costs applies in its most extreme form to VAT . . . the lowest band of compulsorily registered traders . . . bore compliance

costs which averaged £7·80 for every £1,000 of goods sold; the corresponding figure for companies with a turnover of £10 million was 3p."

That shows quite clearly the burden that has been placed on small businesses.

Let us look at the Government policy of introducing student loans. What will be the reaction of the banks to a new graduate wanting to set up a business or become self-employed when that graduate already has a substantial loan hanging around his neck from his days at university? My hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells), in his excellent speech, outlined the Government's policy on fishing and expecially on farming. Government policy in those areas is putting great pressure on the self-employed.

As I have said, high interest rates and the uniform business rate place a great burden on the self-employed small business man. The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) put his finger on the problem when he said that, in a glib but competent speech, the Minister of State tried to slide over the problem of high interest rates in some 30 seconds. Time and again, people in small businesses speak about the pressure of high interest rates not only on their own indebtedness, but on the spending power of those seeking their services or wishing to buy from them.

An economic outlook report yesterday from the Royal Bank of Scotland said that the difference between the present recession

"and that experienced during the early 1980s is that this time the impact will be felt by the service industries".

It is in the service industries that we have seen such growth in small business and the self-employed. The Minister did not address that problem. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby said that the stock answer of my party is entry to the exchange rate mechanism of the EMS. Perhaps we say that time and again because we genuinely believe that it is the answer. Interestingly enough, when freed from the constraints of collective responsibility, Conservative Members have also said that.

If the Minister spoke for only 30 seconds about high interest rates, he said nothing at all in response to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) about the uniform business rate. That the House could have demanded more answers about that is shown by what the Prime Minister has said:

"The present transition period is five years, but that is not an absolute figure and it could be extended if need be."—[*Official Report*, 23 January 1990; Vol. 165, c. 737.]

The state of the small business sector needs to be fleshed out. What do the Government intend to do? Those of us north of the border well remember the problems experienced by the small business sector in Scotland after revaluation. For months, the Government said that they would do nothing and then had to rush legislation through in a week or a fortnight to bring much-needed relief. They subsequently paid the political price for not having acted earlier. Great pressure will build up on Government to respond.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby cannot say that this is purely a problem for the south. He represents a constituency in south Humberside and may not know that in north Humberside a hardware shop had rates in 1989-90 of £2,611.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: I said that it was a daft tax.

Mr. Wallace: Under the uniform business rate, that will increase to £3,740—an increase of 143 per cent.

The hon. Gentleman says that it is a daft tax, but businesses in the north will not be entirely exempt. We are not trying to provide exemption for Harrods. If he understood the transitional scheme and had listened to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Truro, he would know that our efforts are directed towards helping the small business community.

It is important to leave the Under-Secretary of State adequate time in which to reply to the debate. My party is committed to the interests of the small business. That was shown by my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke who said that when we had an opportunity to influence Government we brought about a profound change in the attitude of the Labour Government to the self-employed. In the local government areas where we have control we have helped small businesses. In Government we would carry through our promises and bring benefit to the self-employed and the small business sector.

9.54 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Patrick Nicholls): The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), who has just made an eloquent speech, flatters me if he thinks that I can do justice to the debate in the six minutes that remain. I say to him what my hon. Friend the Minister of State said when he opened the debate—that we welcome the fact that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues decided to choose this subject for debate. Although the debate has been short, it has been useful.

I shall deal first with the speech by the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) who had two limbs to his attack. One was what he described as the crippling rate of interest; and he also spoke about the effect of the uniform business rate.

It would be interesting to consider the careers of the hon. Gentleman and me. We are both virtually the same age, we appear to share the same sort of interests and we are both Members of this House. However, at a time when I was running a small business, the hon. Gentleman was earning his living in a quite different way. The hon. Gentleman spoke about interest rates as though they were far more important than the rate of inflation. When I was setting up my small business in the late 1970s, I was worried not about interest rates but about the rate of inflation. I must reiterate that the Government do not enjoy the current interest rate policy. No Government could enjoy the effect that it has on business in the country. However, it is the proven way to prevent inflation from getting back into the system.

I tried to run a business in the 1970s when inflation rates exceeded 20 per cent. at times. That was incomparably more important than the interest rate. The hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) said that people in his constituency were not talking to him about the rate of inflation. They would not be talking to him about that, because, even though it has peaked under this Government, it is still only at the low mark of the rates reached under the last Labour Government. The hon. Gentleman knows that I am well acquainted with his part of the world. I have a good memory, and I remember what people were talking about in parts of his constituency when the inflation rate was in

[Mr. Patrick Nicholls]

excess of 20 per cent. If anything wrecks small businesses, it is the rate of inflation. If there is one proven instrument to deal with that, it is interest rates. It is not a comfortable instrument, but it works.

The hon. Member for Fife, Central spoke about the Labour party policy, but understandably he did not want to dwell on it overlong. Labour party policy is to support a property tax on business. I remind the hon. Gentleman what the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) said:

"we support the revaluation of business property because we are in favour of a property tax."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 3 March 1988; c. 1186.]

The Labour party should not shed crocodile tears. The hon. Member for Fife, Central does his homework well—much better, I suspect, than some who have spoken tonight. He knows that the uniform business rate produced seemingly large increases in certain areas, not because of the concept of the tax itself, but because of a lack of revaluation since 1973.

It is a matter of great personal grief to me that, in the three minutes remaining, I shall not have time systematically to take apart the spurious arguments of the hon. Member for Truro. I remind him that there has not been a revaluation since 1973. The first time that the revaluation was ducked was in 1978; the significance of that date is that it was the date of the Lib-Lab pact. Indeed, the Earl of Stockton once said that the Liberal party produced policies that were both interesting and original—the trouble was that none of the original policies was interesting and none of the interesting policies was original.

The hon. Member for Truro took the same approach today. He said nothing about any Liberal alternative to the uniform business rate. He told us about a man who kept coming to see him to complain, but he did not say that he had told him what the UBR was all about. He did not tell him about the lack of revaluation, because his party was opposed to it. He did not tell him that, on average, factory rates would come down by 31 per cent. and warehouse rates by 20 per cent. Obviously there is no such thing as a popular charge. There never is, and there never will be. There is no such thing as a popular tax either, but at the end of the day the uniform business rate will be the fairest form of charge. Bearing in mind the fact that the hon. Gentleman's policy is committed to a land revaluation tax as well, it is a bit thick that he should have criticised us today.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 13, Noes 164.

Division No. 60] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Beith, A. J.
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Fearn, Ronald
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Maclennan, Robert
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Wallace and
Mr. Malcolm Bruce.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Favell, Tony
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Hind, Kenneth
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wheeler, Sir John
Wiggin, Jerry

Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Sydney Chapman and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 139, Noes 30.

Division No. 61] **[10.11 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hind, Kenneth
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Paice, James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Wheeler, Sir John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Irvine Patrick.

NOES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Beith, A. J.
Bradley, Keith
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Dixon, Don
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Fearn, Ronald
Gordon, Mildred
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Kirkwood, Archy
McAllion, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Nellist, Dave
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Wallace, James
Wareing, Robert N.

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bob Cryer and
Mr. Dennis Skinner.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House congratulates the Government on creating an environment in which enterprise and small businesses are flourishing, and urges the Government to continue pursuing the policies which have led to a record increase in the numbers of self-employed and new business formations, as confirmed by the increase in registrations for value-added tax.

PETITIONS

Television Reception

10.21 pm

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): I beg leave to present a petition, which I support, signed by 481 of my constituents in the London borough of Tower Hamlets. It is one of three petitions that have been sent to me by people who, having bought or rented television sets and having paid for a television licence, have found that increasing interference with reception has become so bad over the past few months that programmes are now unwatchable.

My petitioners believe that that is due to the massive buildings being erected in Docklands, particularly at Canary Wharf.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House will act to bring a swift remedy to this situation.

To lie upon the Table.

Dogs

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): I wish to present a petition on behalf of my constituents, Mr. and Mrs. John Lynch, and of the citizens of Dundee.

The petition reminds the House of the savage attack that took place last year during which Kellie, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Lynch, was killed by two Rottweiler dogs. The petition urges the House to support any amendments to the law which would require all dogs to be muzzled in public places and which would ban the private ownership of particularly powerful breeds of dogs such as Rottweilers.

[Mr. John McAllion]

Mr. and Mrs. Lynch have succeeded in gathering 15,000 signatures in support of the petition. They have shown tremendous determination, and out of this terrible incident perhaps some good will emerge at the end of the day. I urge the House to support the principles in the petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Points of Order

10.23 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As you know, like my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) I am an assiduous attender in the Chamber. Today, when the Social and Liberal Democrats had the choice of subject for debate on this Supply day, I happened to be out of the Chamber for a short time while I was engaged in important constituency work. I understand that, without any notification, the Minister made an attack upon me.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, when an attack is to be made on another hon. Member, it is usual to notify that hon. Member so that he may respond. The Minister attacked a very good record of work by the Minister with responsibility for small firms in the last Labour Government, who ensured growth and prosperity for small firms. It is deeply regrettable that the Minister should feel so insecure and incompetent that he chose to attack me behind my back. It is very much to be regretted.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) said about his being an assiduous attender in the Chamber. He is. The only reason he was missing tonight was that there was no money resolution. If there had been, I think that he would have been on his feet now. The important issue is that he was attacked——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Was the hon. Member present?

Mr. Skinner: Yes. I was stood at the back.

Mr. Speaker: Why did not the hon. Member raise the matter at the time? I was not in the Chair at the time. The hon. Members for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) and for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) are assiduous attenders. It is a convention that, if hon. Members attack each other in the Chamber, they let the relevant hon. Member know. I cannot judge what happened in the debate to which the hon. Members have referred.

Mr. Skinner: Let me finish this little story. My hon. Friend was attacked——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is not really story time.

Mr. Skinner: It is a bedtime story. When the Minister was attacking my hon. Friend, another Tory Member—I think it was the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton)—said, "Hey, just a minute. Never mind about attacking the hon. Member for Bradford, South. You should be getting interest rates down." There is a moral to the story. The Minister should not have attacked my hon. Friend; he should have been doing his job in respect of interest rates. My hon. Friend came out——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is a good bedtime story, but let us have the Adjournment debate.

Standard Spending Assessment (Cumbria)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

10.26 pm

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): The Government's spending target for Cumbria is ridiculous; it reflects the classic north-south syndrome and indicates the inability of Whitehall to recognise the needs of Cumbria or of any other area outside the south-east.

Those are not my words, but those of the leader of the Conservatives on Cumbria county council. An article in the *Evening News and Star* of 16 January states:

"Tories attack Thatcher. County poll axed."

It goes on to state that the group in Cumbria

"would not seek to meet the Government's target which would mean cuts of up to £33 million."

I wonder whether Mr. Gyngell and his colleagues on the county council now regret their enthusiasm for the introduction of the poll tax. They fought the 1989 election campaign on the basis of the poll tax. They said that it was a good thing. I wonder whether they are so sure now, when their electors must pay the price of the Government's policy.

The standard spending assessment for the county fails to respect or reflect the costs of providing services, particularly education and fire services, in a large and sparsely populated county such as Cumbria. It underestimates the significance of the cost of road maintenance and winter maintenance and it inadequately funds what is called "other resources". It grossly overestimates potential interest receipts.

I now refer to winter maintenance, to give hon. Members some idea of how the SSA was put together. Cumbria is the second largest county in England. It has within it the Lake district, with many of the highest passes in the country and very bad roads in winter. It was originally granted £90,000 for snow clearing, which is less than the London borough of Camden was granted. That gives some indication of the thought that went into the SSA. It was only through representations by Members of Parliament and a high-powered delegation from the county council that that figure was changed. It is still inadequate.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): The hon. Gentleman made a good deal of the remarks of Mr. Gyngell at the beginning of his speech. I should think him unfair if he did not add that, besides criticising the standard spending assessment for Cumbria, Mr. Gyngell criticised unnecessary overspending by the county council. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the council is dominated by the Labour party. Many people think that there are considerable opportunities for savings so that ratepayers of Cumbria do not have to pay as much over the SSA as may be the case.

Mr. Martlew: I am sorry that the right hon. Gentleman did not tell the House which service he would like cut. People in his council—South Lakeland district council—will pay the highest poll tax in the area.

Mr. Cecil Franks (Barrow and Furness) *rose*——

Mr. Martlew: If the hon. Gentleman wished to speak on this subject, perhaps he should have sought an Adjournment debate. I am glad to see that I am keeping up the Conservative Members for Cumbria.

Mr. Jopling: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Martlew: I have given way once to the right hon. Gentleman. I have only a quarter of an hour at my disposal.

It is deeply resented that Cumbria is being penalised to help the south-east. The Government came to the conclusion that they had to pay more to councils in the south-east. That was right and proper, but although it had to be funded the money did not have to come out of the pockets of people in the north of England.

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): My hon. Friend makes an important point about the distribution between the south-east and the north-west. He spoke eloquently about rural areas, but urban areas are equally hit. The city of Manchester—

Mr. Franks: A high overspender.

Mr. Bradley: For a standstill budget, Manchester would require £449·8 million. The SSA for Manchester is £366·5 million, a shortfall of £83·3 million. On top of that, each poll tax payer in Manchester will have to pay £71 to fund the safety net, or, in other words, the Tory marginals in the north-west.

Mr. Martlew: I agree with my hon. Friend. It was interesting that the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks) tried to make a sedentary intervention. He seems to talk in the House more about what happens in Manchester than about what happens in his own constituency.

Mr. Franks: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Martlew: I refuse to give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Had Cumbria been in Wales our SSA would have been £280 million. We have £244 million because we are not a Welsh county council. Cumbria has many similarities with some of the north Wales councils. We have sparsely populated, large areas. I hope that the Minister will not come to the Dispatch Box and get away with the lame excuse that he has nothing to do with Wales and has no responsibility. My constituents want to know why they must subsidise areas in the south and why they are not supported to the same extent as the Welsh county councils.

To go into the detailed estimates for the county, the Government say that Cumbria overspends on education to the tune of 11 per cent. They want the council to cut education by 11 per cent. That is nonsense. We do not spend enough on education in Cumbria. I plan to visit two schools in my constituency on Friday. No doubt, I shall be told that classes are large, that there are not enough teachers, that the buildings are shabby and that there are not enough books. That is a reflection of the amount of spending that is put into the county. The education system in Britain is a disgrace compared with the rest of western Europe. We should put more money into it, not take it out.

The Government say that we should cut education expenditure by 11 per cent. If that happened, the small schools in the Tory rural areas would feel the effect. They are already feeling it under local management of schools.

[Mr. Martlew]

We see pictures of Tory Members in the newspapers presenting petitions and complaining about the threat to rural schools. It is time that they started to do something about that instead of just picking up petitions.

The Government say that we should cut social services spending by 7 per cent. The fact is that this week my county council has already decided to close six old folk's homes—not because they are empty, but because the county cannot afford to bring them up to standard. That is under the present assessment. What will we do if we have to cut the budget by 7 per cent.? Will we say to some old folks, "We have no place for you"? When children in this country are more at risk from sexual abuse than ever before, are we saying that we shall have to cut resources? That is what the Government are saying.

I turn now to the police. Six months ago the Home Office told us that we would get extra police. I was one of those who lobbied for that and I welcomed the announcement. However, the SSA for Cumbria says that we have 4 per cent. too many police. Therefore, on the one hand the Home Office is recognising that we have a problem with crime—indeed, we have near record levels of crime in Cumbria—but, on the other hand, the Department of the Environment is saying that we have to sack the police that we have taken on.

The funding of our fire service is also amazing. We have had a Home Office review and it is right that Cumbria overspends. We spend £500,000 more than the shire average. However, the Home Office review states that the high costs are not due to inefficiency or ineffectiveness. In fact, the main determination of fire costs is not population, but the nature of the fire risks to be covered. As the House knows, Cumbria has several areas of major fire risk in its boundaries. We have British Nuclear Fuels at Sellafield, the nuclear shipyard and the gas terminal at Barrow and a large ammunition depot near my constituency. They are all fire risks. The Home Office report states that there is a shortage of 16 firemen. Therefore, the force is below standard.

However, the SSA for Cumbria on fire services says that we are overspending by 28 per cent. It implies that we should cut the service by 28 per cent. But if we do, we shall be failing to abide by the law because the Home Office has set down statutory guidelines saying that we should maintain a certain level of fire cover. If we cut the fire service budget by 28 per cent., we would have only two full-time fire stations in the county—one in Barrow and the other in Carlisle. The right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), and his hon. Friends the Members for Barrow and Furness and for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) would be most concerned about that.

I have mentioned highways and the problem of winter maintenance. I concede that we received more than the £90,000, but only after a struggle with the Minister. While the Department of Transport says that we underspend on our roads by £1·5 million, the Government say that we are overspending and should cut our roads expenditure. If we did that, we would be cutting Cumbria's economic lifeline. It is a remote county and needs good roads. We do not have them now and we certainly will not have them if we make any cuts. When the Government announced that the poll tax for Carlisle would be £239, they were right. However, they should have added that if we cut education expenditure by 11 per cent. and destroy our children's futures; if we cut social services expenditure by 7 per cent. and close old people's homes; if we cut 4 per cent. off the police budget and give the criminals a bonus; if we cut the highways budget by 19 per cent. and reduce our lifeline for economic viability; and if we cut the fire service budget by 28 per cent. and put lives at risk, then we could have a poll tax in Cumbria of £239. That is the truth. That is what would have to be done if we are to reach the SSA that the Government specify.

In reality, the Cumbrian councils will not make those cuts. Indeed, the Tories on the county council have said that they will not make such cuts, and neither will the Tories on the district councils. In fact, the Lake district special planning board, over which we have no control and which has put precepts on us, will not make any cuts.

Mr. Jopling: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Martlew: I have already given way once to the right hon. Gentleman. If he wishes to make a speech on this subject, he should ask for his own Adjournment debate.

A terrible burden has been placed on the people of my constituency. The poll tax in Carlisle, and probably in most of the south lakeland, will be between £300 and £400 rather than the £239 that the Government suggested.

I have asked for this Adjournment debate for three reasons. First, I want the Minister to change his mind on the SSA for Cumbria. I am sure that that is why Conservative Members are here. Secondly, I wish to place on record the terrible way that the county has been treated not only by the Government but by Conservatives representing constituencies in it. On 18 January, we had a debate and then a vote on a measure that would have given Cumbria and other councils extra money. The right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale and the hon. Members for Barrow and Furness and for Penrith and The Border all voted against it. That is the day that they deserted the people of Cumbria. Thirdly, I want to lay down a marker for the Government and the Minister. They have done it once to Cumbria. If there is any justice, next year they will give us a fair deal with the SSA.

10.41 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): My hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope) wanted to reply to the debate, but, as the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) has been told, my hon. Friend was called away at short notice to Southampton. However, the reason is a happy one. His wife is expecting a baby, and it is arriving early, so it is right that he should be there.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Carlisle on securing the debate and on the vigorous way in which he has put the case for a higher spending assessment for Cumbria. This is not the first time that there have been consultations and discussions between Ministers from my Department and representatives from the county council about the SSA. On 6 December last year, a cross-party delegation from Cumbria county council met my hon. Friend the Member for Itchen and put to him many of the points that the hon. Member has raised again tonight. The council put its case clearly and identified a number of aspects of the SSA where it did not do as well as it thought it should. The fact that Cumbria was able to identify so specifically where it

was not happy with the SSAs demonstrates that, at the very least, the new system is, as we had intended, much more understandable than the complex grant-related expenditure assessments that it replaces.

Ministers in my Department have met many other delegations, from local authorities throughout the country, about local authority grant settlement for this year. We have also received many written representations. Nearly every authority from which we heard put forward reasons why it should be treated as a special case and why some element of the SSAs was not appropriate to its circumstances. My righ hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment considered all these sometimes conflicting representations and laid before the House the distribution report which defines how SSAs are calculated. He said:

"Excluding the parish councils, there are 426 local authorities in England, and the more deputations I have received concerning SSAs, the more I have realised that there are at least 424 special cases".—[*Official Report*, 18 January 1990; Vol. 165, c. 435.]

Drawing up a means to distribute standard spending assessments between the 426 authorities is a difficult task. My right hon. Friend has reached a basis that is fair and strikes the right balance between the differing points of view put to him.

The basis of the distribution is in no way arbitrary and does not seek to reward or penalise particular authorities. It is set out very clearly in the distribution report, approved by the House, which gives a formula for each of a number of service blocks. These formulae apply in exactly the same way to all authorities providing particular services. The information which feeds into the formula is derived from nationally available data sources, so that these data are provided on a consistent basis for all authorities.

Mr. Martlew: Can the Minister explain what went wrong with the computer when it decided that Cumbria would receive £90,000 for winter maintenance but that Camden would get £125,000 for the same purpose?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I shall come to that in a minute. It was a useful element of the earlier consultations that such factors were spotted and dealt with. I am entirely satisfied that the settlement that finally emerged was fair and was on a consistent basis for all authorities.

Mr. Franks: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and thereby displaying far more courage than the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew), who saw fit to use up only 13 minutes of a 30-minute debate, yet chose not to let me intervene.

Will my hon. Friend bear in mind two points? First, the hon. Member for Carlisle said that Conservative Members representing Cumbria had deserted the county. Six Members of Parliament represent Cumbria, three Conservative and three Labour. All three Conservatives are in the Chamber tonight to hear the debate; two of the three Labour Members are not.

Secondly, I ask my hon. Friend to take into account the bloated bureaucracy of county hall. It is a shameful waste of expenditure. Should not the hon. Member for Carlisle direct his fire at his Labour colleagues on the county council instead of at the Government?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend makes a characteristically telling point. I too have noticed that the hon. Member for Carlisle is the only Cumbria Labour Member to attend, whereas all three Conservative Members from the area are here. I refer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks) and my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), who has taken time out of his ministerial duties to attend this debate. All three of my right hon. and hon. Friends have consistently and vigorously promoted the interests of their constituencies and the county. That has been more productive than the mistaken allegations made by the hon. Member for Carlisle.

If the Labour party ever makes progress in bringing forward alternative proposals for local government finance—we await them with interest—the hon. Member will still have to face up to the problem of how to distribute grant between local authorities. A balance must be struck between making the system reasonably simple and understandable—by limiting the number of criteria—and including ever more criteria to take account of every conceivable circumstance. The latter system would immediately become too complex and opaque—features of the system that we have replaced. It became too complex to be understandable even by those who work in local government.

I shall return to the details of the SSAs for authorities in Cumbria, but first I must mention the overall provision in the settlement for 1990-91 for England as a whole. The plain fact is that the total standard spending for 1990-91 —the amount that we consider it appropriate for local authorities to spend in total from revenue to provide services—is a full 11 per cent. higher, at £32·8 billion, than the equivalent for 1989-90.

Perhaps I may now turn to Cumbria itself and put on record that for 1990-91 Cumbria county council told us that a budget of £278 million would, in its terms, be needed to maintain services. This represents a cash increase of more than 11·5 per cent. over its equivalent total expenditure for 1989-90, and seems to me to be rather more than should be needed simply to maintain services. It does not suggest that the council has made further efforts to find savings. My hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness pointed out where it could start to look. I hope that, now that it knows its final standard spending assessment and the grant and business rates going to district councils in Cumbria, it will be able to look again and find further savings to benefit its charge payers. In broad terms, every £1 million by which Cumbria county council could reduce its budget could lead to a reduction in community charges in its area of almost £3 per charge payer. All savings that local authorities can make will now feed through, pound for pound, into reductions in the community charge.

As I have already said, my hon. Friend listened very carefully to the points that Cumbria county council made when it came to see him. One of the points that most strongly concerned it was its assessment for highway maintenance—a point raised by the hon. Member for Carlisle also—and in particular for winter maintenance. Several other authorities with climate and geography similar to Cumbria's also told us that the winter maintenance SSAs seemed out of line with expenditure. As I have said, we looked again at this and realised that the formula we published in the consultation documents on 6 November did not adequately reflect my right hon.

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

Friend's desired treatment of winter maintenance. On 8 December last we wrote to all local authorities informing them of this.

This has been of very considerable benefit to Cumbria county council—a point not made by the hon. Gentleman. Its SSA for highway maintenance in the final figures is £1·587 million higher than the figure published on 6 November. Taken with other changes—in particular, more up-to-date figures for credit approvals—Cumbria county council's SSA is now almost £2·5 million higher than the figures published in November.

Mr. Martlew: The Minister does me a disservice. I indicated that the £90,000 that had originally been given by the Government was increased. But that was not because of anything done by the Minister or any of his minions; an all-party delegation of councillors from Cumbria had to come and tell the Minister that in the winter it is colder in Cumbria than in Camden, and that Cumbria has many more roads and a lot more housing. Otherwise we would have received £90,000.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Cumbria county council was not the only authority to raise that point with my hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend. It was as part of the wider consultation procedure that we took a further look at highway maintenance and, in particular, winter maintenance and came to the conclusion that an adjustment was necessary. I wish that the hon. Gentleman were rather less grudging in conceding that we moved very significantly to increase the subsequent SSA. All of this means that the SSA for Cumbria county council is now £246·476 million, which is an increase over its equivalent GRE in 1989-90 of 7·3 per cent. That figure is close to the current rate of RPI inflation, and well above our estimate of the GDP deflator, which is perhaps more relevant to local government spending. Not only does Cumbria have an increase of about the rate of inflation, but its SSA per adult is around the average for shire counties. Its SSA is £643 per adult and the average is £653. Some 19 out of 39 shire counties have lower SSAs per adult than Cumbria. That cannot be construed as unfair treatment for Cumbria. The hon. Member for Carlisle stayed away from those figures.

Mr. Jopling: Those figures are all very well, but my hon. Friend must understand that many people other than those in Cumbria are complaining. The way in which the SSAs have been worked out taxes the loyalty of many of the Minister's supporters. As the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) said, how can one possibly justify an SSA which says that spending on the fire service must be cut when the Home Office says that spending should be increased?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I had hoped that in the closing minutes of the debate I could come to some of the specific points made. The review of SSAs for the fire service looked at many options. The approach that was finally adopted by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has the support of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, who is responsible for the fire services.

Although the SSA for an authority is made up of a number of elements, we do not ask authorities to compare their expenditure with those elements service by service. It is the overall comparison between spending and SSA that is important. Local authorities retain discretion to set their overall level of spending and to decide how that should be distributed across the services that they should provide. Cumbria will see a 7·3 per cent. increase between its SSA for 1990-91 and its equivalent SSA for 1989-90 GRE.

I welcome this chance to debate the matter in detail. I hope that I have covered all the points raised by the hon. Member for Carlisle, but I shall write to him on any that I have failed to cover. I am satisfied that the new system of SSAs is simpler and more understandable than the old system of GREs and that the result for Cumbria is fair. It is for Cumbria county council to examine its expenditure plans and to play its part in setting a reasonable community charge.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 1 February 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BRITISH RAILWAYS (No. 2) BILL
Read a Second time and committed.

CATTEWATER RECLAMATION BILL

HUMBERSIDE COUNTY COUNCIL BILL
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 8 February.

CITY OF LONDON (SPITALFIELDS MARKET) BILL
(By Order)
Order for consideration for Lords amendments read.
To be considered on Thursday 8 February.

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL (No. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

CITY OF LONDON (VARIOUS POWERS) BILL *(By Order)*
Order for consideration read.
To be considered on Thursday 8 February.

BRITISH RAILWAYS BILL *(By Order)*
Considered; to be read the Third time.

VALE OF GLAMORGAN (BARRY HARBOUR) BILL
[Lords] (By Order)

ADELPHI ESTATE BILL *(By Order)*

EXMOUTH DOCKS BILL *(By Order)*

HYTHE, KENT, MARINA BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (VICTORIA) BILL *(By Order)*

PENZANCE SOUTH PIER EXTENSION BILL *(By Order)*

SHARD BRIDGE BILL *(By Order)*

TEES AND HARTLEPOOL PORT AUTHORITY BILL
(By Order)

VENTNOR HARBOUR BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON REGIONAL TRANSPORT (PENALTY FARES) BILL
(By Order)

LONDON UNDERGROUND BILL *(By Order)*

MIDLAND METRO BILL *(By Order)*

SOUTH YORKSHIRE LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT (No. 2) BILL
(By Order)
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 8 February.

BRITISH RAILWAYS ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL
Order for consideration read.
To be considered on Thursday 8 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

Devolution

1. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received about his recent statement on devolution.

7. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in the discussions concerning the devolution of political power within Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Peter Brooke): My speech in Bangor, Co. Down, on 9 January addressed the possibilities and prospects of transferring some degree of political power, authority and responsibility to politicians in Northern Ireland. There has been widespread reaction, none of it wholly unfavourable.

Much now depends on the willingness and ability of local politicians to find a way forward together. The Government are ready to help in any way they can to bring about talks between the parties. The next step is likely to be further discussions between the Government and the parties.

Mr. Gill: When my right hon. Friend looks at the new map of Europe, does he see any evidence that direct rule satisfies the needs of the people for democratic and popular government? Does he agree that the legitimate ambitions of peoples and nations to regain their institutions is important and that the closer Governments are to the people that they serve, the more economic, accountable and responsive they will be? Does he recognise that those are rhetorical questions——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Such a long question is a very bad start to Question Time.

Mr. Brooke: I recognise that my hon. Friend's questions are rhetorical. Recently the *Irish Times* carried a cartoon, half of which was devoted to a crowd in eastern Europe saying to someone on a balcony, "Negotiate, Power to the people, Elections, Freedom." In the Northern Ireland version, I appeared to resemble the person on the balcony. I was saying the same things, but the crowd was saying nothing. I look forward to a reply.

Dr. Godman: Does the Secretary of State agree that matters in Northern Ireland are not helped by the obdurate behaviour of Allan Dukes and Fine Gael? That questionable behaviour brought about the cancellation of yesterday's Intergovernmental Conference. What further steps is he taking in the presentation of his case for devolution, in the light of the recent findings of the *Belfast Telegraph*-BBC "Newsnight" survey which showed that only 21 per cent. of the people of Northern Ireland have any faith in a power-sharing arrangement? Will he give some sustenance to his colleagues in the Scottish Office on the principle of political devolution?

Mr. Brooke: As a former member of the Whips' Office, I make no comment on the practices of Opposition parties in the Dail. I studied the survey in the *Belfast Telegraph*, but the hon. Gentleman may be forgetting that some of the questions had a second choice attached to them as well as a first.

Mr. Gow: Is my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland in favour of a legislative assembly——

Hon. Members: Scotland?

Mr. Speaker: Order. These are Northern Ireland questions.

Mr. Gow: Is my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland in favour of a legislative assembly in Belfast?

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and I agree that we need to look at appropriate constitutional practices in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: As Northern Ireland is the only part of the British isles which does not have proper local government, is not there an urgent need to restore power to our local councils?

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman may not have meant to refer to the British isles, but, as he knows, conversations are going on about whether further powers may be transferred.

Mr. Stanbrook: Joking apart, the quickest way of breaking up the United Kingdom is by going for a policy of legislative devolution. How does my right hon. Friend justify his policy for devolution in Northern Ireland and reconcile it with the Government's opposition to devolution in Scotland?

Mr. Brooke: I was not joking when I said that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and I agree that we need appropriate constitutional arrangements in Scotland and Northern Ireland. We have been exploring with politicians and parties in Northern Ireland how there might be a transfer of power and responsibility. In my speech in Bangor I simply gave what I thought was the considered view of the parties to whom we have spoken.

Mr. Hume: With regard to the Secretary of State's request to the parties of Northern Ireland today, will he confirm that on each occasion that I and my SDLP colleagues have met the right hon. Gentleman we have made unequivocally clear, without preconditions, our willingness to engage in talks on any subject with all the parties in Northern Ireland, and that further to that, in order to meet the express sensitivities of the Unionist parties, we are willing to seek with them an agreement which, by addressing all the dimensions of the problem, would transcend in importance any previous agreement ever made?

Mr. Brooke: I endorse what the hon. Gentleman has said, save to say that saying that his position was wholly without preconditions might be overstating it a little.

Mr. Kilfedder: I commend my right hon. Friend on his speech in my constituency. As the leader of one of Northern Ireland political parties, I am willing to participate in the talks that my right hon. Friend has mentioned and to sit at the table for as long as is necessary

to produce, if possible, some constitutional progress, and I urge all leaders of constitutional parties to participate in those talks.

Mr. Brooke: As I said when I had the pleasure of visiting the hon. Gentleman's constituency and welcoming him in the audience, I was delighted to be there, and I welcome the letter that he has since written to me stating his willingness to participate.

Community Workshops

2. **Mr. Beggs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will defer for a period of 12 months his proposals for the community workshops in Northern Ireland.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Richard Needham): No. I have listened carefully to the representations made to me in recent weeks and at my meeting on Monday with the workshops I told them of changes that the Government were prepared to make to meet their concerns.

Mr. Beggs: I thank the Minister for his response and I want to record the appreciation of the delegation from the workshops. The Minister was receptive and responsive to their needs and fears about their future, but will he give me an assurance today that the operation of workshops will be monitored closely during the next 12 months to ensure that there will be no insolvency and that they will be protected and supported so that they can provide and maintain jobs and training in areas of high unemployment?

Will the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland consider setting up a mechanism whereby the Under-Secretaries responsible for education and economic development could regularly meet the authorities representing further education in Northern Ireland to consider the main problems that they face and to endeavour to resolve them?

Mr. Needham: On the first part of the question, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall work together and monitor closely how the community workshops get on. I have arranged a conference with representatives from them in the autumn, when we can all get together and discuss how progress is being made. The insolvency issue has a wider dimension because it is part of the regulations covering all company law, but we shall discuss it and see what can be done. I shall pass on the request in the final part of the hon. Gentleman's question to my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Stott: I reinforce the request made by the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs). Does the Minister agree that, having reached agreement with community workshops about the new youth training programme, his colleague in the Department of Education should turn his attention to the devastating effects that the proposals would have on further education-based YTP? Is it not the case that the Government intend to save money and that, as a result, the more expensive and high-quality further education-based YTP will disappear, leaving many of Northern Ireland's young people disadvantaged in the training they receive?

Mr. Needham: The basis of our proposals for the workshops is to improve the quality of training received there. As the hon. Gentleman knows, there are some good workshops in Northern Ireland and some that need to be brought up to the quality of the best. By introducing the new scheme we are ensuring that much more is done on employers' premises to get the youngsters involved in those workshops ready for the world of work, that we are sure will come about in the 1990s. Obviously, that requires an input from the further education colleges to give the generally broad training skills that young people need in the workshops.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I endorse what the previous speakers have said about the thanks that are due for the reappraisal of the scheme. Will the Minister give an assurance that if, with regard to solvency, the scheme does not come up to his expectations, he will look at it again?

Mr. Needham: I will discuss the matter carefully and see what can be done. I do not have a magic wand to solve the insolvency problem, but I am sure that, working together, we can find a sensible way round it.

Republic of Ireland

3. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will next meet Ministers of the Republic of Ireland; and what matters he proposes to discuss.

Mr. Brooke: I expect to meet Mr. Collins shortly to discuss a number of important issues that were on the agenda of the postponed Intergovernmental Conference on 31 January.

Mr. Hunter: When my right hon. Friend next meets Ministers of the Republic will he express the disillusionment felt by many people about the Anglo-Irish Agreement—a one-way road if ever there was one? Will he also express the significance that many people see in the fact that all constitutional parties in Northern Ireland now look for the end of direct rule?

Mr. Brooke: It would be a little hypocritical of me to express precisely the views of which my hon. Friend speaks, as I find the Anglo-Irish Agreement an extremely good vehicle for the conduct of business between Irish Ministers and me. As to his question, I have noted—as I am sure many hon. Members have—the results of the *Belfast Telegraph* poll.

Mr. Mallon: Has the disgraceful matter of the delay in holding inquests in the north of Ireland been raised in discussions with Irish Ministers? I know that the Secretary of State, as a man of compassion, will understand the suffering and distress that the delay causes the bereaved families. Will he extend those discussions with the Irish Government and his colleagues to ensure that inquests are held within a reasonable period, that Northern Ireland inquests have the right to bring in verdicts not findings and that all material witnesses can be compelled to attend and give evidence?

Mr. Brooke: I have, on past occasions, discussed inquests with Irish Ministers. I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, although I do not know that the Government would wish to be involved in advancing each of his proposals.

Rev. William McCrea: Does the Secretary of State find it strange that there was no problem yesterday in suspending the meeting between Ministers from London and Dublin to save the Eire budget, yet it appears impossible for the Government to suspend the Anglo-Irish Agreement to save the lives of people in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Brooke: I understand that the conference was cancelled yesterday because of pairing difficulties in the Dail. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State and I are both former pairing Whips and thus have sympathy with that problem. I once brought the present Foreign Secretary home from Nepal for a vote that we won by 262-0. It made so deep an impression on him that he included it in his latest novel, although he reduced the majority to 17, thus proving again that truth is stranger than fiction.

Mr. William Ross: When the Secretary of State meets his opposite number in the Irish Republic, does he intend to discuss the implications of the Colin Wallace affair—and if not, why not? Do not certain aspects of that affair impinge upon the Northern Ireland Office?

Mr. Brooke: Before coming to the House today, I inquired whether the Irish Government, through the secretariat, had raised that matter since my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces answered a written question on Tuesday. I understand that the Irish Government have not, so far, raised that matter, but I shall be meeting Irish Ministers again in the future, when it may arise.

Mr. Andrew MacKay: When my right hon. Friend next meets Mr. Collins and his colleagues, will he tell them that, contrary to the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter), a great majority of hon. Members, especially Conservative Members, still believe in the Anglo-Irish Agreement? Will he also tell them that a great majority of Members support everything that he is doing to try to bring devolution to Northern Ireland, as that will be in the interests of its people and will give them greater local power?

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support.

Mr. Jim Marshall: As one former Whip to another, I wish to ask a question of the Secretary of State that will show that truth is, indeed, stranger than fiction. When the right hon. Gentleman next discusses economic matters with his Irish counterparts, will he confirm that when Shorts was privatised the Government retained ownership of four leasing companies? Will he give the reasons for doing so? Was it because of taxation or was it because Bombardier refused to accept any potential loss on those leases? Is any employee of the four leasing companies retained by the Government also working for the newly privatised Shorts company?

Mr. Brooke: The points about Shorts to which the hon. Gentleman referred were part of the original negotiations and arrangements. In the context of the leasing companies, it was not easy to calibrate the consequences. Shorts Brothers, under Bombardier's ownership, has an agreement with the Government for the management of those arrangements, which were built into the deal that we made.

Preventive Health Care

4. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has for the promotion of preventive health care; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The Government have made health promotion a major priority in developing health and social services in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: My hon. Friend recognises the increasingly important part played by preventive medicine in the National Health Service throughout the country. Can he reassure the House that the funding for such a programme in Northern Ireland is on a par with that in the remainder of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Needham: Indeed, I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. We intend to spend £900,000 in the coming year on health promotion in Northern Ireland, which is an increase in budget of about 50 per cent. It has always been said that there was a higher chance of having a heart attack after an Ulster breakfast than after breakfast anywhere else in the world. It is certainly true that there is a very good chance of being well treated in Ulster. During the past five years the incidence of heart attacks has been reduced
by about 15 per cent. One reason for that is the Government's emphasis on and determination to follow a health promotion campaign.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Will the Minister expand on his answer to me of 14 November and explain how the new remuneration system for doctors will help to prevent heart disease, promote the cessation of smoking, and alleviate stress-related complaints?

Mr. Needham: The general practitioners' new contract will help to achieve exactly what the hon. Gentleman seeks, as it requires them to offer patients aged between 16 and 74 consultation when they require it. Bonuses will be paid to doctors who achieve particular immunisation rates. The whole point of the new contract is to meet the targets that the hon. Gentleman mentions. I am sure that in fulfilling that new contract, the vast majority of the medical profession in Northern Ireland will improve the health of the Province's population by extending the preventive aspects of their work.

Road Casualties

5. **Mr. Kilfedder:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the number of road casualties in the Province at the current time and in previous years.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Peter Bottomley): In the 1960s, Northern Ireland had the best road safety record of any region or part of the United Kingdom. Since 1986, it has had the worst. Northern Ireland can return to having the safest roads. That is the aim of the road casualty reduction programme launched last autumn. One hundred and eighty-one people died on the roads in 1989.

Mr. Kilfedder: I congratulate my hon. Friend on promoting the "Don't drink and drive" campaign, which has helped to reduce the number of casualties, but does he agree that praise is due also to others who have

contributed to the reduction in the carnage on the roads —including the media, which gave publicity to the road safety campaign?

Mr. Bottomley: If people can have their consciousness and awareness raised with the help of brewers, pubs and off-licences, fewer of them will be offered drink before driving—and drink is still the biggest factor linked with death on the roads. It is important to reach the target of cutting road deaths in Northern Ireland from an average of 210 to 140 per year. That saving of 70 lives per year would probably be very welcome in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: In view of the Minister's obvious and much-publicised concern for road safety, will he explain why his own Department's officials do not seem to share his views? They refused to allow the completion of the bypass of Killead and the dangerous A26, and they are very much against road crossings—particularly in Fountain street, Antrim.

Mr. Bottomley: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will meet me so that we can discuss those issues. One problem is that a number of hon. Members keep away from Ministers. Perhaps we can start working together instead.

Rev. William McCrea: Given the Minister's interest in road safety in Northern Ireland, does he agree that his Department should demonstrate more concern for achieving uniform salting and gritting of roads in the Province? Drivers passing from one council's area into another are lulled into a sense of false security and then become involved in accidents. Will the Minister take a personal interest in that matter?

Mr. Bottomley: Yes, I will. However, I should not want the hon. Gentleman to promote the idea that road casualty reductions are a matter of concern to me only. Road safety councils throughout Northern Ireland have been working on that problem far longer than I have. One reason why road deaths are down from 300 to 200 and will, we hope, reduce further, is because of all their work. Of course, I shall try to ensure that there is consistency in road salting, but I ask all drivers to prepare for bad road conditions and not to assume that the Government can wave a magic wand and save them from the consequences of their own driving.

Republic of Ireland

6. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he intends to announce any further initiatives to promote economic co-operation with the Government of the Republic of Ireland specifically in the border areas.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. John Cope): The Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference initiated last year a systematic programme of assessment of all the main sectors, to determine where the process of social and economic co-operation can most fruitfully be expanded. The first result of that work is a joint Northern Ireland-Republic of Ireland paper outlining possible programme measures that both Governments would wish to see supported under the European Community's transfrontier initiative. The paper is in the final stages of agreement and will, I hope, shortly be submitted to the Commission.

Mr. Evans: As areas on both sides of the border are suffering serious economic deprivation, which is leading to depopulation, do the Government have any plans post-1992 to discuss further with both the Irish Government and the European Commission proposals for improving prosperity in those areas?

Mr. Cope: Yes. The paper is about improving prosperity in the border areas that the hon. Gentleman mentions and covers many economic activities. It deals also with making use of wider co-operation in helping all parts of the island of Ireland.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Is the Minister aware of the damage being done to the economies of border towns by the refusal of the Government of the south of Ireland to allow their citizens to visit those towns for shopping expeditions? When did he last raise that issue with the Government of the south of Ireland? Will the Northern Ireland Office be represented at the forthcoming case in the European Court at Luxembourg?

Mr. Cope: We raised it at our last meeting with Irish Ministers. But more importantly, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, it is coming before the European Court. The United Kingdom Government will be represented at those hearings.

Mr. McGrady: I refer the Minister to the reply I received from the Secretary of State on 14 December at column 1156 in *Hansard* where he gave a not unfavourable reply to the request to set up a cross-border economic committee to look into the consequences of the Single European Act with particular reference to the harmonisation of VAT, fiscal rates and a common currency. What progress has been made since that date?

Mr. Cope: We did not quite agree with the agenda, but, apart from that, most of the matters mentioned by the hon. Gentleman are being discussed through the European Community.

Intergovernmental Conference

8. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the last meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference.

12. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his most recent meeting with Cabinet Ministers of the Republic of Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: I last met Ministers from the Irish Republic at a meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference on 30 November 1989. The joint statement issued afterwards was placed in the Library. A meeting of the Conference was due to be held on 31 January but was postponed due to the unavailability of Irish Ministers.

Mr. Ross: How would the right hon. Gentleman have explained to the Irish Government how that part of the Anglo-Irish Agreement that seeks to improve public confidence in the security forces would have been advanced by the Government's handling of the Colin Wallace affair?

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will make a statement on that matter

later this afternoon. For me to engage in what Irish Ministers and I would have said to each other yesterday is not perhaps the most constructive use of the House's time.

Mr. David Nicholson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that increased prosperity will contribute to the defeat of terrorism in the Province and the Republic? What progress is being monitored in discussions about the increase in inward investment to the Province and the Republic and how does the Northern Ireland Development Board, whose success we all admire, work with its counterpart in the Republic?

Mr. Brooke: I am glad to agree with my hon. Friend about the contribution that jobs and fuller employment make towards the security situation in Northern Ireland. As to collaboration with the Republic, both the Republic and ourselves are vividly aware that we are in competition for inward investment and sometimes find ourselves directly competing.

Mr. Molyneaux: At the last Conference did the British team put forward suggestions for the consideration of a new and more workable Agreement? Did they urge the necessity of the reasonable request for the suspension of the present Agreement for a limited period? If they did not, will they do so at the next meeting in view of Mr. Haughey's more flexible attitude?

Mr. Brooke: Immediately after the last Conference I said that suspension had not been discussed. However the right hon. Gentleman will be aware of paragraph 29 of the review of the Agreement that we published last year which stated that both Governments would be prepared to consider without preconditions any propositions put before them. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman is right in thinking that it is a subject which we will discuss at future Conferences.

Mr. Bill Walker: Did my right hon. Friend discuss at the Intergovernmental Conference the proposals for some form of local government in Northern Ireland? If he did, did those attending the Intergovernmental Conference think it was a good idea, and if they did not, can they tell us why?

Mr. Brooke: That subject has not been discussed at the Intergovernmental Conference since I became Secretary of State.

Mr. Duffy: This week's RAF involvement in air-sea rescue missions off Westport and in the Irish sea raises once again the question of the adequacy of the emergency services on both sides of the Irish sea and as between the north and the south of Ireland. Does not the right hon. Gentleman think that the quality and liaison of such services are a proper subject for the Intergovernmental Conference? As such air-sea rescues increasingly now involve foreign vessels, especially Spanish fishing vessels, will he explore with his colleagues in Dublin the need for international funding of such provision, the burden of which is mostly now borne—magnificently, of course—by the Royal Air Force?

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman makes a constructive suggestion. I do not know whether it would fall naturally within the agenda of a Conference, but it is quite clearly something which could be discussed in the margin of a Conference even if it were not on the agenda.

Mr. McNamara: The Secretary of State referred earlier to a statement that will be made later today, but in the answer given earlier this week a matter referred to which was the responsibility of the Secretary of State—the role of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. In the light, therefore, of truth being stranger than fiction, and of the Colin Wallace allegations, will he now order a complete investigation into Mr. Wallace's allegations concerning the Kincora boys home? Will he also give a complete guarantee that Mr. Wallace will not be prosecuted under the Official Secrets Act for any information concerning that affair and concerning the security forces that he might give to the RUC? Finally, will the right hon. Gentleman now undertake to give serious consideration to the evidence published by Mr. Paul Foot and the forensic report drawn up by Mr. Radley suggesting that Mr. Wallace's memorandum concerning the events in the Kincora boys home is genuine?

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman would, I think, be the first to acknowledge that this does not naturally fall within the purview of the main question. However, to be helpful to the House, if Mr. Wallace has evidence that he wishes to submit in relation to the Kincora affair, he should give that evidence to the RUC and if it is classified information he should first consult the director of Army security. As to forensic evidence, I owe the hon. Gentleman a letter.

Mr. Ashdown: Following on that answer, will the Secretary of State at least give the House an unequivocal assurance that no Clockwork Orange-type of operation is now taking place in Northern Ireland or in any part of the United Kingdom on matters relating to Northern Ireland?

Mr. Brooke: My hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces gave a very specific response on that very question in the answer that he gave on Tuesday.

Employment

9. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about employment trends since 1983.

Mr. Needham: At September 1989, there were an estimated 514,000 employees in employment. This showed a slight increase from the level a year earlier and was some 13,700 higher than five years earlier.

Mr. Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that that record is somewhat superior to that of the Republic, where there has been a 40,000 reduction in the number of people in industrial employment since 1982? Do not these differences underline the fact that the social market economy rather than the social charter is the best engine of economic progress?

Mr. Needham: I agree with my hon. Friend. I do not believe that the social charter will have much benefit for the Northern Ireland economy. However, in the 1990s it is crucial for us to be able to sell ourselves on our merits, which are very substantial. We have a bright, young, well-educated work force, low labour costs and an attractive grants package, and there is no conceivable reason why we should not do better in the 1990s than we have been able to do in the 1980s.

Mr. Beggs: Will the Secretary of State give immediate consideration to the need to protect the remaining jobs at

GEC-Alsthom at Larne in my constituency where 200 redundancies have been announced because of Government policy not to order new nuclear and, indeed, coal-fired stations? Will the Secretary of State therefore endeavour to seek Government approval to proceed with the Kilroot phase II project, which might help save some jobs there?

Mr. Needham: I am not responsible for the purchasing policy of the nuclear power industry or of National Power and PowerGen. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland is working as closely as it can with GEC to find alternative orders.

Housing

11. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the cost of construction of the average public sector dwelling in Northern Ireland in each of the past three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The average tender costs were about £21,700 for 1986-87, £22,400 for 1987-88, and £22,800 last year.

Our goals are to meet urgent housing need and to improve housing conditions in Northern Ireland in rural as well as urban areas.

Mr. Greenway: Will my hon. Friend congratulate the Housing Executive on the effective way in which it has added to housing stock? Will he assure the House that he is pushing the right to buy, which is the most effective way of involving people in communities and home ownership? What is he doing to add to the resources of the Housing Executive?

Mr. Bottomley: All who work for the executive and its members will be grateful for that tribute—which I know will be paid by the whole House—regarding the non-sectarian way in which housing is administered in Northern Ireland. The promotion of the right to buy has been assisted by the arrangements that we have made to add to the executive's resources. Gross resources available in Northern Ireland will be increased by £17 million compared with the previous plans for 1990-91, and spending on housing in the current year has increased by £12 million because of an increase in receipts from house sales and additional resources provided by the Government.

Mr. Hume: Does the Minister agree that the major housing problem in Northern Ireland is rural housing, to which the urban development grant system did not apply? Is the Department reviewing its approach to housing in rural areas?

Mr. Bottomley: That is an important point. Half of all unfit houses are now in rural areas. It is important to continue the attack on bad conditions in towns and in the countryside. It is becoming clearer that we need a policy of rural improvement to improve housing and, where possible, to use the skills of local people in rural areas rather than outside contractors. We have not yet found a way forward, but we are certainly considering the problem.

Mr. Cecil A. Walker: The Minister must be aware of the swingeing cuts in the Housing Executive's budget over the past three years, which has resulted in a 30 per cent. decrease in new house building. I am sure that he is also aware that repairs in the rehabilitation sector have been drastically reduced and that enveloping schemes are now being discontinued. We welcome extra resources, but will the Minister please consider using the Belfast action teams on the necessary environmental works that are urgently required in vandalised areas?

Mr. Bottomley: With the exception of saying that there should be a large new-build programme, which is not necessarily what Northern Ireland needs, the House will agree with what the hon. Gentleman said. It is important to ensure environmental improvement so that housing areas are good inside and outside their front doors to create an uplift in Northern Ireland.

Security Forces

13. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his plans to promote public confidence in the security forces.

Mr. Cope: We attach great importance to encouraging widespread public support for, and confidence in, the police and Army in Northern Ireland as they perform their difficult and dangerous tasks. Careful and constant attention is given to ways of improving relations between them and all parts of the community.

Mr. McAvoy: The Minister will be aware that in the past both communities in Northern Ireland have complained about the activities of some RUC officers. Does he accept that Sir John Hermon, by failing to resign, successfully blackmailed the previous Secretary of State for Northern Ireland into not prosecuting RUC officers after the shoot-to-kill investigations? Will the Minister give an assurance that no one in Northern Ireland is above the law and that he will not give in to similar blackmail?

Mr. Cope: I happily give the assurance that the hon. Gentleman seeks, but I do not accept the premise of the earlier part of his question.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Does the Minister agree that confidence in the security forces would be helped forward if certain unsolved murders were solved? Will he assure me that instead of leaving the Enniskillen massacre in the hands of the local police he will ensure that a special branch unit will work in Enniskillen until that terrible massacre is solved and the people responsible for it are brought to justice?

Mr. Cope: I absolutely agree about the necessity to solve as many of these terrible unsolved murders in Northern Ireland as we possibly can. The hon. Gentleman's particular request is an operational matter for the Chief Constable, but I will certainly pass it on to him. Both the Chief Constable and I would like nothing better than to see that murder in particular solved.

Mr. Mallon: Does the Minister agree that the surest way of increasing confidence in the security forces is for the community to see that they act within the law at all times? Does he further agree that that applies not just to the behaviour of the security forces but to all involved in

Government in the north of Ireland, who should remember the Lord Denning dictat that be you ever so high, the law is above you?

Mr. Cope: It is, of course, important that all members of the security forces and, indeed, everybody else concerned with government and so on, and the public, should remain within the rule of law, and that is what we support entirely.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 1 February 1990.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Blunkett: Does the Prime Minister agree that in her speech to the National Childrens Home regarding the responsibility of fathers for the physical and financial well-being of their children living in a separate household, she understood that she would strike a chord with many people who normally do not agree with her policies? Will she tell the House why, among other policies that discriminate against fathers who try to take that responsibility, the Government in 1988 introduced a Budget which imposed income tax on payments made by fathers to their children in a way that helps to sustain them in a fashion that hon. Members in all parts of the House would wish to see?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments about that speech—that fathers should take responsibility for children, particularly for illegitimate children, because they need the support. As he will be aware, there will be changes in taxation for married couples coming into force in the new financial year, and I shall put the particular point he raises to the Chancellor.

Q2. **Sir Michael McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 1 February 1990.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: After so many years of acrimonious dissent, does my right hon. Friend not think it rather optimistic to expect the Northern Ireland party political leaders to reach some agreement over a devolved administration for their Province? Instead, perhaps the Government should set up a review into the shape and structure of regional and local government in Northern Ireland. I remind her that it is exactly 20 years since Sir Patrick McCrory produced his report on the structure of local government in Northern Ireland. Is my right hon. Friend aware that a new review would be a timely contribution ahead of any talks that may take place between the party political leaders?

The Prime Minister: We would all wish to see greater involvement in local government in Northern Ireland of local government people. We have considered that on many occasions and put it to the several parties. I do not think that we could bring it in unless we had the agreement of the different parties to proper devolved local government, and we have not yet succeeded in that. My right hon. Friend has asked the parties to come in and talk, and I am sure that that would be one of the first matters that he would wish to put to them.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister has made it clear this week that she was given seriously inaccurate information about the case of Mr. Colin Wallace and that that incorrect information caused her to mislead the House. Will she therefore, as head of the Security Services, make a full statement to the House? Will she also commission a form of inquiry that has the power to ensure that the full truth is told about the alleged efforts to discredit public figures and Members of Parliament of several parties, including her party, and to subvert elected Governments?

The Prime Minister: First, my statement to the House on 6 May 1987 stands. It is not affected by the new information. Secondly, Mr. Wallace was a civil servant employed by the Ministry of Defence at the Army headquarters in Northern Ireland as an information officer. It seems right, therefore, that a statement was made by a Minister at the Ministry of Defence on Tuesday and will be made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence today. The statement made by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces indicated that there is an inquiry into Mr. Wallace's case before the Civil Service appeal board, to be conducted by Mr. Calcutt QC and there is also an inquiry in the Ministry of Defence on how certain documents came to be overlooked.

Mr. Kinnock: I am sorry, but that answer does not begin to address the very basic questions. I put it to the Prime Minister that the information which, in her words, has "now come to light" somewhat offsets the credibility of her statement in May 1987 that there was "no evidence" of misuse of information by any members of the security services. Surely, that fact alone justifies a full inquiry.

As the Wallace case raises serious issues of civil liberties and serious allegations of efforts to discredit Members of Parliament and to undermine elected Governments, it would be intolerable if the Prime Minister proposed to do absolutely nothing other than to hide behind anonymous civil servants.

The Prime Minister: I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman's assertions are correct. In so far as new information came forth, and in so far as that has affected earlier statements, the details were given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces and set out in very considerable detail in his statement to the House. My own statement on 6 May 1987 was not affected by the new information and the new information provides no evidence of attempts to undermine or discredit Ministers. This is a matter of the presentation of Mr. Wallace's case to the Civil Service appeal board. That has been put correct. In so far as the new information affected anything that Ministers have said during this Administration, we came straight to the House, a statement was made and letters were written to people who might otherwise have had incorrect information. The

statement was, in accordance with tradition, shown to the former Ministers with responsibility for defence and for Northern Ireland in the previous Labour Administration and their comments were invited.

Mr. Kinnock: Is not the Prime Minister aware that throughout the House and among wider interested parties, there is a strong opinion that neither the Calcutt inquiry, for all its worth, nor the internal inquiry by the Ministry of Defence is broad enough or open enough to satisfy the public interest? Can she explain how she made a statement in May 1987, based honestly on the evidence that then existed, and how, by her own reckoning, new evidence, new details and new facts have "now come to light"? How can she claim, in the light of all those circumstances, that her statement then still stands and should not be liable to any form of reconsideration or revision?

The Prime Minister: Because, for the third time of asking, the new information does not provide any evidence to undermine my statement to the House on 6 May 1987. It is of a much narrower kind than that, as was set out by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces in his very detailed statement, which I commend to the right hon. Gentleman for detailed reading.

Mr. Heseltine: Will my right hon. Friend recognise the seriousness of the description of the Leader of the Opposition about the events that are alleged to have taken place? Which Government were in power when those events took place?

The Prime Minister: The documents that have been mentioned refer to events in 1974-75, a very long time ago, which is why the statement made by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces was, of course, shown to the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees), and to Lord Mason, Lord Carrington and Lord Whitelaw. Comments were invited. These are matters which occurred in 1975 or earlier.

Mr. Rees: The fact that Lord Carrington and Lord Whitelaw were brought into the consultations—and most of the documents—proves that what happened against many of us took place in 1971, 1972 and 1973. It is no good saying that it was just under a Labour Government. The right hon. Lady was a loyal member of the Cabinet at that time. Surely it is not just a matter of a Labour Government. It went on under both Governments. Indeed, there is evidence that the Prime Minister of the day was maligned as well. Surely what the right hon. Lady said about the dirty tricks of Wright cannot possibly cover what has now been revealed.

The Prime Minister: Once again I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the statement which he saw and which was made in very full detail. These events took place about 15 years ago. There is nothing in the new information which was the cause of the statement to the House which casts doubt on my own statement of 6 May 1987, which was about very much wider matters.

Mr. Butterfill: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the recruitment of more paramedically qualified staff to the ambulance service is needed to improve the service? Will she confirm that an offer has been made that will enhance that recruitment? Does she share my puzzlement that the union leaders seem to be opposed to it?

The Prime Minister: In the ambulance service, particularly the accident and emergency part of the service, we need more people with higher medical qualifications. At the moment there are very few—too few in our view—for the topmost efficiency of the service. That is why those people have been offered a 16·3 per cent. increase in pay over an 18-month period. It is to attract those people into the service which we wish to improve.

Q3. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 1 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Beith: I thank the Prime Minister for the fact that at least in her letter to the Treasury Select Committee, by way of its Chairman, she expressed regret that in letters she had previously sent there were errors as a result of the false information which she had been given. Now that she has expressed this personal regret, and yet again has had to give account for things that happened before she took office as Prime Minister, and for the fact that she had to relay to the House information that has proved to be incorrect, will she not think again both about the need for a wider inquiry into the implications of this matter and about the accountability of the security services? Is it not the case that when Ministers are not directly answerable to Parliament for things, those things are less adequately covered by civil servants' accountability to them?

The Prime Minister: In so far as there have been statements made that were incorrect or needed clarification, we came to the House and corrected those statements immediately. I think that that is greatly to the Government's credit. As soon as there was a need for a statement, we made it. With regard to the Security Service, as the hon. Gentleman is aware, there was legislation that set up both a commissioner and a tribunal. That was a great advance, and I do not think we need any further inquiries now.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Does not the right hon. Lady agree that this issue is far wider than the mere dismissal of Colin Wallace? Does not she know that at the Northern Ireland Assembly all the parties called for a public sworn inquiry into the Kincora scandal? These things will not go away, and the time has come for a full, open and honest uncovering of these matters so that people in Northern Ireland may know that the dirty tricks that were carried on have come to an end. Surely those at the receiving end have a right to have their say and put their case.

The Prime Minister: The new information in the papers does not in any way substantiate Mr. Wallace's allegations in respect of the Kincora boys home. As the hon. Gentleman knows, there has already been an inquiry into the matter, and the new information does not affect that; nor does it provide any evidence of attempts to undermine or discredit Ministers. My statement of 6 May 1987 therefore stands.

Q4. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 1 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Michie: There is growing support for the ambulance crews who are in dispute with the authorities

and with the Government, and the Prime Minister is becoming more and more isolated in her stance. Even more concern is being expressed over the harder line being taken by management and some police authorities. After an accident in my constituency on Sunday night, crews were turned away by the police in favour of the Red Cross. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ask a question."] I cannot obtain an answer. I need an assurance from the Prime Minister——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must ask the Prime Minister a question.

Mr. Michie: May we have an assurance from the Prime Minister and the Government that she is not instructing the police or management to frustrate the work that the ambulance crews are trying to do in dealing with incidents of this nature? We need that assurance now.

The Prime Minister: The police have had to step in where the accident and emergency services were not operating properly—and we all wish that they had been operating properly. As for the pay claim and the offer that has been made, many people would consider that an amount varying between 9 and 16·3 per cent.—for the more highly qualified—is reasonable. We expect those who deal with sick people, and on whom those sick people rely, to return to their first duty.

Business of the House

3.30 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Will the Leader of the House state the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Geoffrey Howe): Yes, Sir. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 5 FEBRUARY—There will be a debate on the Royal Navy on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

TUESDAY 6 FEBRUARY—There will be a debate on agriculture on a motion to take note of EC documents, details of which will be given in the *Official Report*.

WEDNESDAY 7 FEBRUARY—Until seven o'clock, motions on social security benefit uprating orders and regulations. Afterwards motions on other social security regulations. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

THURSDAY 8 FEBRUARY—Opposition day (6th Alloted Day). Until seven o'clock there will be a debate on an Opposition motion entitled "The Scottish Economy".

Motion to take note of EC documents relating to rights of residence. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

FRIDAY 9 FEBRUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 12 FEBRUARY—Until seven o'clock private Members' motions.

Remaining stages of the Property Services Agency and Crown Suppliers Bill.

It may be for the convenience of the House Mr. Speaker, to know that, subject to the progress of business, it will be proposed that the House will rise for the Easter recess on Thursday 5 April until Wednesday 18 April.

[Tuesday 6 February

Relevant European Community Documents

(a) COM(89)660 — *Agricultural Price Proposals 1990-91*

(b) 7010/89 — *Adjustments of agricultural structures*

(c) 8309/89, *(d) 8877/89* — *Milk Quotas*

(e) OJ C128 — *Agrimonetary System (Court of Auditors Special Report No. 1/89)*

(f) Un-numbered — *Non-food Agricultural Commodities*

(g) SEC(89)2097 — *Agricultural Situation: 1989 Report*

(h) 8076/89 — *Set-aside of arable land*

(i) 10912/89 — *Sheepmeat Regime: heavy lambs*

(j) 7548/89 — *Monitoring of export refunds*

(k) 7549/89, *(l) 10850/89* — *Scrutiny of European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (Guarantee Section) expenditure*

(m) 7566/89 — *Physical inventory checks for intervention stocks*

(n) Un-numbered — *Sheepmeat and goatmeat Regime*

Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee

(a) HC 11-vii (1989-90) para 6 and HC 11-viii (1989-90) para 1
(b) HC 11-v (1989-90) para 2
(c) HC 15-xxxii (1988-89) para 5 and HC 11-iii (1989-90) para 2
(d) HC 15-xxxvii (1988-89) para 4
(e) HC 15-xxvi (1988-89) para 2
(f) HC 11-vii (1989-90) para 5
(g) HC 11-viii (1989-90) para 8
(h) HC 15-xxx (1988-89) para 5
(i) HC 11-v (1989-90) para 9
(j) HC 15-xxix (1988-89) para 5
(k) HC 15-xxix (1988-89) para 5
(l) HC 11-vi (1989-90) para 5
(m) HC 15-xxviii (1988-89) para 6
(n) HC 15-xxxiv (1988-89) para 19

Wednesday 7 February
Until about Seven o'clock:
Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating) Order
Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order
Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order
Statutory Sick Pay (Rate of Payment) Regulations

Afterwards:
Social Security (Industrial Injuries) (Regular Employment) Regulations
Social Security (Recoupment) Regulations
Social Security (Industrial Injuries and Diseases) Miscellaneous Provisions (Amendment) Regulations (Opposition prayer EDM 424)
Income Support (Transitional) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations (Opposition prayer EDM 422)
Social Fund Cold Weather Payments (General) Amendment Regulations (Opposition prayer EDM 256)

Thursday 8 February
Relevant European Community Document
7706/89 Rights of Residence
Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee
HC. 15-xxxv (1988-89) para 1, HC 11-v (1989-90) para 1 and HC 11-vii (1989-90) para 1]

Dr. Cunningham: In view of the importance of public expenditure to all of us and our constituents, is the Leader of the House yet able to tell us when we can have a debate on the Government's public expenditure White Paper?

Given the widely reported news that the Top Salaries Review Body is recommending that judges, senior civil servants and officers in the armed forces are to be given salary increases of 13 per cent., will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement to be made by the Secretary of State for Health to explain why people on high salaries are to be given such large increases, for which taxpayers will be obliged to pay, while the taxpayers themselves are denied the opportunity to fund a more generous settlement for ambulance personnel—something which they would be very happy indeed to do? Are not we entitled to an explanation of the perversity of Government decisions and of the unfairness of Government decisions in respect of ambulance workers?

Given the Prime Minister's very serious admission this week that she and other Ministers, albeit unwittingly, had given the House of Commons false information in respect of the Colin Wallace affair, is not it now clear that we in the Labour party have always been right in demanding that the security services be made accountable to Parliament? Is not it now obvious that we need greater accountability on the part of the security services to this House? Will the Leader of the House arrange for an early debate on this important matter?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: As I have already told the House in answer to an earlier question from the hon. Gentleman, I hope to arrange a debate on the public expenditure White Paper in the relatively near future. Obviously, the precise planning will have to be left to the usual channels.

The hon. Gentleman's second point concerned the announcement being made today of the Government's reaction to the reports of the various review bodies. He will know that that announcement is being made in accordance with practice established over many years: in the form of a written answer—indeed, I think, more than one. If the hon. Gentleman studies those matters carefully—and they deserve careful study—he will find that they relate to the levels of pay and remuneration for the financial year that has not yet started. He will recollect that the ambulance workers' pay claim relates to a year in which virtually every other group of workers in the National Health Service has settled. Virtually all the ambulance workers' colleagues have already settled at substantially lower figures. That is the point that needs to be taken into account.

On the hon. Gentleman's last point, may I say that there will no doubt be a number of further discussions about the matters arising from the statement made earlier this week, and the statement that will be made later this afternoon. There will also be two Adjournment debates on related topics in the week ahead.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The whole House knows that we are to have a very important statement. May I urge hon. Members who could keep their questions for another time to do so? I should like to get on to the statement by about 4 o'clock.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): If my right hon. and learned Friend saw "Newsnight" last night he will be aware that the Government's proposal to go back on their election commitment not to open up more immigration to this country is rejected by two people out of three. Will he arrange an early debate so that the people of Hong Kong may realise that the commitment erroneously given by the Government will not be sustained by the House of Commons?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: That question will have to be judged when the matter comes before the House in the appropriate fashion. My hon. Friend will know that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made a very full statement on this matter after his return from Hong Kong. It is my impression that that statement was very widely supported on both sides of the House.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the dates of the Easter recess. Those of us who try to combine something of a family life with our parliamentary duties welcome his early announcement and hope that we can encourage him in this practice.

Has he had an opportunity to look at early-day motion 415 on drugs in sport?

[That this House notes with dismay and alarm events at the Commonwealth Games in Auckland which have resulted in competitors from the United Kingdom being tested positively for drugs; expresses its concern at the failure of Her Majesty's Government to bring anabolic steriods within the scope of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and to make their possession and supply criminal offences; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to cease its procrastination and either to introduce legislation for this purpose or to endorse the private Member's Bill of the hon. Member for Fife, North-East due for Second Reading on Friday 2 March, which is to the same effect.]

I am sure that he shares the dismay felt by hon. Members on both sides of the House at the fact that these Commonwealth Games, like the Olympics before them —which ought to have been celebrations of excellence— have been marred by the cheating of drug taking. Can he give an undertaking that the Government will make an early announcement that they will bring in their own provisions to outlaw the taking of anabolic steroids or, alternatively, that they will support the private Member's Bill of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell)?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome of my announcement about the Easter recess. It is clearly desirable to proceed as far as is possible in the direction of giving people a greater assurance about such arrangements as far ahead as we can.

The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to the concern that is widely felt about the evidence of drug taking in sporting activities. The importation and supply of anabolic steroids and similar drugs are subject to controls under the Medicines Act 1968. The Government are considering whether those controls should be strengthened.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give urgent consideration to providing the Opposition with an extra Supply day so that they can bring forward for discussion their tax proposals which, as *The Independent* has shown this morning, could well mean that over a period of time taxpayers who earn between £18,000 and £30,000 might be charged an extra £4,000 per annum in tax?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing attention to that important evidence about the high tax policies that are now being canvassed by the Labour party. We should be grateful to *The Independent*, whose birth is owed to the greater prosperity of that industry under this Government, for giving clear publicity to such important information.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Two questions: first, are the Church measures coming forward soon; and secondly——

Hon. Members: No—one.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members should ask only one question at business questions.

Mr. Benn: In that case, I shall leave that question.

Is the Leader of the House aware that there is a widespread feeling across the House that a Select Committee of the House—preferably the Select Committee on Privileges—should be allowed to hear the evidence submitted by Colin Wallace? As this point has been taken up by the Opposition, and as the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows that it is a matter on which I wrote to you, Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday, can he say when he will be bringing forward a motion to permit that reference to be made?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The right hon. Gentleman understands, I think, that questions of privilege are submitted in the first instance to you, Mr. Speaker, for your determination, before I can take any action whatsoever. The right hon. Gentleman also knows that he will have the opportunity of raising the very case with which he is concerned on the Adjournment debate on Monday week. He can develop his case then.

Sir Philip Goodhart (Beckenham): Following last week's inconclusive conference at Geneva on the Vietnamese boat people, will my right hon. and learned Friend arrange for the Foreign Secretary to come to the House next week to tell us what steps he is taking to improve conditions in the camps, to improve the screening procedure for the boat people in Hong Kong, and to set up an adequate monitoring service in Vietnam to look after the returned boat people?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend will understand that considerable progress was made at last week's conference to complete international agreement. All the participating countries, with the exceptions of the United States and Vietnam, agreed that the mandatory repatriation of non-refugees would start on 1 July 1990, with full international monitoring. I shall bring my hon. Friend's additional points to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary who may consider the points that he has made.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Is the Leader of the House aware that 13 people infected with AIDS due to routine blood transfusions have now died and that others face early death? Is he also aware that the ex gratia payment of £20,000 given to people infected with AIDS by blood products is not paid in transfusion cases? In view of the recent announcement by Canada's Health Minister that his Government will treat both cases equally for compensation, may we have a statement next week, hopefully, one that follows Canada's lead?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot offer an immediate answer to the points raised by the right hon. Gentleman, but I shall certainly bring it to the attention of my right hon. Friends at the Department of Health.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): Does my right hon. and learned Friend have any detailed knowledge of the reports of the Parliamentary Commissioner and of the Select Committee covering the Parliamentary Commissioner? Does he agree that there would be a substantial benefit if the reports of the Parliamentary Commissioner and of the Select Committee were debated on the Floor of the House?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: As my hon. Friend knows, I have discussed that point with the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. The usual pattern is that particular cases and reports that deserve attention are dealt with on the Floor of the House in the way that my hon. Friend describes. So far, there has not been a pattern of providing regular debates on matters dealt with by that Select Committee.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): It is becoming increasingly obvious that there is division within the Government on devolution, as borne out by the recent speech by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in favour of it and another speech by the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) which dismissed devolution as constitutional nonsense. Will the Leader of the House bring forward a motion as soon as possible to outline the Government's policy towards devolution throughout the United Kingdom?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: That point was dealt with in the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland a while ago. He said that all members of the Government, particularly those affected by devolution matters are in continuous consultation on devolution in different parts of the Kingdom. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues will study with care my right hon. Friend's speech, which received widespread commendation although the right hon. Gentleman may not have been quite so optimistic about it.

Rev. William McCrea (Mid-Ulster): Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the deteriorating security situation in the Province? In the first few days of this year in my constituency, a young business man and part-time member of the Ulster Defence Regiment has been murdered, two young men are in intensive care having lost their legs in a terrorist bomb attack—both were members of the UDR—the village of Sion Mills in my constituency has been flattened in a matter of days and one of my colleagues on the Magherafelt district council has been the subject of an attempted murder. Does not that merit a full-scale debate in Government time?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I fully understand why the hon. Gentleman emphasises the impact of terrorism on his constituency. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and all members of the Government are aware of the importance of that. That is why we continue to maintain our campaign against terrorism as vigorously as possible. I shall take into account what the hon. Gentleman said in considering the programme for the weeks ahead.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman reconsider his derisory reply to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) a few minutes ago about what form of inquiry or debate the House will hold on matters that are causing widespread anxiety throughout the country and the House? Is it not absurd that the Leader of the House should suggest that the whole matter could be dealt with in an Adjournment debate? Surely he should consider what form of general inquiry should be held. That is what the Government will be forced to do eventually, so why does he not use his authority to initiate an inquiry sooner rather than later? In the meantime will he make sure that a sufficient number of copies of Paul Foot's book on Colin Wallace are placed in the Library so that the misinformed members of his party can catch up with the rest of us?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am not sure that I am in the business of promoting the business of the Foot family. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary made a statement and produced a document on Tuesday dealing fully with that matter. That is an exemplar of the way in which the Government have sought to respond to any legitimate cause of anxiety about the matters raised in the book. There have been a range of inquiries. The outcome of the most recent investigations was fully reported to the

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House in the answers given on Tuesday. There is no case for further inquiries such as the right hon. Gentleman requests.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Will my right hon. and learned Friend make an early announcement about the way in which the Government propose to deal with the legislation on immigration from Hong Kong? Does he agree that the proposals are clearly a flagrant breach of the promises that were made by the Conservative party and that they involve a permanent change in the nature and composition of the British people? As there is no urgent need for the proposals, would it not be better to debate the matter on the Floor of the House so that the Government have a full opportunity to persuade the British people, against the wishes of some of us, to approve of the proposals rather than sending them for more private and disciplined consideration in Committee?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend will know that procedures designed for the passage of legislation through the House include its consideration in the ordinary way by Standing Committee. This legislation will be brought before and debated by the House in the ordinary way and it will receive the consideration that it deserves. I must repudiate absolutely the suggestion that the legislation, when it comes forward, will represent a breach of any kind of breach, let alone a flagrant breach, by the Government.

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): I recently wrote to the Secretary of State for Social Security asking how many people in my constituency are in receipt of invalid care allowance and I received the answer that that figure was not available. Will the Leader of the House please look into that and try to discover why that figure is not available since the local DSS office must surely know who is in receipt of that benefit?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot answer for the statistical pattern of information available, but I shall bring the hon. Lady's point to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone): Will my right hon. and learned Friend find time, additional to that allocated on the Order Paper today, to discuss the five important motions that will affect the rights that Back-Bench Members have enjoyed for decades? As we are to have an important statement this afternoon, which will inevitably eat into the time allowed for that debate, and as that debate must finish at 7 o'clock, not much more than an hour and a half will be available. Given the importance of the motions to be considered, does my right hon. and learned Friend consider that that is sufficient?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend will understand that that is one reason why you, Mr. Speaker, have said that this is a case for a shorter than usual time to be allotted to business questions. My hon. Friend will also understand that the motions are the result of recommendations from the Select Committee on Procedure and that they have been before the House for consideration for a long time.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): May we have an urgent statement on the issue of compensation for Christmas island veterans? The Leader of the House is aware of the case of my constituent, John Hall, which was highlighted in early-day motion 37.

[That this House condemns the Government's policy towards compensation for ex-servicemen, like Mr. John Hall of Belgrave, Leicester, who served on Christmas Island during the nuclear tests in the 1950's and who as a result of this are suffering from the effects of exposure to radiation; and calls upon the Government to seize this opportunity to show compassion and justice by awarding substantial compensation to our Christmas Island veterans without further delay.]

Mr. Hall is dying of leukaemia and he has five separate medical reports which connect his serious illness to the events on Christmas Island. Today, with all-party support, he began legal proceedings against the Government because of their failure to pay compensation. Does not the Leader of the House believe that it would be fair and just in all the circumstances of these cases if the Government were to save Mr. Hall the agony of High Court proceedings and pay the compensation that those veterans so richly deserve?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman is more than familiar with the background to the topic. He knows that, despite our sympathy with any particular case, we see no reason to make special compensation arrangements for test veterans. On the other hand, we are ready to pay appropriate compensation wherever the Crown's legal liability is established and where there is firm evidence to show that, on a balance of probabilities, ex-service men have suffered ill health as a result of exposure to radiation during the course of their duties. Despite my sympathy with the point raised by the hon. Gentleman, there has been no change in the position.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Will my right hon. and learned Friend accept that, whatever my hon. Friends the Members for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) and for Wolverhampton, South-West (Mr. Budgen) might say, there is strong support on the Conservative Benches for what many of us consider to be an honourable recognition of national responsibilities which is in no sense a repudiation of any manifesto commitment, and that even if it were necessary to adjust a manifesto commitment, circumstances can sometimes demand such a change?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support for the point of view that I have tried to express. The purpose of the Government's approach to the question is to take what steps are sensible and necessary to sustain the confidence of the people in Hong Kong and at the same time to reach conclusions acceptable to the British people. There will be ample opportunity to debate that matter.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): May I press the Leader of the House on the need for a wider debate on the security services and for him as the Leader of the House to recognise that there is support on both sides of the House, certainly on the Labour Benches, for adequate parliamentary scrutinising of the security services which, to a large extent, remain a law unto themselves? With respect, Adjournment debates can be no substitute for a full-length debate. When shall we debate that matter, which has become all the more important as a result of the scandal,

the disinformation and the rest, that have now been revealed, on which we are to have a statement in a few minutes?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: On that aspect, the hon. Gentleman will have to await the statement later this afternoon. The wider question has been the subject of debate in the House on a number of occasions over the years. It remains open to the Opposition to select one of their own days for debating that issue.

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): Will my right hon. and learned Friend find time next week to consider giving the House an opportunity to debate sentencing policy? Is he aware that my constituent, Mrs. Noone, was brutally murdered last year and the man accused of her murder recently committed suicide, unfortunately before he could be brought to trial. Is he further aware that the man accused of the crime had previously been sentenced to life which, in practice, turned out to be 12 years? Does not this unhappy incident eloquently and strongly put the case that a life sentence should mean just that—life.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend understandably draws the attention of the House to the particular case with which he is rightly concerned. I shall bring it to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, who is considering the preparation of a White Paper dealing with such matters and will be making a statement about it shortly.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): I am sure that the Leader of the House and the House will be aware that the Sealink ship, the St. Columba, was badly damaged by fire in the Irish sea yesterday. The emergency services undertook excellent work; of the 294 people on board, only one received minor injuries. Will he and the House join me in thanking the emergency services which included the coastguards, the fire service, the RAF at Valley, the social services department, the Women's Royal Voluntary Service, trauma counsellors, the Samaritans, police and all the others who worked so hard to minimise the injuries? He will also be aware that Sealink is conducting its own inquiry to discover the cause of the fire. Will he assure us that, if necessary, the Department of Transport will also undertake an inquiry to find out whether regulations need to be tightened to prevent such incidents? Will he pass on that message, and the congratulations of the House on the work done by the emergency services, to the appropriate Secretary of State?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am sure that the whole House would wish me to join the hon. Gentleman in expressing our appreciation of the work carried out by the emergency services which he identified so comprehensively. I shall bring the other matter that he raised to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. There are virtually routine arrangements to ensure that such matters are considered as a matter of course.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): Will my right hon. and learned Friend have another look at the possibility of a debate on the traffic and transport options for London, preferably this week but certainly before the end of this month? That will enable hon. Members to contribute to the consultative process and guide my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport along the paths of righteousness, which happen to be public transport paths not the publicly unwanted and environmentally damaging route of new highways.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend is assiduous in drawing attention to the importance of this issue to his constituents. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is equally assiduous in his preparation of a balanced policy to address the issue.

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): Will the Leader of the House find time to debate the terms of reference of the Calcutt inquiry and in a form that allows us to move amendments so that we can ensure that the inquiry investigates why it was that when Colin Wallace drew the attention of child abuse in Kincora to the attention of his superior in 1974 no action was taken and six further years of child abuse ensued? That inquiry should also investigate the links between the late Airey Neave—in writing—with Colin Wallace, commissioning work from Colin Wallace to continue his disinformation activities. It should also investigate the information passed by Airey Neave to Peter Wright, in Peter Wright's capacity as an MI5 officer, about figures in public life. It should investigate the meeting held between Peter Wright and the late Airey Neave in the period immediately before the decision of Airey Neave to offer his campaign services to the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher). It should investigate the meeting that took place in the Cumberland hotel a week before the murder of Airey Neave, when Airey Neave sought to recruit a former officer of MI6 to set up a small group to involve itself in the internal struggles of the Labour party.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I do not think that the House will have any enthusiasm for the way in which the hon. Gentleman has sought, through an extended intervention, to make as many allegations as possible, and many of them against a late and respected Member of this House. The matters upon which he touched have been largely the subject of fully conducted investigations, including two full reports on the allegations in respect of the Kincora boys' home. There is no case to make any special arrangements in relation to that matter.

Mr. Cecil Franks (Barrow and Furness): My question has no association with the question asked by the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone). Has my right hon. and learned Friend noticed the remarkable similarities and parallels between the Colin Wallace case and the Stalker affair? Does he accept that in the view of many, one reason why Mr. Stalker was removed from his inquiry was that he had blundered, or was about to blunder, into the circumstances concerning the Colin Wallace case?

In those circumstances, and bearing in mind that throughout the whole of Northern Ireland questions, Prime Minister's questions and business questions there were numerous requests for various debates on various matters related either to the Colin Wallace or to the Stalker affairs, will my right hon. and learned Friend give consideration to an early debate at a suitable and convenient time?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Obviously, I give consideration to any request made to me in the House. However, as I already said, all those matters have been the subject of full investigation in a whole range of different forums. There

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will be further opportunities to put the points raised to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence later this afternoon.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We must now move on. I will ensure that those hon. Members who have not been called during business questions are called early next Thursday.

Mr. Colin Wallace

4.1 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Tom King): With permission, I should like to make a statement about the case of Mr. Colin Wallace.

In a written answer on Tuesday to my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel (Mr. Marshall), my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces said that records had been found that brought to light information of material significance to the case of Mr. Wallace. Because those records had been overlooked, some misleading information had unwittingly been given to Members of this House by Ministers.

As regards Mr. Wallace's employment in the Civil Service, the papers revealed no evidence that the decision to terminate it in 1975 was taken for reasons other than the offence with which he was charged—namely, disclosing classified information to the media without proper authority and at a time when he had already relinquished his post at Headquarters Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, in the light of the new information about his duties that has now come to light, the Government have decided to ask Mr. David Calcutt QC to examine the papers relating to Mr. Wallace's case so that he can consider whether its presentation to the Civil Service Appeal Board may have resulted in any injustices to Mr. Wallace, and if so whether compensation should be paid.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, in a long written answer in *Hansard* on 30 January at column *110* set out the position that has now emerged over Mr. Wallace's case. He set out also the distinct issues as they emerge from a special re-examination of departmental records by senior officials. That re-examination showed, first, that papers previously overlooked showed that their earlier statements and letters needed to be corrected. The Government have therefore come to the House on this matter as early as possible and an inquiry is in hand within my Department into how the papers were overlooked.

Secondly, the re-examination showed that the newly found information raised a question mark over the presentation of Mr. Wallace's case to the Civil Service Appeal Board, and Mr. Calcutt will review those matters.

Thirdly, it showed that no information has been found to substantiate Mr. Wallace's allegations of a cover-up relating to the Kincora boys' home in Belfast, or to call in question the thoroughness of the major inquiries already made into that affair, including those of Sir George Terry and Judge Hughes.

Fourthly, it showed that no information was found to call into question Mr. Wallace's conviction for manslaughter, on which my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary advised the House on Tuesday.

Fifthly, it showed that none of it calls into question the conclusion stated to the House by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 6 May 1987, following a special report to her by the director-general of the Security Service, that there is no evidence to support suggestions of attempts to undermine or discredit Ministers or former Ministers.

My statement follows the detailed answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces and my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and the published letters to right hon. and hon. Members to whom the previous incorrect answers were given. In

their actions, which relate to events some 15 years ago and to the Administrations of that time, the Government have sought to respond promptly and candidly to meet the responsibilities that fall to them as a result of the new information, and in particular to tackle the question of possible injustice to Mr. Wallace in his Civil Service appeal.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): I thank the Secretary of State for Defence for coming to the House to make that statement, because a written answer, no matter how long, is a poor substitute for an opportunity to put questions on an issue of such importance—especially when so many right hon. and hon. Members have been besmirched by the dirty tricks campaign, and when the very democracy that the House represents has been subject to subversion.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that all Governments in the early 1970s were subject to such attacks? Why is it that it is only now, 11 years after the election of the present Government, that the information has come to light? Can the right hon. Gentleman be more explicit as to how it became available? Will he say who was responsible for granting permission to Colin Wallace to dispose of the documents? Are any of the people engaged in those activities still working in the MOD, and in positions of responsibility?

Does the Secretary of State not concede that the Kincora inquiries were hampered in the past by Mr. Wallace's refusal to give evidence unless guaranteed immunity from prosecution under the Official Secrets Act? Will he consider that part of his statement, now that Mr. Wallace's status has been changed?

Does the Secretary of State agree that the latest revelations show that the questions asked over the years by right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House were not the product of bizarre conspiracy theories but had substance in fact, and that what were once considered rumours are now accepted as facts? Does he agree also that the nature and scale of the allegations go far beyond the Ministry of Defence and that the inquiry announced today will be hampered by Mr. Calcutt's own admission that he can neither compel witnesses to testify nor afford protection for witnesses and their immunity from prosecution?

Does the Secretary of State not accept that an internal inquiry by the MOD, with no guarantee that its findings will be published or made available to the House, will fail to satisfy the House? Does he not recognise that the Attorney-General, the Home Secretary, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Prime Minister herself are all involved, and that the House demands a wider and deeper inquiry than that offered today?

If the House is to clear its name, and if those who have been besmirched in the past are to keep their heads held high, the House has a responsibility to provide the means whereby the fullest and fairest inquiry can be held.

Mr. King: I would not have thought from the contribution of the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) that my statement included the information that we have made full investigations and that we were concerned as to whether the whole truth had been given. I have reported to the House—as did my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces—the outcome of those inquiries, which we took very seriously.

We are concerned that an injustice may have been done to Mr. Colin Wallace in respect of his handling by the Civil Service Appeal Board. We are anxious that justice should be done. I am concerned that at no time did the hon. Gentleman recognise the fact that we volunteered the information. We sought to bring the information before the House and to ensure that justice is done. Although the hon. Gentleman has sought to widen the matter into a broader range of innuendo and allegation, I have absolute confidence—as will anyone who knows him—that Mr. Calcutt will seek to discharge his responsibilities in a thorough way, and certainly will not turn aside if he is not able to do it within the terms of reference that he has been given. We are certainly anxious to ensure that Mr. Calcutt's conclusions are published.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): If the Government are engaged in a cover-up, why did my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces give that detailed answer in the *Official Report* on Tuesday? Is it not wholly inconsistent with the allegations of a cover-up that that answer was given in the *Official Report* and this statement is being made today?

Mr. King: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, as that is precisely the point. We found that there were errors. We were not responding to any direct inquiry but to concern in the Ministry of Defence about matters that were being raised to see whether the information was correct. We had to refer to documents that are 15 years old which were found to be relevant.

A further extremely thorough investigation was made by a senior civil servant. As soon as the matter was brought to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, he gave immediate instructions that all documents were to be examined to see whether any further information that might have been overlooked had come to light.

No further information was found, but I should make it absolutely clear to the House that we shall take every step necessary to ensure that any information is brought to the House. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the firm way in which he has recognised that.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): May I first acknowledge that the Secretary of State is concerned about possible injustice to Mr. Colin Wallace? But what about the injustice to the rest of us whose names have appeared on these blacklists? Is the Secretary of State aware that it is highly significant that in 1974 among the names on the blacklist were those of a former leader of my party, the then leader in the House of Lords, the late Lord Byers, myself as Chief Whip and my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Sir C. Smith)? The reason was that in 1974, between the two elections, the parliamentary Liberal party was pivotal to the parliamentary arithmetic. There could be no other reason.

Therefore, the Secretary of State must recognise that the only possible reason for the inclusion of our names was a direct attempt to interfere with the processes of parliamentary democracy. For that reason, he and the Prime Minister should recognise that it is no disrespect to them to say that it has gone beyond a matter just for Ministers; it is a matter for the House of Commons and a senior committee of Privy Councillors should be set up to inquire into it.

Mr. King: The right hon. Gentleman is addressing issues about which I have no direct information—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. King: All I do know is that the matters were specifically investigated, first, by the right hon. Lord Callaghan, the previous Prime Minister, who made a statement to the House, and then by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who asked the director-general of the Security Service to investigate the matter. The director-general advised her, as she said in her statement in 1987, that there was no evidence of any truth in the allegations.

The right hon. Gentleman talks very glibly about blacklists. I have been on more blacklists in Northern Ireland than I care to count. The authors of some of those blacklists are proscribed organisations in any case. If the right hon. Gentleman has evidence that somehow the Government service was involved in those blacklists, he should bring that evidence forward. He certainly has not been able to impress the director-general of the Security Service.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Can the Secretary of State explain to us how anybody can be satisfied that this dirty tricks department is not still in operation when, at the Dispatch Box over and over again, Ministers are—giving them the benefit of the doubt—to the best of their knowledge, denying that it ever existed? How can we, without a full public, sworn inquiry, be satisfied that this matter is not continuing?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman will have seen *Hansard* and will know that my hon. Friend made it very clear—I think that it was made clear also by the right hon. Gentleman—that when this matter came to his attention the policy was changed. I can confirm to the hon. Gentleman certainly from my own experience that there is no question of such a policy being pursued.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): Does the Secretary of State fully understand that our criticism is not directed at the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Defence, the Army or the earlier Labour Government? I cannot quite understand, then, why the Government should feel the need to be on the defensive.

Does the Secretary of State not accept that all those named ought to have their integrity confirmed by an investigation much wider than anything that has so far been proposed?

In defence of the late Airey Neave, is the Secretary of State really aware of the need to identify that element in what I call the governmental machine that guided the black propaganda and has guided it for a good many years and which may have been the same element that warned the late Airey Neave, in the very week of his murder, that he would not be permitted to carry out Conservative policies?

Mr. King: I find it very distressing to hear continual references to a former, much-respected colleague, a man who has now been dead for 10 years and who is not, sadly, able to speak up and answer some of the points and comments that are made. I know nothing about the points that have been made.

Now, for the second time, we have these allegations about lots of names. I do not know what lists they were on—*[Interruption.]*—or what the authorship of the lists might be. I know very well, from my own experience, that there are organisations on both sides of the terrorist paramilitary extreme who are very good at producing lists and at black propaganda of that kind. If the right hon. Gentleman has evidence, he should produce it. Quite clearly, it was not evidence that impressed the director-general of the Security Services or the previous Prime Minister, Lord Callaghan.

Mr. Michael Marshall (Arundel): Will my right hon. Friend accept that, after seven years of detailed inquiries affecting my constituent Mr. Colin Wallace, I naturally warmly welcome the Government's initiative of the Calcutt inquiry? I look forward to hearing the outcome of that inquiry.

Will my right hon. Friend also reflect on two problems that have emerged in the past seven years? The first is the genuine difficulty of looking into security matters, particularly matters reflecting on a previous Administration, when conventions make it difficult for Ministers, let alone a Back Bencher, to establish facts.

Secondly, with regard to the inquiry into mishandling of documents, to which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister referred, will my right hon. Friend accept that when I came to see Ministers in his Department in 1986, one of my concerns was about the then problem of six missing files referred to by my constituent? Will he therefore please ensure that in the inquiry these matters, and not just the documents referred to by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, are looked at in the widest sense?

Mr. King: It is precisely because of the seriousness that we attach to this matter that both my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces and I have made the statements that we have—my hon. Friend in the answer that he gave on Tuesday and I here today. Exactly the same thoroughness as has marked this investigation will be carried over, under our very specific instructions, into the question of how this matter occurred and the handling of documents of this kind. I take note of what my hon. Friend says about the other files, and I will certainly look at that matter.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): May I refer the Secretary of State to the answer that was given by the Minister of State for the Armed Forces a couple of days ago? The first paragraph states:

> "Ministers have not, of course, been told what advice was given to former Labour Ministers, nor what views they expressed, with the exception of . . . the then Attorney-General."—[*Official Report*, 30 January 1990; Vol. 40, c. *110*.]

May I fill in that gap? What happened was this: I did not know that Mr. Colin Wallace existed. I was never informed that he would be given wide discretion to give documents of high classification—higher than senior civil servants in my own Department—and that he could use them for briefing purposes in all parts of the Province. I did not know that.

The first that I heard, in February 1975, was someone coming into Stormont house and saying that a document had been dropped in the door of a *Times* journalist, and it happened that the lady who looked after the house was the wife of a policeman. She had seen the classification and took the document to the police station. [AN HON. MEMBER: "What is the question?"] Well, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Mr. Merlyn Rees.

Mr. Rees: This document was found, and as a result the police took it in hand. The hon. Member for North Down (Mr. Kilfedder) asked a question in the House, and I recall the answer was that it was a matter for the police.

After that, the Attorney-General, and I am referring to the document, consulted us—my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) will recall this—and said to me, as he was bound to, was this a matter for prosecution under the Official Secrets Act? My view was no, that the document was not important enough, and no prosecution took place.

I say to the Secretary of State, what a position! Here was a high officer of state, an Attorney-General, considering whether to prosecute, but somebody else had given the man permission to use these documents without telling the Ministers of the day. That is the situation that we are investigating.

The question is—I will ask the Secretary of State, who has the great advantage of knowing Northern Ireland—who gave this authorisation?

The documents that the Prime Minister's office—I believe that it may have been the Minister of Defence—gave the Library, give evidence that was given by Peter Broderick, the chief information officer, at the time of the inquiry into Wallace, when he lost his job. I am astonished. How much more does one not know? It says that Mr. Wallace was

"The advisor on Irish matters to the whole Headquarters"

—

he might have been a bit of use in the Northern Ireland Office, perhaps—

"In order to do his job he had constant and free access"

—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I know that this is a very important matter. The right hon. Gentleman was intimately involved at the time, but he must bear in mind the fact that other hon. Members wish to ask questions.

Mr. Rees: Is it correct—it needs to be looked at—what Mr. Broderick says:

"I was instructed by my Generals there to use public relations and information policy techniques in direct support of their military objectives"?

In the same statement, it says, "We knew better than Whitehall."

This was a small group not of intelligence officers but the information staff, with Army intelligence, which includes the replies that we have had, taking over the job of the elected Minister of the day. I believe that this ought to be investigated. [HON. MEMBERS: "Come on."] Some Tory Members might not like this, but our names have been impugned. Some of them—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sure that the whole House appreciates what the right hon. Gentleman is saying. He was involved in these matters, and it is right that we should hear him.

Mr. Rees: In the reply that came, the Prime Minister refers to the inquiry into the security services carried out by the noble Lord Callaghan and myself. The Prime Minister does not know what was in it, but that has not prevented her ever since from saying that everything was covered.

I make it abundantly clear that these dirty tricks in Northern Ireland were not covered in that inquiry. I am the only one who knows; the Secretary of State cannot deny it. I simply say that this will not go away. There is no hiding place. The next Labour Government will look at it, and those who are hiding things for this Government had better remember that.

Mr. King: The House has listened with respect to the right hon. Gentleman's recounting of events when he was in office and his personal recollections of those matters. He will recall—because he referred to the Minister of State's written answer and the question of who authorised these activities—that one point that is uncertain at the present time is whether Mr. Wallace was ever given this specific job.

The written answer—the House will have read it—stated that the case for establishing the post, when it was considered that an additional information officer was needed in Northern Ireland, included the suggestion that this was the sort of work that he should do. There is no information or documentary evidence indicating that he may have been given the specification orally. There is no evidence whether it was actually authorised.

It is also stated in the written answer that, even before he was appointed to the post, whether or not he was briefed orally.

"it would appear that he had already been undertaking unattributable briefing activities of this kind, which may have included disinformation".—[*Official Report*, 30 January 1990; Vol. 166, column 111.]

The point that the right hon. Gentleman missed about the activities of Mr. Wallace was that the date on which the document was lodged was after Mr. Wallace had relinquished his post in Headquarters Northern Ireland.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): One day after.

Mr. King: That is the fact in this matter, so in relation to the question about his authority, he had no authority after the post had been relinquished. I do not wish to say anything further about that, because those are matters which are very much in the area that Mr. Calcutt must now judge and which arise under the question of the handling of Mr. Wallace's employment and the question of his appeal to the Civil Service Appeal Board.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The whole House will have understood why a dispensation should have been given to the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees), who was Secretary of State at the time. But I now ask hon. Members to put their questions succinctly so that as many as possible may be called.

Mr. Michael Mates (Hampshire, East): Would my right hon. Friend agree that, while the House always listens with respect to the sincerity with which the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) puts his view, and from his experience as a former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the matters which he was relating to the House relate solely to Mr. Wallace's job in Headquarters Northern Ireland, which was to do with a campaign against terrorists and paramilitaries of both sides and was nothing whatever to do with the wild and so far unsubstantiated allegations of any dirty tricks against any Ministers of any Government?

In that my right hon. Friend has instituted an inquiry into the Wallace affair, vis-a-vis his job, there is no

[Mr. Michael Mates]

evidence that there was subversion, and until anybody can produce proper evidence, there is no need to have an inquiry.

Mr. King: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those comments. Anybody who has any memory of the circumstances will agree that while we can sit in judgment now in relation to certain activities that took place—and the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) knows this better than anybody—it was a time of great danger and of great casualties, something like 10 times the current level of casualties. It was a time when there were certain practices; the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South made clear his view about them and I fully endorse what he said about the unacceptability of some of the practices that occurred at that time.

But I am dealing in my answer with one specific matter. We have found that an error has been made. We have come straight to the House to make the position clear and to make clear the action that we shall take. There have been attempts to reopen a whole lot of other issues that have been dealt with separately and specifically, in one case by two major inquiries, headed by a distinguished chief constable and a distinguished judge. I am dealing with matters that have come to light, and we wish to see that if an injustice has occurred, that injustice is remedied.

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): I confirm what my right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) has said, because I took part in those discussions. This afternoon, the Secretary of State has made out the case for a full judicial inquiry. He says that he does not know what went on under the previous Administration and that he does not know anything about the smearing not only of Labour Members, but of Conservatives and Liberals. He has raised an objection at the name of Mr. Airey Neave being mentioned, but what about those of us who have also been mentioned and smeared? In the House, we have a right for the matter to be examined in an independent way.

I do not accept everything that Mr. Wallace has said. He is a gamekeeper turned poacher and he has played some dirty tricks in his time—I understand that. However, we now believe that there should be an inquiry, and I am sure that the House agrees. It is up to the Prime Minister, as head of security, to set up that inquiry and until such an inquiry is set up, we shall not let the matter rest.

Mr. King: Fifteen years on, we hear these allegations about the besmirching of reputations. I must point out to the right hon. Gentleman that these matters have been investigated twice. There is no evidence of attempts to undermine Ministers or former Ministers—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. King: I have come to the House to report on a matter on which there is evidence and in which we are clear that a mistake has been made. We are anxious to remedy that, and any ill consequences that may have flowed from it, at the earliest possible opportunity. People jumping up and down one after the other—and I could join the club —[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] If the people jumping up and down alleging that they have evidence do have evidence, they should produce it so that the matter can be investigated properly.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): Is my right hon. Friend aware that we congratulate him on his candour on coming to the House? All Conservative Members are aware that these matters originated under another Administration and that present Ministers have no responsibility for what happened then. Can he confirm that the Government's statements during the past few days have been checked, confirmed and agreed by hon. Members who served as Ministers under the former Labour Administration?

Mr. King: I am grateful to my hon. Friend; that is what we have sought to do. Having found that mistakes have been made, we came to tell the House frankly of them. I have dealt very directly with those issues, and with the action that we are taking to deal with the consequences and to try to ensure that it does not happen again.

In response to my hon. Friend's question, the statements were not shown to hon. Members who had served as Ministers, but the details of the contents of the statements were communicated to Lord Mason, Lord Carrington, the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) and Lord Whitelaw.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): I am sorry that the patience of the Secretary of State is exhausted, but these are important matters. Is he aware that the real anxiety being expressed is that the security services are not under political control? He has said that he has no knowledge of the earlier years, although many of the offences occurred in the 1970s, with two Administrations. By admitting that she was misinformed, the Prime Minister has also said that she was unable, as Prime Minister, to get the truth out of the services for which she is supposed to be responsible to Parliament.

Is the Secretary of State aware that the Government's recent legislation now makes it a crime for Mr. Colin Wallace to give the evidence that would prove that the smearing had occurred? Is he also aware that the vast sum spent in trying to prevent the publication of "Spycatcher" did not show a yearning that the truth should reach the British public?

Is not all this combined to very strong evidence in support of a parliamentary inquiry at which Mr. Wallace, and perhaps Peter Wright and others who are certain that destabilisation occurred, could be rigorously cross-examined by hon. Members from across the House? Will the Secretary of State take seriously our anxiety that a breach of democratic responsibility has been committed by those who purport to be the defenders of our democratic rights?

Mr. King: I have listened carefully to the right hon. Gentleman. I am advised that, as usual, he has got it mainly wrong. I am told that the idea that Mr. Wallace makes himself liable to prosecution does not apply, as he has never been a member of the security services. It has been made very clear,—[HON. MEMBERS: "Who from?"] —as I think the House knows, that this is an area where endless allegations are made. There is an amazing unwillingness to produce evidence that can be tested and checked.

If Mr. Wallace wants to make charges or has evidence on matters arising in Northern Ireland, he should bring it to the RUC. If he has any worries about his position in doing so in relation to classified information, it has been

made clear time without number that he should address himself to the director of army security, who will advise him about the position.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): I speak as one who served with the Army in Northern Ireland. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, given that 300 terrorist murders per annum were taking place at the time, the Army was absolutely justified in using disinformation? Does he further agree that the Army would have been negligent had it not used disinformation? [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Is it not a fact that had the Army not used these techniques to undermine terrorism, many more British soldiers and civilians would be dead today?

Mr. King: I understand entirely why my hon. Friend comments as he does. There were practices of using disinformation to malign organisations and individuals. When my hon. Friend says that the Army is entitled to use disinformation, that is certainly true. Disinformation may be necessary to protect lives and security.

If hon. Members do not understand what I mean, I will give the House the most obvious and simple example. I arrived back this morning from Washington. I travelled under a false name. I make no apology for that. It was deliberate disinformation; it was done in the interests of security. The position is that disinformation may be needed to protect lives in Northern Ireland. I make no apology for that.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): Should we not remind ourselves that the term "misinformation" is a euphemism for telling lies, that Mr. Colin Wallace was employed by a Government to tell lies, and that indeed he was a very squalid part of a very squalid operation in the North of Ireland at that time? There will be no tears shed in the North of Ireland about the manner of his dismissal.

The real issue at stake involves the characters and the reputations of those who were besmirched by people like Colin Wallace, those who may have lost their lives as a result of the activities of a dirty tricks department, those young lives that were blighted because of organised buggery which may have been part of the same campaign and, above all, the integrity and the highest practices which one expects from a system of law and security which simply did not seem to operate there at the time.

Will the Secretary of State agree to a full inquiry into those real matters, or will he consign this as another can of worms upon which the lid must be kept, instead of laying bare the facts which nobody doubts?

Mr. King: If I have heard him right, the hon. Gentleman is, in effect, asking for what would arguably be the third, fourth or fifth inquiry into Kincora. What presumption is there that that would establish anything different?

I have come to make a statement about certain information that was overlooked in the Ministry of Defence. I made it clear in that statement that the re-examination indicated that no information had been found to substantiate Mr. Wallace's allegations of a cover-up relating to the Kincora boys' home in Belfast. If new, fresh evidence emerges from another quarter, that evidence should be made available. If Mr. Wallace wishes to present any evidence, as he has been asked to do countless times, he should do so. What is absolutely unacceptable is for people to continue to call for inquiries, and to continue to indulge in innuendo, without producing any evidence on which the charges can be based.

Mr. Julian Amery (Brighton, Pavilion): Will my right hon. Friend clarify two points? If I understand his statement and the deduction that has followed it, it is perfectly appropriate and right to use disinformation to protect ordinary military operations; otherwise we would be running one after another into an ambush. Did I also understand my right hon. Friend to say that no evidence has come to light of attempts by agents of the Government to besmirch particular individuals in the way that has been suggested? If that is so, it too is important.

Mr. King: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for making his first point, about disinformation. That is precisely the point. As my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces said in his statement,

> "It has not since the mid-1970s been the policy to disseminate disinformation in Northern Ireland in ways designed to denigrate individuals and/or organisations or for propaganda purposes."—[*Official Report*, 30 January 1990; Vol. 166, c. *111*.]

I did not say that it has not been the practice to use disinformation where it is necessary to protect lives, and for sound and absolutely honourable security reasons. My right hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Amery) has understood that point very well.

As for my right hon. Friend's second question, I sought to make a point about the allegations that the security services were somehow involved in attempts to undermine or discredit Ministers in previous Administrations. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made a statement about that, and the director-general was asked to conduct a thorough investigation. He found no evidence of any truth in the allegations.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the inquiry deal with the question whether Colin Wallace had a written job description classified "secret", relating to his undercover operations? If it were possible to establish the existence of a job description in one form or another, would the inquiry be able to examine the nature of the activities involved?

Will the inquiry also be able to establish the source of a document dated 1972—a CIA registration card—and that of a forged bank statement in the name of the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley), dated 1973? I might add that there was not a Labour Government in either of those years. Will it establish the source of a letter to my right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) dated 3 October 1971, from some American organisation of IRA sympathisers, thanking my right hon. Friend for money that he had never sent/again, a forgery?

Will the inquiry deal with a document dated autumn 1971—again, a Labour Government were not in power then—entitled "Economics: Master or Servant of Mankind"? The document was allegedly written—although we know that it is a forgery—by my right hon. Friends the Members for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey), for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and for Salford, East (Mr. Orme). Those forgeries were produced between 1971 and 1973, and we want to know who produced them.

Mr. Mates: You tell us.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the inquiry deal with a document entitled "Vote Labour", which advocates assassination, but which is a forgery and has nothing whatever to do with Labour? We want to know the source of that document. Will it deal with a speech that was allegedly made, but was never made, by my right hon. Friend the Member for Salford, East—to a Labour party conference that never took place? Who wrote this material? We want to know, and if the inquiry does not deal with these matters, it will be a whitewash.

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman knew the answer to his question before he rose to his feet. He has indulged once again his interest in parading all kinds of rumour and innuendo. [HON. MEMBERS: "You asked for evidence."] The House has no idea of the evidence of authorship of those documents.

Let me deal with the hon. Gentleman's first question, about the job description. Let me make it clear—this is what I have come to speak to the House about—that I would expect it to be for Mr. Calcutt to make the decision, within his terms of reference. I have absolute confidence in Mr. Calcutt: I am confident that he will seek to discharge his terms of reference to the full, and will take into account any relevant matter. The other matters certainly do not fall within his inquiry.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): A few moments ago, my right hon. Friend said that he had no direct information about some of the wider constitutional security matters in and around the Wallace affair. He is aware that some of us feel that that is the fundamental flaw in his statement, and in the terms of the inquiry that he has announced.

This is not merely a narrow Ministry of Defence matter relating exclusively to a Civil Service appeal to do with Mr. Colin Wallace, important though that is. There are new issues here. In the past few days the Prime Minister has announced to the House that she was misled by Government servants, and even this afternoon we have heard disclosures of apparently wrongful and unauthorised use of disinformation by members of the Security Service, without satisfactory checks and balance and ministerial authorisation.

I think that my right hon. Friend should take account of the feeling in the House that there are wider and deeper issues that need to be identified by a wider and deeper inquiry. The matter will not go away as quickly as some people hope, and I think that, sooner or later, a fuller inquiry will have to be carried out by the head of the security services.

Mr. King: I know that my hon. Friend is concerned about open government and less secrecy. I am sorry that he was not able to acknowledge the fact that, having discovered that an error had been made, we have come straight to the House. I thought that he would feel able to applaud that.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to clear up one aspect of what I said. Of course I am not privy to and familiar with the details of what the director-general of the Security Service may have found out about activities that took place during a Labour Administration, to which I do not have access. *[Interruption.]* I am talking now about attempts to subvert a Labour Government and the allegations that were made about the discrediting and the actions of Ministers at that time. I obviously do not have access to that information.

What I do have access to are the findings of the director-general of the Security Service, with which I have no reason to disagree. I share the view of the Prime Minister. She made it clear in her statement that she accepted fully the assurance and advice that the director-general had given her, and I am sure that the House will do the same.

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West): But has the right hon. Gentleman not yet grasped that the misleading answers to which the Government have now admitted are like the 13th stroke of the clock, casting doubt not only on themselves but on all the other answers that have been given about the matter over the years? If it is only now that someone has troubled to search the files, how can it be known what other documents are lying there undetected, and how can the public have confidence in anything less than a full public inquiry?

Mr. King: The right hon. and learned Gentleman may choose to see this as the 13th stroke of the clock, but I have no evidence of that whatever. I have made matters absolutely clear in my statement. On the specific question of the job specification, we have found that—to put it simply—there are concerns that the appeal may not have proceeded on the fullest evidence available to it. That is why my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces and I have made it clear that, as a result of previous information that was incorrect, misleading answers may have been given. That is precisely why we advised the Prime Minister, who has written letters on the same matter on our advice, that it was necessary to correct the incorrect advice that she had been given by myself and by Ministers in the Ministry of Defence. We sought to make that absolutely clear. But in my statement I made it clear also that people who imagine that there are all sorts of other implications in this error of overlooking certain documents are wrong. That simply does not stand up.

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the House should at least take into account the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel (Mr. Marshall) was able to pursue his inquiries, which gave rise to the response of my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces; the fact that my right hon. Friend came here to make this statement and to answer questions on it; and the fact that we have a system under which the accountability of the Government to this House is avidly pursued, even at prime ministerial level? No other Government or, indeed, democracy in the western world would allow this degree of public examination of its policies. Perhaps Opposition Members would like nothing better than an exposé of the security system that would undermine fatally the capacity of this democracy to fight terrorism.

Mr. King: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for the very eloquent and perfectly fair way in which he has stated precisely the issue that is before us. It is quite ironic that, when I come to the House to apologise for an error and to set out the actions that we intend to take to put it right, I should be told by some hon. Members that that will not do. It is a very odd approach indeed.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): The Secretary of State admitted a few moments ago that, before the mid-1970s, there was a policy of denigrating individuals by disinformation. Can he tell the House on what information he bases that statement? Who were the people who were denigrated, and on the basis of what disinformation were they denigrated?

Mr. King: In my statement I referred to the answer that had been given by my hon. Friend. I have made it clear that his statement and his answers were based on a further examination of files—an examination which identified the case being made for the establishment of a new post whose job specification included these requirements. The hon. Gentleman has seen the answers. Further evidence on what form that took, and whether it was ever communicated to Mr. Wallace, is not clear. As for what has now happened to Mr. Wallace's position, I have no doubt that Mr. Calcutt will wish to pursue such matters.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): Is my right hon. Friend aware that in this House and outside he enjoys widespread confidence for the integrity and thoroughness with which this inquiry will be conducted? Will he be reluctant to concede to arguments that the scope of the inquiry should be increased? Perhaps he would care to say what credibility we ought to attach to the allegations of dirty tricks and to the besmirching of Members of this House by a man who was convicted of and imprisoned for the particularly horrific manslaughter of the antique dealer Mr. Jonathan Lewis. Perhaps we should be asking ourselves not about the integrity of the Prime Minister and other Ministers reporting to this House but about the system by which this Walter Mitty character had such access to highly classified documents.

Mr. King: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has stated very clearly another aspect of this very difficult saga. With hindsight, there is no doubt that one is entitled to ask how some of these things arose and how some of the people concerned could be involved in such matters. It is easy, 15 years after the event, for people who were not involved to judge. We certainly have a duty to take whatever steps we can to ensure that if, in the areas that I have described, errors were made and disinformation was overlooked, the situation is rectified. No matter what view we hold, Mr. Wallace is entitled to fair treatment. If we think that there is a risk that he did not receive justice, we have a duty to have the matter investigated.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): What circumstances induced Sir Michael Quinlan, as far back as last June, to advise the Secretary of State that he should have an inquiry into Colin Wallace?

Mr. King: The hon. Member talks about an inquiry into the information and into any documents that were available, which were the source——

Mr. Dalyell: He is the Secretary of State's Permanent Secretary.

Mr. King: I am actually aware who my Permanent Secretary is.

In that situation, there was concern over whether, in respect of a number of issues that had been raised, the fullest investigation had been made. Authority was therefore given, and the matter was raised with Ministers —immediately confirmed—to investigate whether any files were missing.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Will my right hon. Friend accept that many hon. Members on both sides of the House, when they first heard of the allegations made by Colin Wallace, were inclined to dismiss him as a Walter Mitty figure? Will my right hon. Friend accept that what has changed the situation this week is the confirmation that there were in the Ministry of Defence documents concerning an operation—perhaps not cleared, perhaps a renegade operation—code-named "Clockwork Orange"? Is not that the single item has justified some of the anxiety that has been expressed in the past?

Are there not precedents, in the shape of similar inquiries being passed straight to the Security Commission? Will my hon. Friend consider very carefully whether this is not an ideal matter for the Security Commission to look into? After all, if the Government have nothing to hide, surely it would be to their advantage to take that step.

Mr. King: My hon. Friend knows that what he referred to, particularly in relation to "Clockwork Orange" was referred to in the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces. While descriptions have been given of what the project might have been like, and the suggestion made that Mr. Wallace was involved in the project, the documents make it absolutely clear that the project was not actually cleared. I think that this is where some ideas start off—whatever Mr. Wallace may have been involved in, and the ideas that he had—but we are dealing with the facts, with what actually happened.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Would the Secretary of State—first of all, as people read *Hansard* —realise that it demeans his office to pretend that the disinformation about which we are speaking is that which requires him to travel under an assumed name? We are speaking of much more serious matters.

Secondly, how can the right hon. Gentleman come to this House and repeat such phrases as "documents were overlooked" and "inadvertently misleading the House" and then proceed, in a stout defence, to resist any possible inquiry, on the grounds that there is no such information? Is he aware that his incapacity to understand the serious nature of the breach of rules—or whatever it was—by the Security Service is exactly the kind of defence used by the security services in eastern Europe? He ought to be ashamed of himself for taking that sort of position.

Mr. King: I have come here to explain certain events that occurred at a time when there were in office a Government of whom the hon. Gentleman was a supporter. I do not make any point about this, because it affected different Administrations at that time. I make no apology for coming to the House in these circumstances. It is disgraceful for the hon. Gentleman to say that I should be ashamed of myself when I have come to explain that mistakes were made, and to state what action we are taking to correct them.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): While applauding the Secretary of State for his courage in making what would obviously be a very embarrassing statement for any Minister to make, may I ask whether he accepts that he has

[Mr. Teddy Taylor]

a very special responsibility to those whose reputation may have been gravely undermined by the activities of Mr. Wallace and his colleagues?

Can my right hon. Friend clarify in what circumstances he might think there was a case for a further inquiry? Would it, for example, be if we had evidence that all the documents referred to by the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) and other frauds and forgeries alleged by Mr. Wallace to be the product of his particular group had been supplied to the Government in 1984?

Mr. King: I am obviously grateful to my hon. Friend for what he said at the beginning. On this matter, we have sought to be quite frank with the House. Various allegations have been made. If there is evidence to substantiate the allegations about a whole range of matters, it should be brought forward. People might then like to explain why it had taken 15 years to do so.

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): May I address a number of specific points to the Secretary of State? He has referred on two or three occasions to mistakes having been made in the past, and he has twice repeated that errors have been made in overlooking information. The only significance of the new information is that it suggests that Mr. Wallace may well have been telling the truth in this particular.

The argument that we are seeking to put to the Secretary of State and to get him to accept is that, if there is evidence that Mr. Wallace has been telling the truth in this particular, there may well be validity in his general arguments and points. Therefore, for that reason if no other, there is a need for a far wider-scale inquiry than is being proposed at present. The Secretary of State must know that the piddling little inquiry that he has set up is to determine whether Mr. Wallace was fairly or unfairly dismissed in the light of the new evidence—but that just will not do.

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman totally overlooks the fact that that was one of the specific matters raised by the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) when he called for an inquiry. In fact, the hon. Gentleman was actually calling for the fifth or sixth inquiry. In answer to the idea that these matters have not been inquired into when they have been a matter of specific inquiry, there is absolutely no evidence that a further inquiry would produce anything different from the previous inquiries. It is simply no good for people to make and to keep on making allegations, which is certainly true of Mr. Wallace over the Kincora matter, and yet refuse to bring forward evidence on it.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the deep resentment among my hon. Friends at the attempt by some Opposition Members to smear members of this Administration about things that happened long before any Minister in this Government came to power? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, if the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) were to put before members of the Government the documents of which only he and Lord Callaghan have direct knowledge, they would be looked into, and that it is no use the right hon. Gentleman accusing this Government of not knowing what they are talking about, when the information has not been put to the Government?

Mr. King: I certainly endorse what my hon. Friend says. If there is evidence, it should be brought forward and put before the appropriate authorities. I find it difficult, standing here, to understand why that has not been done.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Under the Government's own definition of "subversion", which includes undermining parliamentary democracy, were these dirty tricks that were aimed at politicians "subversion"? Will the Secretary of State answer that point? Is it not becoming increasingly clear that there was political meddling on behalf of a small faction in the security services to achieve a Right-wing putsch in this country, and that it was successful? When are we going to get the truth about that?

Mr. King: I am making a statement about somebody who was a member of the information service in the headquarters in Northen Ireland, and attached to the Army. That is the matter with which I am dealing. Some of the allegations that have been made previously have been fully investigated, and separate statements have been made to the House. Some of the allegations have been subject to quite separate and very full inquiries. I have nothing to add on those. I have made a specific statement about the action that we are taking in respect of one specific matter.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): If it is established beyond peradventure that there is no shred of evidence to suggest that there was a campaign to discredit Ministers at the time, is not the only logical conclusion that those who call for further inquiries are, either consciously or unconsciously, seeking to attack the credibility of our security services, which at the time were facing a campaign that caused the death of 300 people, or that they have no confidence in Ministers of the time?

Mr. King: Listening to some of the contributions that have been made, I well understand why my hon. Friend makes that comment. I am under no illusions that one or two contributors to this debate are very keen to undermine —*[Interruption.]*—the confidence in the security services, and they have made that perfectly clear——

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Name them.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order for the right hon. Gentleman to suggest that my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir David Steel) and other right hon. and hon. Members were seeking to aid and abet the terrorist organisations in Northern Ireland by raising the questions that they have?

Mr. Speaker: I did not hear. I am sure that the Secretary of State did not intend that.

Hon. Members: Withdraw.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): May I invite the Secretary of State, on reflection, to withdraw the remark that he has just made, which I am sure, on reconsideration, he would want to withdraw? It cannot possibly be his view that my right hon. and hon. Friends who have served, as he did, with great distinction in Northern Ireland, could

possibly justify or deserve the comments that he has just made, and on behalf of my other hon. Friends, I certainly repudiate them.

Mr. King: I made it absolutely clear—if the hon. Gentleman checks *Hansard*, he will see that I said "one or two"—*[Interruption.]*

Hon. Members: Name them.

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I say to the Secretary of State that even that is a reflection upon the honour of hon. Members?

Hon. Members: Withdraw.

Mr. King: If you take that view, Mr. Speaker, I most certainly withdraw.

Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes (Wimbledon): I also speak as an hon. Member who has served in the armed forces in Northern Ireland. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we are sometimes in danger of discussing these matters while losing sight of the general context? Does my right hon. Friend accept that his statement proves to the House that the Government's only object is to ensure that fairness and accuracy are put on the record, whichever Administration may have been in power at the relevant time?

Mr. King: That has been my purpose today. If errors of this kind are discovered, it is important that one comes immediately to the House to make that clear. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces set out the full background to these matters. My right hon. and hon. Friends and other hon. Members who were given incorrect information have received full letters setting out what we believe to be the correct position.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Does the Secretary of State now accept that he has demonstrated clearly that the Prime Minister should have been making the statement this afternoon? Having misled the House—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."]—and having refused to make a statement——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must bear in mind what he is saying. What the Prime Minister has admitted is that she inadvertently misled the House.

Mr. Madden: Does not the Secretary of State very much regret that the Prime Minister has not seen fit to listen to one second of the statement that he has made this afternoon? Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the Prime Minister that he has been unable to persuade the House of the matters that we are debating, and that his very unconvincing performance of bluff and bluster has not prevented him from sinking in the House this afternoon?

Will the right hon. Gentleman ask the Prime Minister to come to the House on Monday to announce that there is to be a full independent inquiry into all the matters that we have been discussing, and that there will be a parliamentary investigation, either through a special Select Committee or through the Select Committee on Privileges, to examine the activities of Mr. Wallace in relation to Members of Parliament and former Members of Parliament?

Mr. King: I think it is absolutely ludicrous for the hon. Gentleman to suggest that the Prime Minister should come to the House to apologise for an error made in documents being overlooked in the Ministry of Defence. I and my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces take full responsibility for that. I have come to the House at the earliest possible opportunity—I landed from Washington at half-past 8 this morning—to make a full statement to the House. The hon. Gentleman's comments are purely trivial.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The whole House knows that we have a heavy day in front of us. May I ask hon. Members to reflect on their questions and to ask for information that has not already been given?

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): We on this side of the House congratulate my right hon. Friend on his frankness. Will he confirm that, in his investigations in his Department, there has been no proved link between what he has revealed to us today and the allegations that have been made by the hon. Member for Workington (Mr Campbell-Savours) about the so-called "dirty tricks department"? Will he also confirm that the defence of Mr. Wallace, at his trial where he was convicted for murder by a jury—[HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw".]—which was upheld by the Court of Appeal——

Mr. Cryer: Disinformation.

Mr. Hind: —depended on the fact that he had been framed by the secret services, which must cast some doubt on some of the things that he has been saying?

Mr. King: I confirm, as I made clear in my statement, that the further information which has come to light has no relevance whatever to the other matters that he raised.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): In addition to the documents mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), may I draw to the attention of the Secretary of State a 100-page pamphlet, illustrated with about 100 photographs, which seeks to denigrate in a scurrilous way his right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), which was circulated at the 1974 general election? Any inquiry that fails to address that and the documents already mentioned will not be credible.

Mr. King: As I have told other hon. Members, the question is whether the hon. Member has any evidence of the authorship of that document. I could point him to documents circulated in Northern Ireland that denigrated me in a particularly vicious and nasty way. I know that it is no good complaining about it, but I have a good idea of the origin and authorship of those documents.

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): Some years ago, the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service sent the Prime Minister several documents, some from Mr. Colin Wallace, some from the Institution of Professional Civil Servants as it then was, and one from Mr. Peter Broderick, the head of the information service for the Army in Northern Ireland. They showed clearly that there was a dirty tricks campaign in Northern Ireland. How comes it that, in the years since, the enemy from within has been allowed to lie, lie and lie again about what has been happening, but no Minister has come to the Dispatch Box to say, "That is not true; we now have the truth; we have seen the documents"?

Mr. King: As I am the Minister who has come to say that documents have been found, the hon. Gentleman should give me the credit for it.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Does the Secretary of State accept that, however fascinating the history of this episode, there is currently great cause for anxiety about the activities of the security services? The Secretary of State, as Minister directly responsible for military intelligence, his right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), sitting on his right, who was formerly responsible for the secret services, and the Prime Minister, who is now responsible for all the security services, will be aware that the way in which things work is that they are informed on a "need to know" basis. Is he satisfied today that he knows all that he needs to know to ensure that such dirty tricks campaigns are neither happening now, with Colin Wallaces in new guises, nor will happen in the run-up to the next general election?

Mr. King: My statement and the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, as well as what the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) said, have made it clear that, whatever practices there may have been in the 1970s, they were clearly and firmly stopped. I have no evidence whatever that such a policy continued to be pursued, either in the right hon. Member's time of office or in mine.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): Surely it is inconceivable to any reasonable man or woman that the people with and for whom Mr. Wallace worked embarked on the operation without thinking it through and forming an objective? If I recall correctly, the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) said that, according to some documents, it was an objective of the generals. That is to say, they had an objective beyond and different from that of the elected Government of the day.

In Northern Ireland, we should like to know precisely what the political and constitutional objective was. We should also like to know why the information, misinformation or disinformation—call it what one will—has been referred to only in relation to Great Britain politicians.

All of us who work in politics in Northern Ireland know that, during the 1970s, the whole place was alive with rumours about leading politicians, especially those from the Unionist community. Many of those rumours were designed to injure the standing of those politicians, not only in their own communities but throughout the Northern Ireland community. Frankly, many of them were dredged out of a cesspool.

This is a serious matter. The Government and Conservative Members do not seem to understand that the present Government continue to be the victim of what happened in the 1970s. It was not an error but a deliberate policy perpetrated against the Government, and which the Government repeated to the House. That makes it a constitutional issue of the greatest importance. It is wrong for any Government to say that they will not carry out the fullest inquiry to discover what happened, if only for their own protection and that of the Prime Minister and of subsequent Cabinets.

Mr. King: It is clear, and the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) made it clear, that any policy of disinformation designed to denigrate individuals or organisations in the early 1970s was stopped. If there is any further evidence of such a policy, it should be brought forward. I have nothing to add to the statement that I have already made.

Mr. Cryer: But on the evidence from the Secretary of State's hon. Friend the Member for Arundel (Mr. Marshall)—Colin Wallace's Member of Parliament—documentation has been requested from the Department since 1986. Why has it taken four years to discover those documents? When was the search instituted and how many days ago was that handful of documents discovered? Will there be a search for the other five and a half or more files of documents that it is alleged have gone missing?

Is not the Secretary of State worried that the matter goes to the extent of treason? He seems to be prepared to defend the security services whatever dirty tricks they get up to, even to the point—this should be clearly noted by the House—of denigrating hon. Members for exercising their democratic options in the House. The aim of the security services was an attack on our very system of democracy. Would not an inquiry by the Select Committee on Home Affairs be a way of ensuring full democratic accountability? As the Committee is made up entirely of hon. Members, what is wrong with that?

Mr. King: I am not sure whether the hon. Member was listening to the answers that I gave earlier, including the answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel (Mr. Marshall). I have nothing to add to the statement that I have made about the approach that we should now adopt to these matters.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): While I welcome the narrow field in which the Secretary of State has responded, will he answer the questions asked earlier? Are any of those involved in disinformation or giving advice to Ministers still in responsible positions as advisers to the Government or in public service?

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the matter could go beyond the Ministry of Defence into other areas, even the Northern Ireland Office? Does he accept that it will take a wider inquiry to deal with the issues, the innuendo that still surrounds the people involved in the Kincora inquiry and the allegations that Colin Wallace was the third member present at the murder of Tommy Herren?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman chose to widen his questions into precisely the areas where I said that no evidence arising out of the matters that I have reported to the House has been substantiated or gives fresh ground for anxiety. On the question of who authorised Mr. Wallace, it is clear that he was already undertaking unattributable briefing activities, which may have included misinformation, before he was authorised to do so.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The Secretary of State said that documents were overlooked. On what day were they found? What was the date? He must have it on file somewhere.

Mr. King: They were found early last year. The first document was found then. On the instruction of the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, a formal investigation was held to find out whether other information was available to guide us.

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): If the Secretary of State is right to tell the House that these matters have come as a surprise to Ministers and senior civil servants, why, in the early years of this Administraion, while Colin Wallace was in prison, was a senior-level meeting held inside the Ministry of Defence at which Ministers and senior civil servants, including Clive Ponting, were present?

The discussion was about the danger to the reputation of the Government if Colin Wallace came out of prison and continued to make the statements that he had made before he went in? How can we be told that the matter is a shock and a surprise? All the documents that my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) has shown to the House were delivered to the Prime Minister in November 1984. Why was nothing done about that?

Given that the Government have now admitted the status of Colin Wallace, can we be told why it was that, when Colin Wallace warned his superiors about child abuse in Kincora in 1974, no action was taken and that child abuse continued until the issue was made public by the press?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman tries to widen the issue beyond the point that I made. I shall seek to give the exact date when the first document came to light, on the basis of which an instruction was given for a full examination. A considerable number of documents had to be examined to make sure that there were no other inaccuracies in what is a very serious issue indeed.

It may not be clear that the first document was not the job specification; it was not any evidence that anything was given to Colin Wallace. It was as listed. If the hon. Gentleman has read the Minister of State's written answer, he will know that it was a background paper seeking to justify expenditure on a further information officer in Headquarters Northern Ireland.

That was not conclusive proof, and that is why it was necessary to find out whether Colin Wallace was given the job specification and to seek to come to the House with proper information. We have come to the House not with a complete story but with something which is of sufficient concern and which we believe means that, in justice to Mr. Colin Wallace, the matter should be investigated and reviewed by Mr. Calcutt.

Mr. O'Neill: Will the Secretary of State confirm that Mr. Calcutt will have the powers to obtain and to make use of the job specification? Will he also confirm that section 1(9) of the Official Secrets Act 1989 makes it clear that not only those in the security services but those who work in support of them can obtain immunity and the like? Will he guarantee that immunity from prosecution will be provided under that Act?

How can the Secretary of State give a guarantee about "Clockwork Orange", which was not extended beyond Northern Ireland, when he freely admits that he has not seen the relevant papers?

Lastly, does the Secretary of State agree that to appear on a blacklist drawn up by terrorists is one thing, but to appear on a blacklist drawn up by servants of the Crown, whose responsibility was to uphold our freedom, is a completely different matter? As those people are senior Members of the House, surely it is reasonable that, as requested by hon. Members on both sides of the House, we have the fullest public inquiry so as to satisfy the House, to clear the names of those besmirched and to restore public confidence outside the House in the workings of our affairs?

Mr. King: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's first question is yes—I have forgotten the question but I know the answer.

Mr. O'Neill: The job specification.

Mr. King: Although the job specification is a classified document, Mr. Calcutt will have access to it and he will be able to show it to Mr. Wallace. I have also been advised that Mr. Wallace will be authorised to give the authorities the facts in the other matters that have been raised, so no offence arises under the Official Secrets Act. In that respect, there is no change from the old Act, which only made unauthorised publication an offence.

Mr. Speaker: We now come to the debate on the private Members' motions——

Mr. Beith: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Madden: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: After this length of time, and given the pressure on time, I hope that hon. Members are raising points of order with which I can deal.

Mr. Madden: My point of order is precisely a matter for you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that an application for the matter to be referred to the Select Committee on Privileges has been made to you. Can you say when you intend to make a statement?

Mr. Speaker: No, I cannot, because I am considering the matter and I have had to write to the hon. Member concerned asking for further information.

Mr. Hind: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: There is great pressure on time. Other hon. Members are bound to lose time as a result of points of order now.

Mr. Hind: When I asked a question of the Secretary of State, I wrongly said that Mr. Wallace was convicted of murder. In fact, he was convicted of manslaughter, and I wish to apologise to him and to the House.

Ten-minute Rule Bills (Budget Day)

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. For reasons that are obvious to the House, it has been necessary to take some time on that important statement. The Leader of the House will, if you now give him an opportunity, put before the House five motions. As I understand it, under an order passed by the House on Friday, you have to put the Question on those motions and any amendments to them at 7 o'clock, despite the fact that it is now 5.25. If I am not mistaken—you will be able to confirm this—you have no discretion about whether you put the Question. You are obliged to do so and you must bring the debate to a conclusion with a vote. The motions before us all have profound effects on the rights of Members. They curtail those rights in a series of different ways. The Leader of the House will have a case to make as will the Chairman of the Select Committee on Procedure and the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should not be making a speech.

Mr. Beith: I am putting it to you, Mr. Speaker, and I hope that the Leader of the House is taking note, that, however well you discharge your duties, if you comply with the order passed on Friday, it will not be possible for all Back-Bench Members, who have a legitimate interest in the matter, to take part in the debate, yet it is their rights that are being taken away. I appeal to you, Mr. Speaker, to tell the Leader of the House that you have no discretion about how long the debate can last, and that the matter should not be brought to a vote after so short a time.

Mr. Speaker: I confirm that I have no discretion in the matter. I have to put the motions at 7 o'clock. This is a joint debate. The five motions will be taken together, and I confirm that at the end I shall put only those motions that are moved.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No, no. I am on my feet.

I have selected the first amendment, in the name of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith).

Mr. Benn: Is it in order, Mr. Speaker, for five motions to be moved together without the consent of the House? My understanding is that motions of a differing character may be taken together if the House wishes it. Given the point that the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) made about the pressure of time, if only the first motion is moved we shall at least be able to debate that for an hour and a half, but if all five motions are put together, all five have to be put to the vote.

Mr. Speaker: I understand that there is an agreement —[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."]—that there should be a general debate on the five motions together.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Speaker: There was a business motion last week which set that out. I understand that that arrangement had general agreement.

Mr. Benn: With great respect, Mr. Speaker, I fully understand that you have no discretion in what you have to do at 7 o'clock, but we have discretion about whether to assent to the grouping of motions, all of which are quite separate in character. The House often discusses such motions together if it wishes to do so, but in this case the only way of protecting the time of the House on at least four of the motions is to object to them being taken together. Therefore, if it is in order, I object to the five motions being taken together—as, I gather, do other hon. Members.

Mr. Speaker: Let me make it perfectly plain. When the Leader of the House rises, he will move the first of the motions, but I understand that there is an agreement that all the motions should be debated together. I am sure that there is a great deal of interest in these matters, but to date no one has indicated their interest in taking part in the debate, although, of course, no one has to do that in writing.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I hope that it will be helpful to you, because you are in a difficult position, which is not of your making. Will you confirm that, if the Leader of the House were not to press some of the motions today, there need be no vote on those? You, Sir, have no discretion, but the Leader of the House does, and he should take account of what hon. Members are saying.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

That is extremely helpful of the hon. Gentleman, because that is exactly what I mentioned. I can put to the vote only those motions which are actually moved. Until we hear the Leader of the House, I do not know which ones he intends to move.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You have just told the House that no Member indicated in writing a desire to participate in the debate. I most certainly did.

Mr. Speaker: Yes. I confirm that the hon. Lady did.

Mr. Skinner: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that on Friday there was a business motion. It quite clearly allows the votes to be taken at the end. It does not state that the Leader of the House has to move the motions collectively. If he so chooses, and if the House agrees, the Leader of the House can move the first one, we can debate it and deal with it. The business motion does not compel the House as a whole to deal with all five motions collectively and dispose of them. The Leader of the House can help in this matter.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Geoffrey Howe) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: It appears that the Leader of the House is about to help in this matter.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have been trying to see how best to deal with this, because these are important matters for the House as a whole and the time for debating them has been curtailed. However, I would not wish to set aside time

to no purpose. As I understand it, we could debate all five motions even if I moved only one. If I have that option —it seems to be the convenient one—I should move motion No. 4, which relates to ten-minute Bills on Budget day, which has the widest assent. Of course, hon. Members may oppose it, but it is the one most likely to be generally supported.

The debate could range over all five motions and we could return on a subsequent occasion to votes on the other matters. That would be the most convenient way of proceeding, because we want to use the time usefully, but not in such a fashion as to deprive hon. Members of the opportunity of considering the matter.

Mr. Speaker: The House has heard what the Leader of the House has said. Let us proceed.

5.33 pm

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I beg to move,

That no notice may be given under Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in bills and nomination of select committees at commencement of public business) for a day on which Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer has declared his intention of opening his Budget; but

(i) notices proposed to be given for such day, and

(ii) notices so given for a day in respect of which such intention is subsequently declared,

shall be treated as having been given for the first Monday on which the House shall sit after the Budget is opened, and may be proceeded with on that day as though it were a Tuesday or a Wednesday.

That this Order be a Standing Order of the House.

I am grateful to the House for giving me time, by raising points of order, to reflect on the matter sufficiently to reach a conclusion which makes reasonable sense.

As the House knows, the five motions arise from the second and third reports of the Select Committee on Procedure in the last Session. Three of them relate to private Members' time and two to ten-minute Bills. I am moving the first of the two relating to ten-minute Bills. They provide a sensible package to consider together.

Motion Nos. 1 to 3 relate to private Members' time. The overall purpose of the three motions is to ensure that, as far as possible, the time available for private Members' business is fully used for that purpose, not interrupted or disrupted by the unintended or unorthodox use of procedures relating to other issues. They are also intended to avoid any unusual use of procedure which would affect the precedence of private Members' Bills as determined in the ballot and Standing Orders, or provide additional time for a particular Bill beyond that allotted to private Members.

When it made these recommendations, the Procedure Committee was not concerned with the progress or fate of individual Bills, and nor am I. Our common purpose is simply to protect private Members' time—no more, no less —and that is what the motions set out to do.

Of the two motions relating to ten-minute Bills, motion No. 4, which I have moved, is intended to ensure that the opening of the Budget is not delayed by a ten-minute Bill. The other motion on that topic—motion No. 5—is tabled to overcome problems which have arisen under the existing queueing system by replacing it with a ballot system.

Of the three motions on private Members' time, motion No. 3 would mean that, on a Friday on which private Members' business had precedence, any petition remaining to be presented at 10 am would stand over until 2.30 pm. In practice, in the ordinary way, the presentation of petitions on such days is normally completed well before 10 am. On the one occasion when that was not the case, the subject of the petition was the same as the motion to be debated on that day.

On this matter, I agree with the Procedure Committee that reform on the lines suggested in motion No. 3 would not involve any real curtailment of Back Benchers' rights, and no one seriously argues to the contrary.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Is the Leader of the House aware that all this tidying up and rationalisation operates against the interests of any Member, from whichever party, who is determined to raise a subject? We can all easily go in for ballots. It takes a little effort, guts and sweat to queue for many hours. It is an interesting question of philosophy: should we operate a general ballot to the advantage of the Executive or give some chance to hon. Members who, rightly or wrongly—for whatever cause, good or bad—are prepared to sweat it out in that room upstairs?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman intervenes at the wrong stage of my speech. When I deal with the relevant motion I shall express some sympathy with the hon. Gentleman. He should allow me to come to that. I am dealing with motions Nos. 1 to 3; he is making a point about motion No. 5 with which I shall deal in a moment.

Under the terms of motion No. 2, if a motion for a by-election writ moved on a Friday—on which private Members' business has precedence—was opposed, it would not be pursued at that time on that Friday. This motion represents a modest improvement on the original recommendation. The Procedure Committee's proposal was that, if proceedings on such a motion had not been disposed of by 10 am, they should stand over to the next sitting day.

There are two good reasons for being a little more positive than the Procedure Committee. First, such a motion, if not taken formally, might not be disposed of in half an hour. It would be sensible to avoid starting something which might not be finished, but which could nevertheless encroach on private Members' business which was to follow.

Secondly, such a motion would take precedence over the presentation of petitions, and would therefore encroach on the time available for their presentation. The overall effect of the variation contained in my motion would be no different from the Procedure Committee's proposal, but it would lessen the scope for encroachment on private Members' time. Its effect would be that the by-election writ motion would stand over for consideration on the next business day—the Monday.

It has become customary for writs to be moved on a Tuesday, and it is most unlikely that a party would seek to move a writ on a Friday. In practice, polling normally takes place on a Thursday. By deferring the moving of a writ from a Friday to a Monday, the same two Thursdays would be available for polling.

Mr. Skinner: The Leader of the House was a Member of Parliament on the two occasions when I moved a writ on a Friday. I was doing him, as well as many of my hon. Friends, a good turn on those two occasions—especially on the first, when Enoch Powell was involved in trying to keep people here through the weekend. I was trying to stop his queue-jumping Bill. The right hon. and learned

[Mr. Skinner]

Gentleman will remember that, almost certainly, he would have been kept here Friday, Friday night, Saturday and Sunday until the Bill had got through the House. I was doing the Leader of the House a service.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I appreciate the trail-blazing role played on that occasion by the hon. Gentleman. Since he undertook that noble task, the matter has been considered by the Procedure Committee under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery); from that joint distillation of activity and intellectual effort, these proposals have emerged. That simple change —transplanting the day from Friday to Monday—will still leave the same two Thursdays available for polling.

I emphasise that the motion does not preclude the moving of a writ, but it prevents Members from using it as a ploy to delay the start of private Members' business. It takes its place alongside the other proposals in relation to private Members' business.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): Before the Leader of the House leaves that point, will he confirm that what the Procedure Committee recommended would have stopped any proceedings at 10 am on a Friday on which there were private Members' Bills or private Members' motions? As I read it, under his motion, the person who moves the writ could speak for three hours, because it says "and is opposed". It cannot be opposed until the person who moves it stops speaking—that is the first moment at which it can be opposed. Surely that is so?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend is an astute observer of the parliamentary scene. I hope that he is not right; it is certainly not intended that he should be right.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): The hon. Gentleman is right.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: That is why I treat my hon. Friend with such respect. The motion that I have moved is not the one to which my hon. Friend directs his gaze, which gives me the opportunity to consider it a little more if that is necessary.

Mr. Skinner: Oh, that's good.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Well, I have to take advantage of the opportunities presented to me.

The effect of motion No. 1 would be to prevent a private Member from moving a motion to amend or suspend Standing Orders, unless the House had previously agreed in the same Session that it was necessary or expedient to do so. In particular, it would prevent a private Member's motion from being used as a device to facilitate the passage of a private Member's Bill by providing additional time for it as exempted business, by giving it precedence over other private Members' Bills or by allocating specific time to it.

Miss Widdecombe: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Not in the middle of a sentence, even for my hon. Friend.

The Procedure Committee did not think that it would be acceptable to the House for private Members' motions to introduce significant procedural changes that could affect the progress and priority of individual private Members' Bills. It thought that that would destroy the carefully balanced and well-understood arrangements for private Members' business.

Miss Widdecombe: My right hon. and learned Friend is talking about preventing a private Member from moving a motion. Does he agree that, in this instance, a private Member cannot bulldoze anything through the House? It all depends on the will of the House. Should not my right hon. and learned Friend say that he is preventing the whole sum of Back Benchers and everyone else from deciding whether they wish to allocate time to a particular motion? Is that not what he is really saying?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am saying that the arrangements that are basically in place for the deployment of time between public and private business and the management of the time available for private Members' business are the result of a great deal of analysis, thought and experience over a long period. As the House knows, in November the Government responded to certain recommendations of the Procedure Committee by extending the time available for private Members in aggregate—I think, by one day. It would not be sensible to allow that set of arrangements to be disturbed by private Members in the way identified in the motion.

The Procedure Committee thought that the change that we are seeking to prevent would destroy the carefully balanced and well-understood arrangements for private Members' business. For example, a Bill introduced under the ten-minute rule procedure—which may not be set down for Second Reading until private Members successful in a ballot have had the opportunity to choose their slot for Second Reading—could be given precedence over a ballot Bill.

Miss Widdecombe: Or over the will of the House.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: No, but we do not think that the change would be sensible. The House has the opportunity to consider the matter today. Similarly, such a change could result in a Bill low in the ballot leap-frogging one that is higher up in the ballot.

The motion provides a balance for two other motions, which clear the decks, so far as is possible, to allow unimpeded consideration of private Members' business within the accepted procedures. This motion, which forms part of the trio, ensures that those procedures are maintained and not altered to favour a particular private Member's Bill. More generally, the motion precludes Standing Orders being amended by a private Member's motion. I agree with the Procedure Committee that, on balance, it is not appropriate that our procedures should be amended in that way.

I emphasise that the changes do not preclude general or specific procedural changes being the subject of a private Member's motion, but would prevent the motion from being couched in terms that could implement immediate change. Private Members would retain the right to express opinion on such matters, but not to make changes without wider support in the House than, perhaps, a low vote on a Friday at the initiative of one Member.

Mr. Beith: If the right hon. and learned Gentleman wants to observe well-understood and established practices, does he not think that the Government should be subject to at least some degree of similar restraint? The

Government can, on a low vote in the House on a Friday, similarly move motions that change Standing Orders or —this happens more often—vary their impact or exempt certain business from their impact. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman is worried about the balance being changed, why has he sat back and watched the balance shift in favour of the Government on similar matters over a long period?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: That is a separate point. Today, we are concerned with the preservation of the existing balance, which the motions are designed to achieve.

Miss Widdecombe *rose*——

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I regret that I cannot continually give way. There is not a great deal of time, and I want to put the case before the House.

I shall deal with the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) when he has had the opportunity to speak to it.

Taking the three motions together, and also taking account of the Sessional Order moved on 22 November 1989, they ensure that additional time is provided for private Members' business and that that business, as well as its timing and precedence, is—so far as possible—protected from interruption or disruption by other matters or by the misuse of otherwise legitimate procedural devices. That is the basis on which I believe the three motions provide an outcome that is both fair and balanced.

There are two motions dealing with ten-minute Bills. The effect of motion No. 4 would be that no ten-minute Bill would be introduced on Budget day. The slot would not be lost, but would be moved to the Monday following Budget day. In the unlikely event that the date of the Budget was to be announced so late that notice of a ten-minutes rule application had already been given for that day, the ten-minute Bill would be moved to the following Monday.

Mr. Skinner: I bet there is a loophole there.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: There may be, but I hope not.

As the Procedure Committee suggests, I think that the proposal would be for the convenience of most hon. Members. It would not restrict the rights of Back Benchers, but would preserve them, given the various methods used to avoid a ten-minute Bill on Budget day. I know that some Members may relish the prospect of a Budget day slot, when the House is unusually full, but I think that for most Members it would be an unwarranted disruption and irritation. Speaking as an ex-Chancellor, I can confirm that I always welcomed the opportunity to get into my Budget speech without having to wait until after the presentation of a ten-minute Bill.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): I speak with some experience of this matter, because I think that I was the last Member to have a ten-minute Bill on Budget day—back in 1985, when the Chancellor was the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson). My recollection is that I received a very warm reception from hon. Members on both sides of the House. Indeed, the House gave me leave to introduce my Bill, despite the fact that it was critical of the Chancellor's handling of the economy.

I cannot think of any justification for the right hon. and learned Gentleman's proposal. In previous years, the Chancellor took retaliatory action by using some of his messenger boys—parliamentary private secretaries in the Treasury and elsewhere—to abuse the system by squatting in the Public Bill Office, on a rota basis, sometimes for several days and nights. They never had any intention of moving a motion. When it was too late for another hon. Member to take the slot, the Tory Member withdrew the motion and the House was deprived of the opportunity of a ten-minute rule slot on Budget day.

That was an abuse of the House through dog-in-the-manger tactics. It is wrong that the Leader of the House should want to move the goalposts and further limit the opportunity for Back-Bench Members to obtain a slot on Budget day. Does it have anything to do with the televising of the House?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman disproves his own case. If he is the only hon. Member ever to have presented a ten-minute rule Bill on Budget day, that proves that it is neither a substantial nor a long-felt wish for democratic rights. The hon. Gentleman was an eccentric in that achievement, and the fact that no one had done the same before shows that the overriding wish of the House has always been to get straight on to the Chancellor's Budget.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I do not want to widen the debate, because I sense that on the particular issue now under consideration I have the House on my side.

In making strenuous efforts subsequently to ensure that the hon. Member for Falkirk, West did not have an opportunity to repeat his success, and that subsequent Budgets were introduced without interruption, certain hon. Members performed a public service, legitimised by the recommendation of the Procedure Committee—and now by the House, when it votes.

The fifth motion was the subject of an intervention by the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham). He has now come back in time to study that question. The effect of the motion will be to replace the existing first come, first served, queuing system with a ballot. Consideration of the case for that change arose in the last Session, when right hon. and hon. Members began queuing for increasingly long periods to secure slots for ten-minute Bills.

Mr. Winnick *rose*——

Mr. Corbyn *rose*——

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) has many qualifications for intervening, but perhaps he will allow me to give way at a sensible point.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman also allow me to intervene at a sensible point?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: That is for consideration.

The first come, first served, system led to friction because of the way in which right hon. and hon. Members took the place of others in the queue. It also caused difficulties for the House authorities. Because right hon. and hon. Members queued in the Public Bill Office conference room, it could not be used for its proper purpose, and it became necessary for the Clerk of the

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House to inform Mr. Speaker that the work of the Public Bill Office was being affected—and he does not often make reports of that dramatic impact.

Mr. Winnick: As there are ballots for Adjournment debates and for oral questions, is there any reason why there should not be a ballot for ten-minute Bills? What is so holy and sacred about queueing all night? My view is not influenced in the least by the fact that the last time I did so I contracted shingles the following week.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful for the support of the hon. Member for Walsall, North, because it illustrates one style. In the hon. Members for Walsall, North and for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), one sees one hon. Member who is lusting for the right to queue all night, and another who is happy that I should take away that opportunity.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way on that point?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: No. I must be allowed to develop that point.

My predecessor as Leader of the House was originally disposed to move a similar motion last summer, but the problem eased and he did not do so. It is obvious that this motion evokes strong feelings among some Back Benchers on both sides of the House. The existing arrangements provide an opportunity for right hon. and hon. Members who hold strong views on an issue to do something about it. They see the chance of 10 minutes of prime time as a reward for persistence and initiative—one that they would like to retain—rather than simply good fortune in a ballot.

Mr. Corbyn: I have introduced seven ten-minute Bills by means of queueing in the Public Bill Office conference room—although better facilities, such as heating, could be provided there. However, I have never been successful with a private Member's motion or a Bill under the ballot procedure, which I have used at every opportunity since entering the House.

I am not complaining of my lack of success in the ballot but making the point that I have been successful with ten-minute Bills by making an effort as an ordinary Back Bencher whereas I have never been successful under the ballot procedure. The motion will remove the opportunity for initiative.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I shall seek to explain that I am not doing that which the hon. Gentleman thinks I am doing.

I have identified the fact that a choice must be made between those who want a reward for their persistence and initiative and those who are prepared to rely on a ballot. Although persistence is commendable as a general virtue, we should not preserve a massive endurance test—particularly if it is likely to inconvenience the Clerk of the House. I should not wish to see a return to the situation that existed last summer. However, I am conscious of the feelings of right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House. I have to strike a balance between the rights that they wish to cherish, the effective working of the House, and the inconvenience that can be caused to Officers and other officials.

I am standing even further back from the fifth motion, which I have not yet moved, than from the others—and I shall be interested to hear the views of right hon. and hon. Members on it. If there is a strong feeling that the existing arrangements should be maintained, I am prepared not to move it.

Miss Widdecombe: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way now?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend will no doubt have an opportunity to make a speech herself. I am trying to explain that I am so conscious of the balance of feeling on both sides of the House that I am willing to reach a conclusion in the light of the opinion that is expressed. I hope that my hon. Friend will contain her enthusiasm until an opportunity arises for her to speak.

If there were to be a recurrence of last summer's situation, I would not hesitate to bring the final motion before the House again. However, provided that we can maintain the existing balance, I do not intend to press it.

Miss Widdecombe *rose*——

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me, because I must conclude.

Subject to my comments on the fifth motion, I believe that all five would, if passed, bring added clarity to our procedures and, taken together, be to the benefit of the House as a whole. Taken together, they do not unduly restrict or erode Back Benchers' rights but instead protect them by providing for private Members' business to be considered on its merits, without the intrusion of other matters. To balance that, it will not be possible for private Members to seek to alter the procedures of the House to benefit any particular private Member's Bill.

The motion relating to Budget day will preserve the slot for ten-minute Bills that would otherwise be lost. As to the fifth motion and the choice between endurance or ballot, I am ready to listen to the views of the House, because I should not want to press ahead if it does not have general support.

5.57 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): The time available for private Members' Bills is already limited but is nevertheless very important. There is general agreement that that time should be safeguarded whenever possible. When I escaped from the minefield of the rate support grant, I little realised that I was entering another minefield of procedural argument that crosses the Floor of the House.

Mr. Winnick: And it is far more complex.

Dr. Cunningham: It is far more complex, and certainly far more dangerous.

It is not surprising that discussions about making changes to the time allowed to private Members are themselves contentious. In the past, private Members' time has been used to introduce legislation on abortion, the abolition of hanging, regional policy, wildlife and countryside issues, and the protection of badgers. Those were all highly controversial and important issues. I support the Leader of the House's view that, whatever else we want, we do not want any diminution of the time available to private Members to set the agenda of the House.

Mr. Corbyn: It was good of my hon. Friend to outline some of the Bills of significant social and environmental importance introduced in private Members' time. Does he

agree that it should be increased so that Bills can be debated? That would end the nonsense of the objection system and provide an opportunity not just to present a Bill in 10 minutes but to debate it, and allow the introduction of legislation by Back Benchers. Does my hon. Friend agree that the balance has shifted away from right hon. and hon. Members to the Executive who occasionally inform—or, rather, misinform—the House about their actions?

Dr. Cunningham: Although I agree with my hon. Friend that we should have more time, that is not one of the points under discussion today. As I understand from the proposals on the Order Paper, private Members are getting slightly more time in the House. That is to be welcomed. As for more time on ten-minute Bills, the Leader of the House has made it clear that he does not intend to move his proposal for ballots for ten-minute Bills. Although I have no objection to a change in procedure for balloting for ten-minute Bills, I am quite content that we should allow hon. Members more time to discuss the proposal.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): Before the hon. Gentleman leaves the valid point he is making about Back Benchers' time—I am sure that all hon. Members agree that Back Benchers should have as much time as possible—does he deprecate the fact that uniquely, on Tuesday, a Front-Bench spokesman presented a ten-minute Bill?

Dr. Cunningham: No, I do not deprecate that. As I have said at the Dispatch Box in respect of applications under Standing Order No. 20, every hon. Member has the same rights in these matters. I do not accept the argument that a Front Bencher who wishes to raise an important issue—a constituency issue, for example—should be denied the opportunity available to other hon. Members to use the procedures of the House to pursue it or to raise it.

Mr. Skinner: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Dr. Cunningham: I have said to my hon. Friend that I do not wish to take up a lot of time because our debate has been severely curtailed.

Mr. Skinner: It is in answer to the hon. Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay).

Dr. Cunningham: I shall give way, but I hope that nobody will complain that I have taken too long.

Mr. Skinner: Perhaps I take a different view on these motions from that of my hon. Friend, but that is not the point I am making right now. The ten-minute Bill on Tuesday would have been moved by a Labour Front Bencher in any case. The hon. Member for Berkshire, East thinks that the person who got the ten-minute Bill was a Back Bencher, but it was a Front Bencher—my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott)—who passed it on to another Front Bencher.

Dr. Cunningham: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that it was my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) who got the ten-minute slot in the first place. However, perhaps I can move on.

It is no secret that usually, but not always, there is great controversy, not on party political lines but across the Floor of the House, when private Members' Bills are brought before the House. We know that there are alliances across the Floor of the House for and against many of those controversial matters. It seems today that, although right hon. and hon. Members present have been diametrically opposed on certain issues and on the merits of Bills, they seem to be joined together to defend the status quo on the procedures. In other words, they want to reserve the opportunity to use, or perhaps in some case to abuse, the procedures of the House to defeat controversial issues in private Members' time because they do not agree with the merits of a Bill before the House.

I welcome the three motions referring to the moving of the writ, the presentation of petitions and the use of private Members' motions to change Standing Orders because they are a serious and welcome attempt to safeguard precious private Members' time. The proposals come with the recommendation of the Procedure Committee, which I also applaud. Those three motions are worthy of general support.

I have already referred to ballots for ten-minute Bills. I shall not waste any more time on that, as the Leader of the House has said that he will not pursue that matter today. I turn now to ten-minute Bills on Budget day. In 1981 my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) introduced a ten-minute Bill when the Leader of the House was Chancellor of the Exchequer. I am sure that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will recall that occasion. I also well remember the amusing and witty speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan), which he rightly said was enjoyed by right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House, with the possible exception of the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) who was the hapless victim of that speech. However, I personally support the view that on a day as important as Budget day we should not have to wait any additional time for the presentation of the Budget by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. As there will be no diminution of the time available for ten-minute Bills—it will simply not be possible to introduce them on Budget day—I support that proposal.

It is inevitable that proposals to change the procedures of the House will meet strong opposition and be regarded as controversial. I have never been a fan or a supporter of the more arcane aspects of procedure and the way in which we conduct our business. I believe that the whole matter of procedure and how we deal with business in the House is long overdue a fundamental overhaul, and I hope that we can achieve that before much longer. For the life of me I do not believe that our constituents think that the way in which we proceed on many occasions is sensible in the interests of either good legislative scrutiny of the Executive or producing good legislation. I am sure that if we asked our constituents they would like a breath of fresh air blown through the Chamber and other aspects of procedure in the House of Commons. Although by comparison to what I have been calling for these measures are relatively small and even modest, I welcome the reports of the Procedure Committee and offer general support to the propositions enunciated by the Leader of the House and I hope that the four motions that I support can be determined today. If that is possible, I shall certainly vote for them.

6.7 pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): I start by thanking my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House and congratulating him on setting quite a precedent in bringing

[Sir Peter Emery]

forward two debates on procedure within four months or so—twice in this Session of Parliament—when previous Leaders of the House have not been able to find time for reports that have stood for months and years without being debated. I welcome that immensely.

I was delighted to hear the shadow Leader of the House's commitment to reform of procedure. I have tried time and again to drag the procedures of the House screaming into the 20th century. I welcome the fact that we have support from the Opposition Front Bench spokesman. We have not always had that in the past, and it is a most encouraging step forward.

Let me make it absolutely clear that one of the important principles, as any hon. Member who has sat on the Procedure Committee will agree, has been that the objective of the Procedure Committee has been at all times to try to defend the rights and the time available to Back Benchers. That is one of the major factors always in the minds of those on the Procedure Committee, because only they can protect Back Benchers from the power of the Executive. This debate is important, because that is exactly what the motions are intended to do.

It is immensely important that motions 1, 2 and 3 are seen as a package; they must not be taken individually. In the report of the Procedure Committee it is clearly stated that they must be introduced only as a package. What is the reason for that? After the debate on 20 January 1989, Mr. Speaker said:

"I hope that we shall not go through this kind of thing again."

He said later:

"It is for the Leader of the House . . . to put his proposals to the Procedure Committee. I am sure that it will consider them."—[*Official Report*, 20 January 1989; Vol. 145, c. 661-62.]

We then had a letter from the Leader of the House asking us to consider how we could defend private Members' time.

All this arose because of somebody trying to "cheat" or "find a way round" the normal procedure for private Members' Bills, and those who were against that saying they would find a way of stopping it. The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) was most effective. When an hon. Member introduced a motion on a private Members' day to try to give special power to her Bill and put it above the Bills of other Members in the ballot, that was seen by many hon. Members as being unfair. The hon. Member for Bolsover said that a way would be found of putting an end to this, and that is exactly what happened, and the House decided that that procedure would not be followed.

Arising from that, therefore, we have brought forward this balance. We have said in the first motion that a private Member will not be able to gain special powers by a private Member's motion that goes beyond the normal allotted time. It would be wrong for that Member to be able to obtain that time in the first instance. If the Member can get the approval of the House twice, that is another matter. But, if we take that power away from Members, we must at the same time try to establish the balance that no other Member should be able to interfere with the private Member's motion time either by introducing petitions or by moving writs in order to take that time away.

We are attempting to ensure that when a Member wins time for a private Member's motion he or she will be able to have all the time from 10 o'clock until 2.30 uninterrupted on the motion; or, if it is a private Member's Bill, that time cannot be eaten into. If either of these is limited, the balance is taken away and preference given to one side.

I have tried to point out to the House that these three motions all hang together and that in our judgement it would be wrong to amend them, or to accept two and leave one out. Indeed, if the House wished to do that I would say that we ought not to have the other two either. We either have the package as a whole or we have nothing at all.

Miss Widdecombe: I will ignore, until I have some chance to contribute to the debate, the rather vulgar references to cheating and queue jumping. But is there not a very clear distinction between the three motions, inasmuch as two are deliberately designed to obstruct and one is designed to take away the will of the House? If the House believes that a Member is trying to cheat or queue jump, the House can say no; if it thinks otherwise, it can say yes. Why does the Procedure Committee think that the House should not be able to decide the issue itself?

Sir Peter Emery: I am amazed. I have spent some time trying to explain the point and it has been entirely ignored. We are not taking powers away; we are stopping anybody getting round the procedure. Any hon. Member who believes otherwise has either not understood or not been in the House long enough to know the normal procedure.

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Gentleman did not understand the question.

Sir Peter Emery: I understood it very well. The hon. Lady is afraid that she or other hon. Members will not be given special power to put something to the House to extend their right and enable them to further a Bill for longer. We are saying that this is "cheating"—that is in inverted commas and it was in inverted commas when I first said it—getting round the normal understanding of the ballot and the allocation of time to private Members. Private Members must realise that if they want a massive amount of time for their private Bills, they stand very little chance of getting them through, unless they can get general agreement.

The next two motions concern ten-minute Bills. The first concerns a ten-minute Bill on a Budget day. The Procedure Committee believed that it was the wish of most Back Benchers to get on to the Budget, and that they did not want this to be interfered with by the jollity of a ten-minute Bill speech. The Committee wanted to ensure that, if a Bill was not to be moved on Budget day, the slot for a private Member would not be taken away; in other words, private Members' time would not be lost. I am delighted that the Government have been willing to move in that direction and even allow a ten-minute Bill to be introduced on a Monday, which is not the normal time, in order to ensure that Back-Bench time is not taken away.

Perhaps I should remind Members what the ten-minute Bill is really about. It is intended to give Back-Bench Members the opportunity to introduce legislation, but if one analyses the facts, one sees that this is not what is happening at the moment. In the last Parliament, 194 ten-minute Bills were introduced on the Floor of the House. Permission was refused for only 23 at the time of their introduction. Only two of the 194 reached the statute book.

Mr. Skinner: One was yours.

Sir Peter Emery: No, that was a private Bill, not a private Member's Bill, and there is, as the hon. Gentleman knows, a lot of difference.

The slot for the ten-minute Bill has altered from being a means of satisfying the desire of a Member to get legislation through. It has become a slot in which Back-Bench or other Members can make a ten-minute speech in prime time on a political issue.

Mr. Winnick: Why not?

Sir Peter Emery: The hon. Gentleman asks, "Why not?". That might be a fair question, but I think it right that hon. Members understand this when we are looking at the motion on leave to bring in a Bill.

What happened in the last Session was that hon. Members queued upstairs in the Committee Corridor sometimes for as long as four or five days. *[Interruption.]* I am told a fortnight. I can confirm four or five days, but it may have been longer. That, I believe, is immensely undignified.

Few hon. Members who play a leading role in the House can afford to spend up to a fortnight queuing. Balloting would enable the hon. Member for Bolsover to be in his place in the Chamber for questions. Hon. Members who play a major role in the House do not have the opportunity of a ten-minute Bill if the queueing system is abused. I am told that there is a working agreement to deal with this; I hope only that that is not a carve-up. If we return to the undignified and insanitary situation of hon. Members queueing for days on end, we shall return to what has been widely accepted in the House as an unfair system.

Mr. Winnick: If queueing is so marvellous, as hon. Members seem to believe, why should not we queue for early-day motions or to be the first hon. Members on the list to ask the Prime Minister a question? Surely the logic of that would be along the lines suggested by the critics of balloting. If we ballot for other matters, why not for ten-minute Bills?

Sir Peter Emery: The hon. Gentleman—who is a member of my Committee, and I thank him for the work that he does for it—demonstrates impeccable logic—on this occasion, anyway.

Balloting protects the rights of the majority of hon. Members, not the minority who are willing to queue for a fortnight, and it will assist hon. Members who wish to play a major role in the House. That needs to be said and to be understood.

I urge hon. Members to ensure that the first three motions are passed because they achieve a proper balance that will ensure that when an hon. Member wins the ballot for a private Member's Bill or private Member's motion the time allocated will not be interfered with by hon. Members using procedural methods to further other matters. I hope that the motion relating to introducing Bills on Budget day will be accepted and that the power to deal with ten-minute Bills will be held in reserve in case the procedure gets out of hand again.

6.22 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): There were times when I thought that the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) was legislating for a House without people, in which the reality of hon. Members wanting to pursue various causes was absent from our proceedings. I say that with some concern because I have worked with the hon. Gentleman for many years on the Procedure Committee, and I value the fairmindedness that he brings to its proceedings.

I am grateful to the Leader of the House for recognising the difficulty in which the House would have been placed if there had been a vote on all the motions without a proper opportunity to debate them. He responded helpfully to hon. Members' requests. We shall reach a decision on only one of the motions and deal with the others at a later date. However, the other motions have been introduced into the debate, so they must be considered.

The background to the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) was more extensive than the hon. Member for Honiton suggested. He said that an issue arose in the debate on abortion—it also arose in a later debate on a Bill about embryos—but he must realise that the principle that he enunciated, that the balance of private Members' time must always be preserved, goes back a little further. The House would never have passed legislation on abortion at any time in the past 50 years unless the balance had been deliberately changed. The Abortion Act 1967 was passed in Government time. The Government decided that they would change the arrangements and make time available.

The hon. Gentleman must also take into account how the issue came to light. He must recognise that the purpose of the motion brought before the House at that time was to take more private Members' time. Those who did not like it thought that it was a smash-and-grab raid on private Members' time. However, it added hugely to private Members' time by allowing a Bill to be considered in a way that the Government would insist that a Bill of their own was considered if they could not get it through in the time available. They do that every week of the year, and sometimes every day of the week. It is no good hon. Members shedding crocodile tears and saying that we are here to protect private Members' time by ensuring that hon. Members do not grab more time than the Government are prepared to offer. The House was being invited to accept or reject a motion that would have given hon. Members more time than they are normally given by the Government.

Sir Peter Emery *rose*——

Mr. Beith: The hon. Gentleman did not give way to me. I would normally give way to him willingly, but he should learn that lesson.

Sir Peter Emery: May I apologise to the hon. Gentleman for not giving way? I was unaware that he was trying to catch my eye. Therefore, I will not interfere in his speech.

Mr. Beith: It is kind of the hon. Gentleman to say that.

Hard cases make bad law. This matter has arisen from two occasions when hon. Members were lucky enough in the ballot to raise a subject of their choice. On the majority of occasions, the motion or resolution is debated and talked out. However, that offers the hon. Member an opportunity to ventilate an issue. It is rare that these circumstances arise, and it is likely that that will remain so.

[Mr. Beith]

The House must think carefully before changing its procedures in response to one or two incidents, because the House runs a risk when it does that. Not long ago, the Government lost business because the Consolidated Fund Bill ran through the night. There was a great panic and Front-Bench spokesmen said, "We must never let that happen again". They therefore changed the procedure for the Consolidated Fund Bill by introducing a regimented series of timed debates that offer no flexibility. That change was not justified on its merits but was made in response to a particular incident. It is always advisable to step back and think whether a change is desirable in the long term rather than as an appropriate response to an incident.

When I looked at the motion in more detail, I became even more anxious about its long-term desirability. It is a draconian motion—Henry VIII clauses have nothing on this—because it does not merely preclude hon. Members from extending the time available for a private Members' Bill or from jumping the queue; it prevents them from changing any Standing Orders in private Members' time. That is one of the reasons why I tabled two amendments. There is no obvious reason for the motion.

Under the motion, Parliament is trying to bind its successors, which we are not supposed to do. The motion says not only that something will be the case but that no hon. Member can introduce a motion to change it. It is an attempt by Parliament to bind its successors by ensuring that an hon. Member cannot change the effect even of this Standing Order. The reason for including paragraph (e) was to stop hon. Members doing what the Government do so often—dispense with the effects of a Standing Order.

Paragraph (d) embraces the entire book of Standing Orders within the terms of the motion. If hon. Members decided that they were fed up with the arrangement by which they book a seat at Prayers in order to keep a seat for the day, and an hon. Member tabled a motion to change that, it would be ineffective because the Table Office would say, "Sorry. We cannot accept this motion."

If an hon. Member thought that we should change the Standing Orders so that we did not have to wear a top hat or otherwise to be seated and covered when raising a point of order during a Division, that hon. Member could not go to the Table Office and table a motion to make that change on a private Members' day. An hon. Member would be unlikely to want to do that, because there would undoubtedly be more pressing public issues that he would want to raise. So it is pointless even to prevent him from doing it.

I cannot understand why the Procedure Committee or the Leader of the House should table a motion to take away from private Members the right to put before the House changes in the Standing Orders, other than in a motion, which the Government can conveniently ignore, expressing an opinion. There is no point the Leader of the House saying that, if the House passes opinion motions, the effect of them would be carried out. He knows that such an assurance is worth no more than his tenure in office as Leader of the House.

All sorts of undertakings have been given from the Government Front Bench by the right hon. and learned Gentleman's predecessors to do all manner of things. An undertaking was once given by a predecessor of the right hon. and learned Gentleman that there would be time for prayers against negative statutory instruments on the Floor of the House whenever such time was sought. That undertaking has been dishonoured almost every month in the life of Parliament while I have been here. So passing opinion motions is no good. The Government are taking away from private Members their right to invite the House to change our Standing Orders.

I do not know any local authority in Britain that would have a ruling that precluded councillors from bringing before councils motions to change their standing orders. Sometimes there are built-in procedures to make such a step more difficult, such as a larger number of members having to support a motion, or the necessity for a larger majority or the need for a set number of members to be present and voting in a division.

It would have been worth the House considering procedures of that type. But to say that private Members can never in any circumstances bring before the House an effective motion to change or modify the effect of our Standing Orders is an extraordinary, perverse and draconian step to take.

Sir Peter Emery: It is not as draconian as the hon. Gentleman suggests. The motion says, in effect, that unless the House has previously agreed that the motion shall come forward, it shall not come forward a second time. So there must be two bites at the cherry; it cannot be done on one motion—there must be two. In other words, it is not that one can never do it but that one needs two, not one, motions to do it.

Mr. Beith: What is the effect of that? It means that one must come up in the ballot twice. The hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) said that in his time in the House he had not come up in the ballot once.

Mr. Skinner: Me neither.

Mr. Beith: The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has been in the House longer than I have and he has never come up in the ballot for private Members' motions, though I am sure that his name has been put in every time. Now, we must come up not once but twice in the same Session of Parliament if we are to have some effect, or have a chum or croney say, "Never mind that I want to raise the question of the terrible plight of people in Cambodia or the question of the poverty of people in parts of the Berwick-upon-Tweed constituency. I will give my day to you so that you may have a second attempt at a debate."

The Chairman of the Procedure Committee and the Leader of the House are asking us to accept the inconceivable if they imagine that that is a reasonable process. It is not so bad if the Government must apply twice for something, because they have all the time in the world. They can easily appear twice before the House with a motion to achieve a change.

So the motion is shifting the balance of power from private Members to the Government. When I heard the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) supporting the motion, I realised that I was on the right side. When the Government and a spokesman of the Official Opposition get together, private Members are in trouble.

Dr. Cunningham: If the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) got as worked up about some of

the important political issues of the day as he does about the subject under discussion, he might be on the right side for once.

I went through the process of consulting my colleagues in the parliamentary Labour party and in the shadow Cabinet before expressing my view on the Floor of the House. I made it clear that I was expressing a personal view. I hope that my hon. Friends will support me, but they all have a free vote.

Mr. Beith: I am delighted to hear that. The hon. Gentleman could not have been here for Prime Minister's Question Time, when I got quite worked up about the issue which has been occupying the House for most of the day. The hon. Gentleman made an unnecessary and gratuitous remark.

The Chairman of the Procedure Committee said that it was all part of a package. He said, in effect, "This is a restriction on private Members, but it is part of a package." One must be careful about suspicious packages, and we have been given plenty of advice to that effect. This package is particularly suspicious because it contains matters about which hon. Members were not originally aware and which go far beyond its original purpose.

It is also a package with an item missing. When the Procedure Committee decided on the package, it had before it an amendment for which five of the Committee had voted, including those who had voted for the other portions of the package. That amendment would have provided that as part of the deal private Members would have a limited version of the opportunity that Governments have to extend the time available for Bills that they put before the House. It was suggested that that should happen, not on a Friday—when there is the fear that it may be difficult for hon. Members, such as me, from distant constituencies, to be present—but on a Monday, so that private Members would have an opportunity to suspend the 10 o'clock rule in the way that the Government suspend it every day, and as they are doing today.

The Government must not complain, for on the Order Paper today is a motion to suspend the 10 o'clock rule so that they may have time to have the Civil Aviation Authority (Borrowing Powers) Bill considered. Five of the 11 members of the Procedure Committee wished to say that private Members should have that opportunity in a limited form on a Monday, but that is not in the package because it was defeated by six votes to five. As a result, it has become a notably unbalanced package.

We shall not vote on this issue tonight. We shall vote on the issue about ten-minute Bills on Budget day, which seems to be a product of televising the proceedings in the House of Commons. I was in favour of televising our proceedings, although that may have given rise to some odd results, and being embarrassed about having a ten-minute Bill moved on Budget day seems to be one of them.

I cannot work up any enthusiasm for the idea that we must deny hon. Members the chance of bringing forward a Bill on that day. I accept that it is not the loss of a slot, that it is fair to private Members overall, and that such opportunity will be available on the following Monday. But I cannot bring myself to rescue the Government from the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) who added to the proceedings usefully when he brought forward budget proposals of his own.

On the motion that the ten-minute Bill procedure should change and that we should move to a ballot, instead of hon. Members having to queue, a finely balanced argument exists. There is something to be said for endeavour and for procedures that reflect an hon. Member's determination to raise an issue. People outside the House do not realise how much we have become dependent on the lottery and the ballot.

Most of our constituents imagine that we raise issues in the House because of our preparedness to get stuck in and because we are determined to speak out and say our piece. Up to a point that is the case, but it is not the case for many things, including private Members' Bills, motions, questions to the Prime Minister and questions to individual Ministers. These are all a lottery, a ballot, but the ten-minute Bill procedure is down to endeavour. The endeavour may, however, become rather disproportionate when it involves hon. Members having to occupy sleeping bags for three or four days. Nevertheless, I consider it to be a finely balanced issue.

When compared with the motions that will come before the House later, the issue on which we will vote tonight does not seem to raise great excitement. A whole shift in the balance of power between the Government and private Members over the opportunity to invite the House to consider our procedures is a fundamental change which is undesirable and should not arise simply because one incident caused some argument and controversy at the time.

6.37 pm

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone): I, too, am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for agreeing not to move all the motions that have been tabled. The time allowed is, in any case, totally insufficient when we are sweeping away private Members' rights, some of which date back to 1927. So I am grateful to him for agreeing to postpone four of the debates. The result is that I am able to support the one motion, but I hope that when the various issues return to the House, adequate time for debate will be provided.

I make that point particularly to you, Mr. Speaker, as the guardian of Back-Benchers' rights. We should not have such sweeping motions, five all bunched together, in such a confined space of time. My right hon. and learned Friend will have taken account of the fact that during business questions and in this debate substantial feeling has been expressed by hon. Members in all parts of the House about the way in which the motions could be ill-advised. We must debate them thoroughly and reach proper conclusions.

It is unfortunate that the motion is in the name of the Leader of the House rather than in the name of the Chairman of the Procedure Committee. Although we are to have a free vote—as there must be as we are concerned with procedure and Back-Benchers' rights—because it stands in the name of my right hon. and learned Friend, there is bound to be moral pressure on many hon. Members to support the motion. Great as is my respect for the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), the moral pressure on hon. Members would be somewhat less if the motions stood in his name.

I am happy to agree with the Chairman of the Procedure Committee on motions Nos. 2, 3 and 4, but I

[Miss Ann Widdecombe]

dissent strongly on motions Nos. 1 and 5. My right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House inadvertently misled us when he said that it was a choice between a ballot, which is a parliamentary euphemism for a lottery, and queueing. That is not the question. The problems that arose last year with queueing did not arise as a result of private Members' initiatives. No private Member queues for four or five days. Private Members were queueing quite happily for a reasonable time to get a Bill. I speak from personal experience. As my hon. Friend the Chairman of the Procedure Committee kindly pointed out, I have not been here long, but even in that time I have managed to get two ten-minute Bills by queueing only for a couple of hours.

The procedure got out of hand—and the House should understand this—when the Government and Opposition Front Benches became involved and decided to turn the matter into an inter-party competition. The procedure then became similar to the procedure for Prime Minister's questions when all hon. Members are reminded to go in for it. It became similar to the way we sign the book of motions, when hon. Members stand in the Lobbies exhorting other hon. Members to sign them. Suddenly, the whole procedure was no longer a Back-Bench initiative, but an inter-party competition. If that element is taken out of the procedure and it is returned to the Back Benchers, we shall not be queueing for four or five days any more than we have in the past. Had this matter been left to the good sense of the Back-Bench Members none of this would have arisen in the first place. My right hon. and learned Friend has not given the House the whole picture —inadvertently, I am sure. However, I have described the background against which the issue should be examined.

At present, hon. Members queue for ten-minute Bills and obtain them by initiative. It is the only remaining slot not governed by a draw from a hat or by having to rely on being lucky in a raffle. If an hon. Member wants to raise a pressing piece of constituency business, a conscience issue or another matter, all he has to do is to have a bit of endurance and initiative. It is deeply offensive that we should be told that one of the reasons for changing the system is that the Clerks object to us sitting in their room. For whom does this House exist? Is it for the benefit of the Clerks or of hon. Members? It is for the benefit of hon. Members, so that argument should carry no weight with us. If we queue in the Clerks' room for a fortnight—which I have never seen done—that is our right and it should not matter what they say.

I shall inevitably be seen as having a specific interest in motion No. 1 inasmuch as I have used the procedure. That is true, but although that procedure has been used twice on a pro-life issue, the fact remains that it is open to be used on any issue. It cannot be abused in quite the way that other motions are abused because it depends on an extremely rare combination of circumstances. First, an hon. Member must have a Bill sufficiently high in the ballot to avoid accusations of blatant queue-jumping. If his Bill is Nos. 18, 19 or 20, this procedure will not commend itself greatly to the House. Secondly, either he or a sympathiser must draw first place in the ballot for private Members' motions on a Friday. Thirdly, the sympathiser must do that in time to influence the passage of the Bill. It is no good coming first in the ballot two months after the Bill has failed and all other Bills are on Report. The combination of circumstances is so rare that it is not surprising that it has happened only twice in the last decade. Do we need to take a sledgehammer to crack something that occurs only twice in a decade? Statistically it is not worth bothering about.

There is a distinction between that procedure and the procedure for petitions and by-election writs. If an hon. Member decides to move a by-election writ, as the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) did, there is nothing that the House can do to prevent him under the present rules. He can stand up, move his writ and talk about the Yorkshire weather for three hours five minutes, and there is nothing that the House can do to prevent it. If 500 other hon. Members want to debate the alternative business, which is first on the Order Paper, there is still nothing that they can do. If 50 hon. Members decide to move petitions, there is nothing that the House can do to stop them. But if an hon. Member comes to the House and asks for extra time, the House can say "No". The difference is between the House having the final say and private Members being able to use their own initiative to be obstructive.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: There is nothing to prevent a Back-Bench Member from moving the closure on a speech for moving a petition. That is perfectly in order.

Miss Widdecombe: That is wrong, as I found to my own cost and from my own experience. Until it has been proposed and until the proposer has sat down, an hon. Member cannot move the closure. The House has no sanction over that, but it has a sanction over a private Member who wants to obtain extra time. A private Member may want to do that for two reasons. First, he or she may consider that his or her Bill is so vital that the House must grant it extra time. If the House decides against that, the House can say "No" and no harm is done, except that that hon. Member has wasted a whole morning in putting forward a motion with which the House has no sympathy. Secondly, an hon. Member may ask the House for redress. Perhaps the hon. Member has been subject to considerable filibustering, to disruptive tactics or to an ingenious use of parliamentary devices. That hon. Member may come to the House to say, "I know that we have a majority for this Bill. That has already been demonstrated on Second Reading. I have been prevented from proceeding and I ask the House for justice." The House can still say "No". That is the point of motion No. 1. The House already has sanctions, and there is no need to extend them.

The issue of a low vote on Fridays has been raised. My right hon. and learned Friend knows what happens here on Fridays. If there is a very unpopular motion or Bill, a low vote will not enable it to proceed. Some hon. Member who is as well endowed with eloquence as the hon. Member for Bolsover will talk all morning, thereby forcing a closure motion. But if fewer than 100 hon. Members vote, that closure cannot be carried. An unpopular Bill or motion cannot be carried on a low vote on a Friday. The case advanced today has been made on a set of false assumptions that bear no relation to what happens here, to what has gone wrong with queueing for ten-minute Bills, to what goes on when the House can say "No" to a request for extra time or to what happens on Friday when a low vote, as my hon. Friend the Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay) knows well, can be fatal to a Bill.

This is a serious assault on Back-Bench time. In 1927, one of your predecessors, Mr. Speaker, ruled that it was not in the specific competence of the Government to move motions relating to time and additional time, or to move any motion relating to the business of the House. He said that it was down to any hon. Member,

"providing he can find the time to do so."

At present, the only way that he can find time to do so is through the most uncertain process of a ballot, which is a euphemism for a lottery. Are we going to take even that small, pathetic, last little hope away from Back-Bench Members? Are not the motions really about the balance of power between the Executive and Back-Bench Members? Motions Nos. 1 and 5 do not protect Private Members' time, but reduce our already very small rights still further.

6.49 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I agree with the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) about the balance of power between the two Front Benches and the Back Benches. During the 20 years that I have been here, there have been several instances when, because of Back-Bench activity, the two Front Benches have got together and managed to find a system to enable them to stop the limited power of the Back Benches.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) talked about the Consolidated Fund Bill. That was a classic. We used to be able to keep the Government up. We once managed to prevent the Secretary of State for the Environment from carrying out the important policy measure of selling off old peoples' bungalows. The Government measure had to be brought back, but it was not until much later. What happened? The Front Benches got together and decided to curtail Back-Bench activity. Now the Consolidated Fund Bill finishes at 9 o'clock, by order, as a result of the changes that took place.

Such changes cannot be good for any Back Bencher. That power was used by the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) when the Labour party was in government. He and his mates used it successfully one morning. We understand that such Back-Bench activity can take place whichever party is in power.

I oppose all five motions. I will not pick and choose. Unlike the hon. Lady, I think that we should oppose all five, because they are part of a package, as the Chairman of the Select Committee on Procedure, the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), said.

When the Adjournment motion is debated in the summer and at Christmas, hon. Members can raise matters concerning their constituencies or whatever. The practice used to be that if an hon. Member went on beyond three hours, the Government had to have a majority of 100 to closure the debate. If the Government did not have a majority of 100, we carried on. What was wrong with that?

But what happened? The Government said, "It is terribly bad having to keep 100 people here a day before the hols. Would it not be a good idea to get together and finish the debate after three hours, by an order of the House?" My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) joined me and, I think, my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) on one occasion in voting against the Government. It would be interesting to look at *Hansard*——

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): I did not.

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend says that he did not.

Mr. Dixon: I am not joining my hon. Friend tonight.

Mr. Skinner: That suggests that my hon. Friend did join us on the other occasion. We voted against the Government because we felt that it was necessary to stop the two Front Benches joining together and taking away Back-Bench opportunities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) has a point. He says that these are only minor things, and that we need much bigger changes. If the Government Front Bench, together with the Opposition Front Bench, said that they intended to reform the House of Commons lock, stock and barrel, by having full-time Members and stopping moonlighting and boozing, by clocking on and clocking off and starting at a proper time, that would be all right.

I would not mind coming to work before the streets are aired. Some of us used to work like that before we came here, so it would not be hard for us to get here at 9 o'clock. We used to be at work at 6 o'clock in the morning. Such reforms would give more power to Back Benchers. Sadly, we are living not in that world but in a world that has been fashioned by the nobs and snobs of yesteryear. This is a quaint little place, based on the Eton debating society. We could choose not to come in; we could say that it is not for us, or we can learn the rules and destabilise. That is what I have been doing for about 20 years. I am not keen on throwing all that experience away.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): I hope that my hon. Friend is not saying that he has a vested interest in preserving the present system.

Mr. Skinner: No. I have already made the point that I want to see changes, but only a few of us are keen on developing a system of full-time Members of Parliament and proper hours. I get the impression that things will not change before I leave the House, so I have to use the system. That is why I oppose these intrusions on Back-Bench activity. I am pleased that the Leader of the House has caught on to the idea that it would be good if he managed not to upset everybody. That is why he is moving only one motion tonight, the one relating to Budget day.

If the Chairman of the Select Committee on Procedure wanted to bring in a package, why did he not propose the curtailment of some activities that are not liked by the elite, but at the same time give Back Benchers other rights? We could have had 10 motions instead of five—five to curtail activities and five to give Back Benchers more opportunities. For instance, the Government might have proposed that Front-Bench speeches should not last more than 20 minutes. Part of the total package might have been extra Adjournments for Back-Bench Members.

Sir Peter Emery: We have suggested that.

Mr. Skinner: It is not in the package; I cannot see it.

Sir Peter Emery: It is in our report.

Mr. Skinner: Oh, it is in a report. It is buried in a report; it is as deep as that. The hon. Gentleman used his diving skill to bury it. I am talking about the package that is before the House.

Hon. Members know that the reason for the five new measures is mainly the television cameras. They are all about regulations for the cameras. Everywhere the television cameras have gone, they have managed to

[Mr. Skinner]

fashion the activities that they screen. We now have football matches starting at five past 3 on a Sunday. Why? Because it suits television. On occasions, horse racing is stopped because it is not synchronised with a rugby league match.

The reason the Government want to tidy up the procedure is to make sure that the television authorities know what is happening on a Friday and to ensure that there will not be extra activity. The Government do not want ten-minute Bills before the Budget, because it is not nice for the Chancellor. They do not want such activity. That is wrong. Why should we give in to the television moguls?

Not all the motions relate to Fridays, but the Friday bit is important for the Leader of the House. He has latched on quickly. He has been gallivanting round the world, but this is not the United Nations. As Leader of the House, the right hon. and learned Gentleman has to come here regularly at half past 3 and has to stay late at night. It suddenly dawned on him that he has to be here on a Friday as well. One thing he can do is make sure that he does not need 100 hon. Members here on a Friday too often. What does he do? He says that he will curtail the activities of hon. Members. So part of the package is to make the task of the Government easier.

On the question of queueing for ten-minute Bills, I suggest that the Leader of the House should have a site meeting before he changes the procedure. The right hon. and learned Gentleman can go with my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) when he is queueing for a Bill to give pensioners a better lot. He can get his sleeping bag, a little television set and his sandwiches.

Mr. Corbyn: No drink.

Mr Skinner: No, no drink. If the Leader of the House does that, he will get a better picture of what takes place.

The hon. Member for Maidstone was upset about moving writs and so on. She will be surprised to learn that I am not against the idea of hon. Members using the opportunity to combine a motion and a Bill. There may be occasions when the procedure is not right, but not on the subject on which the hon. Lady used it, nor on the one on which Enoch Powell used it. I do not think the House wanted the hon. Lady's Bill; otherwise, hon. Members would not have let me get away with what I did. By and large, most hon. Members said, "It is not a bad idea, because we would only be here on Saturday and Sunday; Skinner is saving us the weekend."

If an hon. Member had an important case and got a high place, not No. 7 but No. 2, the Bill would go through. One Bill goes through and the other does not. Two more Bills have gone through quickly on the first occasion. That means that three Bills have gone into Committee, but one that has drawn the No. 2 place will have some difficulty because there are already three Bills in Committee.

Hon. Members may say, "That is unfair: there are three Bills in Committee, and the one that has drawn the No. 2 place has not a cat in hell's chance." Two more Bills may get through, and then it is all over. I think that, on an occasion when a Bill suits the majority of hon. Members, the House might decide that it would not be a bad idea if —by a fluke—the motion to get it through was passed. I might not even move a writ to stop it; I might encourage it. There are such occasions, albeit caused by flukes or accidents.

Miss Widdecombe: That happened to Powell's Bill.

Mr. Skinner: It did not, because Powell used a surrogate. Powell's Bill was all about embryo research——

It being Seven o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [26 January].*

The House divided: Ayes 209, Noes 38.

Division No. 62] **[7 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Baldry, Tony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Buckley, George J.
Butterfill, John
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cunningham, Dr John
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dixon, Don
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Derek
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Golding, Mrs Llin
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hind, Kenneth
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Mans, Keith
Maples, John

Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Michael, Alun
Miller, Sir Hal
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mowlam, Marjorie
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
O'Brien, William
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pike, Peter L.
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Tredinnick, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Wareing, Robert N.
Warren, Kenneth
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John M. Taylor and
Mr. Nicholas Baker.

NOES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Beith, A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Corbett, Robin
Cryer, Bob
Dalyell, Tam
Fearn, Ronald
Fisher, Mark
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Hinchliffe, David
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Kennedy, Charles
Livingstone, Ken
Maclennan, Robert
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Meale, Alan
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Nellist, Dave
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Salmond, Alex
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Wallace, James
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Dennis Skinner and
Mr. Jeremy Corbyn.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That no notice may be given under Standing Order No. 19 (Motions for leave to bring in bills and nomination of select committees at commencement of public business) for a day on which Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer has declared his intention of opening his Budget; but

(i) notices proposed to be given for such day, and

(ii) notices so given for a day in respect of which such intention is subsequently declared,

shall be treated as having been given for the first Monday on which the House shall sit after the Budget is opened, and may be proceeded with on that day as though it were a Tuesday or a Wednesday.

That this Order be a Standing Order of the House.

Mr. Speaker: Motion No. 5? Not moved.

Redbridge London Borough Council Bill

Order for consideration, as amended, read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill, as amended, be now considered.

7.13 pm

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): The motion on the Order Paper is

"That the Bill be considered upon this day six months."

If my hon. Friends and I are to be honest we will admit that our reason for tabling that motion is that we do not want the Bill to be considered further. It is our contention that the House should not be considering it at all. Hon. Members may recall that it was given its Second Reading on 6 June 1989 and that on that occasion all the comments were undoubtedly to the effect that it should not be allowed to make any further progress. Unfortunately, as always, the vote that followed a lengthy and well-informed debate was carried largely by those who had neither listened to the debate nor knew anything whatsoever about the subject.

It is a matter for great regret that we are back in the House considering the Bill further. As a piece of legislation it is fundamentally flawed. It tramples on ancient and well-established rights. It attempts to take from Havering borough council rights which were established by royal writ and which it has enjoyed, uninterrupted, for over 700 years. I understand that the charter markets in the constituencies of 284 hon. Members may be similarly affected if the Bill is successful. It will undoubtedly set a precedent for the challenging of ancient market rights through the private Bill procedure. I submit that that should not be allowed or encouraged.

I want to draw attention to a statement, copies of which I understand the promoters of the Bill sent to all hon. Members. I want to go through the statement paragraph by paragraph and explain why I consider that it is misleading in respect of a number of issues. Of course, I accept that it was not the promoters' intention to mislead hon. Members.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): The hon. Gentleman has referred to the concern of many authorities in whose areas there are charter markets. Does the document to which he is referring really deal with that matter? I am sure that everyone recognises that that is the particular concern about the procedure that has been used throughout. It is my impression that the document avoids that issue. Certainly it does not deal with it in great detail.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. As I go through the document it will be clear that that whole issue is not mentioned. Anyone reading the document would get the impression that this was a simple matter between Redbridge and Havering councils alone, with no deeper meaning, and capable of no wider interpretation.

In paragraph 1 the promoters say:

"The Bill is promoted by the Council of the London Borough of Redbridge . . . It would authorise the establishment of a market on a site near the town centre of Ilford."

Paragraph 2 says:

"The council in 1980 adopted, following a long public local inquiry, a Local Plan for the Ilford Town Centre entitled the 'Ilford Town Centre Action Area plan'. . . . In accordance with the proposals contained in that Plan the Council has brought about the revitalisation of the Ilford Town Centre by the construction of a relief road diverting the A118 around the Town Centre, providing service roads and the pedestrianisation of part of the High Road."

No doubt hon. Members will wish to join me in congratulating the Ilford council on doing so and will wish it every success in its endeavours to create a pleasant environment and a good shopping centre. It is, however, my experience of shopping centres around the country that they are not made very much more environmentally attractive if market stalls are placed right in the centre of them. But, so far as any planning permission application is concerned, that may be a matter for Ilford borough council to decide.

In paragraph 3 the promoters continue:

"A pleasant environment for residents, workers and shoppers has been created in the Ilford Town Centre. This has led to considerable investment in the Town Centre and the Prudential Corporation and the Norwich Union Insurance Group are currently creating a £100 million retail development, known as the 'Exchange at Ilford', which will provide 51,000 square metres of new shopping floorspace together with a 1,200-space car park."

Again I say to the hon. Members for that area that that is marvellous, but, with this wonderful shopping centre, I cannot believe that the addition of about 80 market stalls will make or break the Ilford plan.

Then we come to more contentious matters. In paragraph 4 Ilford borough council says:

"The Plan proposed the development of one site in the Ilford Town Centre for 'substantial shopping development, combined with an expanded and more attractive covered retail market which could be a vital feature of the improved shopping centre'. Since the adoption of the Plan some 250 persons have indicated a desire to trade as stallholders in the Ilford Town Centre. The Council are of the opinion that a market established on the proposed site which it owns at the Ilford Town Centre would provide an additional and attractive facility for shoppers which will complement the 'Exchange at Ilford' development. The Council has the support in this matter of the Redbridge Chamber of Trade and Commerce, the Ilford Trader Association and both the Prudential Corporation and the Norwich Union Insurance Group."

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): Does my hon. Friend have any information about the support that the proposal has within the council itself? Is the council united on it?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am afraid that I cannot help my hon. Friend on that matter. However, an intervention from one of the hon. Members for Ilford might assist us. If either of them gets an opportunity to speak in this debate perhaps he will be able to deal with the point.

The question that I should particularly like to ask my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne), because I asked it on Second Reading and have not yet had a reply, is whether he or his council know how many of the 250 persons who have stated their desire to trade at Ilford already trade at Havering. That seems an extremely pertinent point. If all that the Bill succeeds in doing is to remove some 250 stallholders—or thereabouts—from Havering five and a half miles across to Redbridge, I cannot believe that it will be vastly in the interests of the population of either of our two boroughs, or of anybody else who lives anywhere near the vicinity.

With the ease of travel that we have today, there can be no doubt that many Redbridge residents shop in Romford and enjoy the facilities of the Romford market, which has been established for so long. Hon. Members who were present on Second Reading will recall that I said that ease of travel must go against the promoters of the Bill, whereas

they were praying it in aid as a reason for allowing a proliferation of markets. In fact, it does nothing of the kind. The fact that people can now travel with substantial ease for considerable distances to do their shopping must be an argument against allowing too many market centres to spring up.

The whole pattern of trading in this country is moving towards people shopping in one place for everything that they wish to buy—at one time and in one place. Indeed, they often drive substantial distances to do so. My constituency has been suffering for some time because of some of the out-of-town supermarkets that are now being developed all around the country. People get into their cars and often drive happily for 10 or 15 miles to get to one of those places to do their shopping, and then return home. Our shopping centres and the centres of our towns are already under substantial threat. In my opinion, a proliferation of market centres, as proposed by the Bill, would undermine the security of the shopping centres in middle-of-town developments and would not be at all helpful. If Ilford manages to get the House's permission to proceed with the Bill, it may well live to regret it.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South catches your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, I should be grateful if he would deal with my point about where the 250 traders who have been applying to him and to his council for a place in the new proposed development come from. I very much hope that the sponsors have taken the trouble to do that research because they will be doing Havering borough council and the House less than justice if, seven months after that point was first raised, they still cannot give us an answer.

I continue with the promoters' letter. Paragraph 5 states:

"Planning permission will be sought for the establishment of the market if the Bill is enacted."

I ask the House to pay particular attention to paragraph 6 because it is wholly misleading and gives an impression that is quite different from that reflected by the facts, and probably quite different from that which the promoters intended to give. I shall read it before commenting. It states:

"The law of markets provides a protection for any existing market franchise against another, competing, market being established within 6¾ miles. The London Borough Council of Havering has, it is understood, two markets at Romford which are within that distance, and it would be in contravention of the protection to establish the proposed market at Ilford. The London Borough Council of Havering also has a third market at Romford operated by them in the exercise of their powers under Part III of the Food Act 1984. If the Council established a market pursuant to that power it would not be in contravention of the protection afforded by that Act although it would not be immune from challenge, under common law, from a franchise market. The Romford Markets contain approximately 600 pitches each and they are held on different days (Wednesday, Friday and Saturday)."

That is not an accurate reflection of the position in Havering at Romford market. There is one market site in Romford. It does, indeed, have 600 or so pitches, but to give or attempt to give the impression that there are three separate market sites is wholly misleading and has certainly misled some of my hon. Friends to whom I have been speaking. One of my hon. Friends, to whom I was speaking a couple of moments ago, and who I had hoped would support my motion, said that he had read the document and, having seen paragraph 6, felt that Ilford borough council had a good point. He suggested that Havering was being extremely mean, having three existing markets, to wish to deny Ilford a smaller one five and half miles away. But that is not true. Romford has one marketplace. It holds three markets in that one marketplace on three different days. That is not at all the same thing as the impression that has been given in the document.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): May I ask for further clarification on that point? Do I take it that the three days on which the market is held in Ilford are referred to in the document submitted to support the Bill as three markets? Furthermore, do I take it that the market at Ilford, with its 600 stalls, is an open market?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: In answer to the hon. Gentleman's second point, yes, it is an open market. In answer to his first point, again yes, there is one position of 600 pitches, but the three markets referred to are the three different days on which a market is held on that site. My understanding is that quite a lot of those pitches are occupied by the same stallholders over the three days. To refer to that as three separate markets and to give the distinct impression that there are three markets in different places, each with 600 pitches, is wholly misleading. If my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South would like to intervene, I am sure that he would agree that that statement does not reflect the true position and I hope that it did not intend to convey the impression that it undoubtedly does.

Mr. Vivian Bendall (Ilford, North): Is it true to say that the same stallholders are involved on each of the three days? Does none of the stalls vary?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: My hon. Friend must have misheard me. I did not say that. I said that the market is held on one site of 600 pitches. There are three markets. The reason for the confusion is that the markets are set up under different rights. I believe that one was originally set up under the writ, one under an Act and one because of long practice. Therefore, it is technically correct to say that they constitute three different markets—I do not argue with that—but the impression given in the document that three separate markets are operating is wrong. There is one marketplace at which the same 600 pitches are used three times a week, to constitute three markets.

In specific answer to my hon. Friend's question, although the market is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mr. Neubert) as I understand it, some stallholders are there two days a week and others are there three days a week. Many are there only one day a week. Therefore, it is a balance and a mix. I am not saying that the same people are there every day; I am saying that we cannot multiply 600 by three and come to 1,800 traders using the market, because that would be equally misleading.

Mr. Bendall: Will my hon. Friend further clarify the number of people who hold licences in the market?

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am sorry; my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) was whispering in my ear and I could not quite catch my hon. Friend's question. Will he repeat it?

Mr. Bendall: Yes. I wondered how many people actually hold licences at Romford market.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am afraid that I cannot answer that question because I do not know. However, I can probably find out before the end of the evening if my hon. Friend wishes me to.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romford is present in the Chamber, but unfortunately is barred from taking part in the debate because he is a Minister. I know that the fact that he is barred is as much a matter of regret to him as it is to me and, I am sure, to the rest of the House, because what he would have said, had he been allowed to say it, would have proved invaluable to the debate. I am afraid that I shall have to do my poor best to fill in the gaps that he cannot fill himself.

Paragraph 7 of the document states:

"Havering Borough Council petitioned against the Bill, and the issues between the two Councils were dealt with by a Committee of your Honourable House. Evidence was brought by the two parties and the Committee decided on a compromise, whereby the Bill was allowed to proceed but certain amendments were made for the benefit of Havering Borough Council, including special provision for compensation."

That is true and I do not dispute that that is exactly what happened. However, I make two points on it. First, although Havering borough council was pleased to be able to get some concessions out of Ilford council, which have certainly assisted our position as I shall show a little later, it did not accept that the Bill should be proceeded with at all; nor did it ever give the impression that it was supportive of it. The fact is that Havering borough council will be damaged by the passing of the Bill, as will the 284 other constituencies that I have already mentioned. The principle that charter markets have a right to operate unchallenged will be grievously breached if the Bill proceeds through the House. That would not be a good thing.

The impression given by paragraph 7, as I read it, is that Havering borough council and Ilford have now made friends and are happy to proceed with the Bill as it is now constituted. That is not true. Havering borough council is happier with the terms than it was but it is not happy with the way in which the Bill is proceeding or that it should proceed at all.

My second point on paragraph 7 is extremely relevant to our proceedings tonight. The Chair will correct me if I am wrong, but I understand that the House is by no means bound by any agreement reached in Committee and that any decisions reached by the Committee are subject to the approval of the House and to Parliament as a whole. Therefore, we are not bound to accept any compromise that may have been reached in Committee. I do not argue with the decisions made by the Committee. They improve the Bill rather than damage it and improve the position of Havering borough council. But it is important to stress that if people differ from the view of the Committee, they are entitled to make their point and, if necessary, force the matter to a Division.

I have dealt with the promoters' outline of the case. I believe that it was misleading. I hope that my hon. Friends who have read it will also have taken the trouble to read the Second Reading debate where they will find a much truer account of what is behind the Bill and its implications. I know that they probably have not done so, and I regret that it is unlikely that we shall obtain the support that we should have been obtained if they fully understood the matter.

Having read the promoters' letter, some of my hon. Friends must wonder why Havering borough council persists in opposing the Bill. Before I deal with that, I should like to give the promoters credit for the concessions that they have made. Specifically, I draw the attention of the House to the concession on compensation. On Second Reading I and other hon. Members spoke about compensation. The original proposal was outrageously inadequate. I should not do justice to the subject if I did not refer to the original clause to enable us better to understand the changes that have been made in Committee.

Originally, compensation was dealt with in clause 4(2) and (3). It read:

"The measure of compensation shall be the capitalised value of the estimated loss of income to the claimant from persons trading at his market resulting from the continuance or establishment of a market under this Act.

Compensation under this Section shall carry interest from the expiry of six weeks from the date on which the claim was received by the Council.

Except as otherwise agreed by the Council, compensation under this Section shall not be payable except upon a claim made in writing to the Council within three months of the commencement of this Act."

It was most unfortunate that the Bill was allowed to reach Second Reading containing such a clause. I do not want to labour the point that I made on Second Reading but the compensation provision was absurd. People would have had to put in a claim for compensation before the market at Ilford had opened. The idea that a proper assessment of the resulting loss could have been made at that stage was absurd. It was wrong to ask the House to consider the Bill in that form.

I am glad to say that the position is now better. Compensation under clause 4 has been substantially improved. Clause 4(2)(a) says:

"The measure of compensation shall be—

(i) in the case of the Council of the London Borough of Havering or the owner from time to time of the right to hold Romford Market, in each year ten per cent. of the net profit accruing to any person holding a market under this Act ('the market operator') from that market measured by deducting from the market operator's turnover relating to the market (exclusive of Value Added Tax) any expenses defrayed by the market operator which are wholly and exclusively attributable to the market and not being—

(A) any payment (whether by way of rent or otherwise) made by the market operator to the Council for the right to hold the market; or

(B) in the nature of capital expenses written off to revenue; or

(C) any payment in respect of the compensation or interest payable under this section; or

(D) taxation; or

(ii) in any other case the capitalised value of the estimated loss of income to the claimant from persons trading at his market."

To summarise the difference, Havering council, which previously was not to be compensated, will now receive a 10 per cent. return from the revenue gained by traders who open their market stalls at Ilford. That is of substantial assistance to Havering borough council. I applaud the inclusion of that compensation in the Bill.

The compensation available to those who trade at Romford has also been improved. It is in much the same form as in the original Bill except that it will now be payable under clause 4(3)(b):

"Except as may otherwise be agreed by the Council, compensation under subsection (2)(a)(ii) above shall not be payable except upon a claim made in writing to the Council within 24 months from the market commencement date".

That is much more satisfactory. First, we have a two-year period in which to assess the damage and, secondly, and more important, it will not commence until after the market is opened. At least now we shall have a period during which properly to assess the loss to those trading at Romford.

I do not know—perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North (Mr. Bendall) can assist the House—how the assessment can be made while people are trading both at Romford and Ilford. Perhaps consideration should be given to that. There must be a computation to assess the changes made in those circumstances or, indeed, if someone moves his stall from Romford to Ilford. No doubt that will come up again later in the debate.

Havering borough council objects to the Bill for two reasons. I have already mentioned the first. The second is that the Bill goes against the way in which legislation should be amended. It is wrong that the position of charter markets, which exist not only in my constituency but at 284 other sites, should be eaten away piecemeal by private Bills.

On only one previous occasion has the position been changed. That was at Bexley and in that case it was done by agreement between two councils. There was no conflict or dispute. No one came to the House and attempted to take away the rights enjoyed by a borough without that borough's consent. I can see no objection to a private Bill if both parties agree to it, even when ancient rights are being subjugated by Acts of Parliament. But when there is a conflict, when the borough that is to be penalised does not consent, and when there is a substantial difference between the two parties, as in this case, it is wrong for the private Bill procedure to be used to make a fundamental change in the application of the law of the land.

A Royal Commission looked at the position of charter markets 98 years ago. It concluded that they should be altered. It said that it should be possible to create more markets within areas covered by the charter market rights. It said that the whole system should be considered and changed by Parliament. That was 98 years ago and nothing has been done.

If successive Governments believed that charter markets should be abolished and that a change should be made, it should have been done by Parliament. A Bill should have been brought before the House and debated. We could have gone to the root of the matter and decided whether it was right that ancient rights such as those enjoyed by Havering council should be abolished and whether we should operate a different system. That would be quite legitimate. But to accept the system and not to act on the proposals of the Royal Commission for nearly a century and then to come to the House again and again to erode the position of the charter markets that each borough has enjoyed is not the way in which private Bills should be used. They should not be used to further the interests of one borough or another. For that reason, I hope that the House will join us in wishing to defer consideration of the Bill for a further six months.

7.39 pm

Mr. Neil Thorne (Ilford, South): I listened with interest to my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor). I have read the Second Reading debate in *Hansard*, but my hon. Friend will not be surprised to hear that my interpretation of it is different from his. On that occasion, the Division truly reflected the arguments that had been advanced.

My hon. Friend has made a number of points and I shall not detain the House by re-reading the statement because he has done so for me. I shall attempt to address some of the points that he has made and, if there are further questions, I shall do my best, with the leave of the House, to answer those later.

My hon. Friend asked about the 250 applicants for the 80 spaces in the proposed Redbridge market. He cannot have much experience of market traders or he would appreciate that they are anxious to retain some sense of anonymity and they do not always want to disclose exactly what business interests they have elsewhere. When they apply for a stall they are, as a rule, unwilling to say what other stalls they have and where they are located. Therefore, keeping accurate statistics of how many stalls each trader has is not practical. If my hon. Friend consults his local authority, he will find that it does not have an accurate record of the 600 stallholders in its market.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I shall check to see whether my local authority has such information. However, the situation is slightly different in a market that has been established for a long time compared with one that is being established now. Presumably, Ilford council will license the market holders and apply some sort of criteria to determine whether somebody is a fit and proper person to have a stall. What criteria is the local authority to apply other than whether people have been trading elsewhere, whether they have a criminal past and other necessary information?

Mr. Thorne: The local authority will make inquiries about the desirability of each applicant, but it will not necessarily be able to discover the business interests in other markets of other members of an applicant's family. My hon. Friend will find that Romford market has many more than 600 stallholders as it meets three days a week and, by his own admission, some stallholders have more than one stall and some go only once a week. It will not be possible to discover exactly what other business interests those stallholders have.

Mr. Bendall: Is my hon. Friend aware that many stallholders go to many markets around London? They could be at Bexley on Monday, Bromley on Tuesday and Romford on Wednesday.

Mr. Thorne: Indeed. My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster does himself and my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mr. Neubert) an injustice in suggesting that Romford market is likely to empty out into Ilford. I have no such fear. Redbridge is asking for an 80-stall market and there is no way that that could absorb the 600-stall market that is enjoyed at Havering.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I do not want to give the impression that Redbridge will empty Romford of stalls. It will do nothing of the kind. The limit of 80 stalls has been heavily negotiated and it was not present on Second

[Sir Nicholas Bonsor]

Reading. But even though it will not empty Romford, it will damage it. If I am right that many stallholders who will attend Redbridge come from Romford and so will move, that will undoubtedly have an impact on Romford market, quite apart from taking a lot of the clientele.

Mr. Thorne: My hon. Friend is taking a pessimistic view. These markets are popular and there is no reason why Romford should suffer any great loss. I have patronised Romford market for many years. I have visited it since I was a schoolboy and my impression is one of a vibrant market. In days gone by one of its main purposes, if not the main purpose, was as a cattle market. That is the reason for the limit of six and two thirds miles. That was considered to be one third of the distance that cattle could be driven in a working day. That allowed them one third of the day to get the cattle to the market, one third of the day for them to be at the market on sale, and another third of the day for them to be driven back. That is rather out of date and in this day and age one should be working on an entirely different basis.

Mr. O'Brien: Has there been any contact with the National Market Traders Federation which has a code of practice for establishing markets and deciding who shall operate in them? The point about 250 applicants is relevant. Does Redbridge intend to obtain permission for the market and then hand it on to a third party who will operate it as a private market?

Mr. Thorne: As far as I am aware, Redbridge has not yet decided whether it wants to operate the market itself or to pass responsibility for it to a private operator. That decision will be taken if Redbridge attains an Act of Parliament to implement it. The National Market Traders Federation has been in touch with all Members of Parliament and I understand that it has also been in touch with the local authority. How far the discussions have gone, I do not know. However, it is not a regulatory body, rather a membership body, so it does not have any rights of control or nomination as to which traders are suitable. There is a significant difference. On that basis, the advice that it can give is somewhat limited.

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend accurately said that the limit of six and two thirds miles went back to Roman times but that we had come a long way since then and were due for a change. That may or may not be so. We may be due for a change but, if anything, there would be less loyalty to a particular market today because of the speed of communications. Therefore, it could be argued that the limit needs to be tightened, not loosened.

Mr. Thorne: If we went down that road we would argue that no new supermarkets or any other form of trade should be opened. That is not the line that I would take. There should be the maximum possible choice for shoppers to shop as and when they wish, where they wish.

The figure of six and two thirds is out of date. Another figure would be more appropriate in this day and age. As has been said, it would be quite appropriate for people to complete their shopping in one area. If there is a good shopping centre in Romford and shopping is not confined to the street market, the people who go there to shop will be loyal to that particular shopping area. They can do their market shopping and also their under-cover shopping in department stores and elsewhere. That is what other people would like to do in other areas. It is right and proper that they should be able to do so. If people wanted to go for keenly priced goods, clearly they would want to go to a market with a large number of stalls. One with 600 stalls would be much more attractive than one with 80. An 80-stall market should not and cannot be a threat.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: In their preamble, which I covered at some length, the promoters described Romford market as three markets. As I understand the Bill, in the same equation, my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) is asking for six markets. He is not asking for 80 stalls but six times 80 because, under the terms of the proposed Act, they are able to open six days a week.

Mr. Thorne: I do not think that my hon. Friend is right. The description of Romford market as three markets reflects the fact that there are three entirely different markets. One was set up by ancient charter, one by a lost prescription of grant and one by the Food Act 1984. That is how the three separate markets were created. They may be on the same site, but anything done in Redbridge would come under the Food Act and would, therefore, be one market.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: I am sorry to intervene again but I must pursue that. Is not my hon. Friend merely being semantic? He says that there will be three separate markets on three days. I accept that, technically, they are three separate markets because they were set up under three separate Acts. However, in reality, the stalls are open three days a week. If my hon. Friend succeeds, in his area 80 stalls will be open six days a week. There will not be 80 stalls but 80 times six and, therefore, the threat to Romford is much greater than the impression that my hon. Friend seeks to give.

Mr. Thorne: My hon. Friend has not really researched his local authority's decisions on this matter. Otherwise, he would appreciate that it could apply for markets to be opened on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday as well and could therefore have the other three days under the Food Act if it so wished.

If Romford market were open only under the Food Act, it would have been referred to as one market and would not have had the protection of the six and two thirds miles. Therefore, Redbridge borough council need not have applied to the House for this Act. There is no inconsistency in my argument. The likelihood of 80 stallholders turning up in Redbridge on Monday and Tuesday but not wanting to turn up in Havering is remote.

Mr. Bendall: Will my hon. Friend clarify this point? As I understand it, the six and two thirds miles relates to the charter that granted the cattle market. Is there still a cattle market at Romford?

Mr. Thorne: No, the cattle markets at Romford and Stratford were phased out many years ago. There have not been cattle markets there, to my knowledge, for perhaps 15 or 20 years, or even longer. That is another reason why the figure of six and two thirds is irrelevant.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: It is important to clarify this matter, as it is deeply significant. If the Bill goes through in its present form, Redbridge borough council will have the right to open 80 stalls, six days a week with 80 different

stallholders on each day. In other words, 480 stallholders will be able to operate in Redbridge from Monday to Saturday. Am I right or wrong?

Mr. Thorne: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, but, in practice, it is no more likely that 80 stallholders will apply to have a stall in Redbridge on a Monday than would wish to have a stall in Romford on Monday. Stallholders in Romford have not found it profitable to do so on a Monday. Therefore, there is no likelihood that Redbridge market will be open every day of the week. If it were likely to be profitable for a stallholder to do that, Havering authority, on behalf of Romford, would want to hold markets on other days of the week, in addition to the one day a week on which it is allowed to do so at present under the Food Act.

My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster made two other points which I shall deal with. First, he said that 284 charter markets in the country could be under threat. I entirely disagree. It has been necessary for the London borough of Redbridge to come to the House to ask for a special Act for a market within six and two thirds miles. Where those charter markets are a long way from the next town the problem does not arise and there is no threat. Where there are other major towns nearer than six and two thirds miles, quite rightly those other authorities wishing to open a market would have to come to the House for such authority. Clearly it would be wrong and misleading to give the impression that there was any threat to 284 charter markets.

My hon. Friend also talked about compensation. Naturally, this was revised during the passage of the legislation through the Opposed Private Bill Committee which, in its wisdom, decided how compensation could be calculated. The figure of 10 per cent. of the profit was generous bearing in mind, as my hon. Friend has accepted, that there is a conflict on only two days a week. Therefore, 10 per cent. of the total profit seems extremely generous.

The way in which the calculation was made was put into the original Bill, and it went before the Opposed Private Bill Committee which listened to counsel on both sides at great length over many days. My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster criticised colleagues and suggested that if only they had listened to all of the Second Reading debate they would clearly have voted in his favour. I do not agree. But by the same logic, had our colleagues listened for many days to arguments put by counsel, instructed by the two local authorities, surely the House would wish to consider the Bill further. I believe that we should do so tonight.

7.57 pm

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Unlike the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne), I believe that there is a danger to the future of established markets if the Bill is allowed to continue in its present form. The danger arises because we shall be dealing piecemeal with an issue that is targeted at markets instead of looking at the position in total. Other authorities, many of which will be influenced by people wanting to develop markets, could follow the same procedure. The very fact that the application by Redbridge has received the attention of the House sets a precedent for future applications.

If we are to be fair and honest in our judgment, we must consider the position of the market traders. They are small business people who often start from nothing and, in many instances, with hard work and some luck develop businesses that can sustain a living for themselves and their families. Market trading is usually a family affair. The only right of a market trader is if he stands his stall in a franchise market. He then has the right, under common law, to be there provided that there is a space available and that he pays the toll.

Under current law, no organisation can set up a market within six and two thirds miles of an existing franchise market. That protects market traders and small business people. It is true that the distance was set by an historic event, but nevertheless there is an inbuilt protection for market traders. The proposed market in Redbridge would be only a short distance from an existing market, so the long-established principles would be broken and there would be serious problems that would be detrimental to the traders at both the existing market and the proposed Redbridge market.

In an intervention I asked the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) whether there had been any consultation. Although I accept that the market traders' organisation is not a regulatory body, at least it looks after the interests of 25,000 or more market traders.

Mr Bendall: Why did not the Food Act 1984 provide the same protection of six and two thirds miles?

Mr. O'Brien: The Act dealt with different circumstances and different principles in the markets. That is why I began my speech by referring to mismatched and piecemeal legislation. We should be considering the whole of the operation of markets and not piecemeal legislation. The 1984 Act was intended to deal with certain matters, as the legislation before us is intended to deal with other matters. That piecemeal consideration of the issue will continue if we agree to this legislation.

The Bill is not necessarily intended to allow the borough of Redbridge to organise a market itself. The hon. Member for Ilford, South said that it had not yet decided whether it would organise the market or whether that would be handed over to a third party. It would be dangerous for the market traders for Redbridge to request permission for a market and then hand it over to a third party. Those traders have experience at the sharp end of private market operators. I have discussed the matter with people who stand market stalls in my constituency, at Ossett and Normanton, and at Wakefield in the neighbouring constituency. They told me how the private operators bring on to the markets their own traders who already have stalls in other markets that are operated by the privateer. That cuts across some of the sacred principles of market traders. The principles involved in the setting of market stalls should have been more fully considered when the Bill was in Committee.

Another important matter is charges for stalls. Unscrupulous operators have been known to ruin a good market by not operating within the broad principles that relate to markets. The Bill does not encourage good practice and it threatens established procedures. The hon. Member for Ilford, South does not agree, but were he to examine the matter in more depth he could conclude only that the Bill is a danger to established markets because it is piecemeal legislation. Franchise markets are an important part of our heritage. For example, the Pontefract market has operated for hundreds of years and goes back to Saxon times.

[Mr. O'Brien]

If the House agrees to this legislation, the laws on franchise markets will be threatened. Indeed, that threat is targeted on low-income groups because they depend on the markets for reasonable goods at a price they can afford. We must ask why the Bill is even before the House. The market at Romford is less than six miles from the proposed market at Redbridge. There is no real demand for stalls in that area. I note that 250 applications have been made, but there is nothing to show what sort of trade would be carried on by the applicants. I understand that there is no demand and no waiting list for additional stalls in Romford. That market caters for a number of communities in and around the area, including Redbridge. The evidence submitted to the Committee shows that there is no demand for additional market facilities in the area.

In Committee, it was argued that people without cars or access to public transport could not travel to Romford market. If that is a reason for accepting the Bill, what of rural areas? If there is a demand to develop market trading, it is in rural areas where there is a lack of public transport and where fewer people can afford cars. If a reason for accepting the Bill is that people find it difficult to travel six miles to Romford, Conservative Members in particular should be arguing for more market facilities in their constituencies. There is no substance in the argument for an additional market at Redbridge. The same criterion could apply to every rural area and community throughout the country where people are denied the use of public or personal transport.

The letter accompanying the original applications suggests that Redbridge is to be a covered market which will operate six days a week. In my view, that is merely an extension of a shopping development. I suggest that it would be fairer to the local community to make an application for a store comprising 80 stalls, rather than make one under the guise of it being an open market.

Mr. Squire: Has the hon. Gentleman established from his researches if it would make a difference whether such a store had a roof? Is it the concept of open air versus non open air that is in dispute, or do the walls surrounding a store make all the difference?

Mr. O'Brien: The difference would come if the market were handed over to a third party such as Asda, who could develop it not as a market but as a superstore. The difference between the proposed market at Redbridge and the existing one at Romford is that the latter is an established open market, whereas that at Redbridge will be covered. The application is for 80 stalls because it will be a covered market—a supermarket. It is wrong to consider an application for what is ostensibly an open market when it will, in the main, be developed as a supermarket. I hope that we shall receive honest clarification of the real nature of the application.

Mr. Thorne: The proposed site is a car park over which there is a flyover carrying a road over the railway. The site is only covered inasmuch as it is under a flyover.

Mr. O'Brien: My remarks were based on the letter accompanying the application, which refers to a covered market. If, as the hon. Gentleman suggests, the only cover provided is a flyover, it will be different from what we understand as a covered market.

That is the letter's second misleading statement. The first one was that Romford has three different markets, but the truth is that there is only one market area, comprising the same stalls, but subject to three different Acts of Parliament. For that reason only they are referred to in the supporting letter as three markets, which is most misleading.

I return to my earlier point that, as Redbridge borough council's representatives have given misleading information, the scheme should be more carefully considered. One wonders how many other misleading statements have been made in support of the Bill. I suggest to the Bill's supporters that more consideration should be given before the House agrees to the Bill. The Bill should be deferred so that all the evidence can be analysed properly to see whether it contains any other misleading statements.

I appeal to hon. Members on both sides of the House to support the motion in the names of my hon. Friends the Members for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) and for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley), and of the hon. Members for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) and for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor), as that would be in the best interests of the House and of the public.

8.17 pm

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien), and agree strongly with the main thrust of his arguments. To be fair, I must pay tribute also to my next-door neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mr. Neubert), who is bound by Trappist vows on an occasion such as this. One has heard of the strains and frustrations of office. It is arguable that this evening, one of the more acute forms of frustration is being visited upon my hon. Friend. I only hope that the inadequate way in which I and my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) are dealing with the matter will give him some consolation.

I congratulate also my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne), who is a genuine long-term friend. We encounter one another occasionally at local events, and I always treasure his company.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster said, the royal writ governing Romford market has operated for 742 or 743 years—I forget which. It also covers markets in nearly half of the constituencies represented by right hon. and hon. Members. Those markets are protected by the operation of common law, which is at the very foundation of our rights. The House should consider carefully any application to vary rights that have existed for that length of time before deciding to alter them. In particular, the private Bill procedure is an extraordinary way to vary common law rights. I shall return to that in the ultimate part of my argument.

It is important that I put the precise viewpoint of the London borough of Havering. I do not intend to touch upon the promoters' statement. That would be unfair to the House, as it has already been covered by my hon. Friends the Members for Upminster and for Ilford, South. It is important that there should be no doubt about the attitude of the London borough of Havering, which is directly affected by the Bill.

I shall quote selectively from a letter from the Havering borough secretary which begins, "Dear Robin"—it is a

very friendly borough, Madam Deputy Speaker; I should like to think that your part of the country is similar. The letter states:

"It would be foolish to pretend that the amendments made in Committee do not limit the potential harm to Romford Market from a rival at Ilford. In particular limiting it to not more than 80 stalls on the one identified site is an improvement on the Bill as originally lodged. Nevertheless, the principle remains that Redbridge are using private legislation to override long established Common Law rights . . . What we put to the committee and suggest is still a sound proposition is that the abolition of rights going back 750 years should not come about as a result of a piecemeal process whereby one piece of private legislation in one area (e.g. Bexley) is succeeded by another (e.g. Redbridge) and so on."

—one might suggest that they are using salami tactics.

The letter continues:

"There is no real difference in the circumstances applicable at Romford Market and those applicable at Common Law markets up and down the Country. Conceding the principle in this Bill must therefore make easier the compulsory extinction of other market rights."

That is demonstrated by the fact that the Bexley London Borough Council Act 1987 has been relied on in part as a precedent by Redbridge, although that Act appears to have come about by some agreement between parties.

The letter states:

"The compensation provisions in the Bill have been substantially rewritten as a result of the committee hearing."

I shall return to compensation in a moment, as it would not be fair to read out a long letter to the House. However, the letter continues:

"It might be helpful to remember that the deposited Bill (i.e. the version we petitioned against) allowed for a market to be established by Redbridge anywhere within a circle of just over 3 square miles, and also allowed Redbridge to authorise the establishment by others of a market within that same area . . . they could have had two markets unlimited in size and only broadly limited by location."

That is one of the reasons why the original objections were so strongly based.

The amended version in which the council is allowed to establish a market which is limited to not more than 80 stalls on the particular site identified by the signed plan is a considerable change from the original Bill.

The letter concludes:

"The petition lodged by Havering in respect of Romford market has produced a transformation in the Bill which it may be thought was unlikely without our opposition."—

there is certainly no reason why it should have been changed.

"This emphasises the danger of launching into private legislation to take away established rights of another body and you might think Parliament could still be urged to send Redbridge away to think again about whether they really need powers of this kind."

The letter was signed by the borough secretary and solicitor.

I mentioned that the terms are changed so that the market will consist of 80 stalls on an identified site. I do not know whether 80 is the right figure. The House will note that I have tabled an amendment on the matter.

On Second Reading, the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley), speaking from the Opposition Front Bench, referred to the well reported divisions within the majority group on Redbridge council. As a former council leader, I confess that the news that there could be divisions in local authority groups comes as something less than a shattering surprise. I held the job for three years and I would have been surprised to hear that my council was united about anything—except possibly the name of the local authority, and even then there was probably a rebel fringe moving an amendment.

I recall that it was suggested that up to one third of the majority group had objected to the Bill as originally deposited. We now have a very different Bill which imposes upon the stallholders in the putative market in Redbridge an absolute responsibility to pay sums of money and, as I have already said, it limits the number of stalls.

I do not have to go back very far to remember that quarrels broke out in my council group on far smaller issues. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South will comment on whether the revised Bill now has a clear, obvious and unambiguous commitment from Redbridge council, and whether it is aware of the dangers that have been highlighted this evening and recognises that they should take it away and think again, as the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) suggested.

Obviously, Havering welcomes the fact that, although the original Bill would apply compensation to cases where the right was conferred by statute or royal charter, that has now been deleted so that any legitimate claim can be considered. I welcome the fact that the Bill now refers to 10 per cent. of net profit, although I shall return to that in a moment. Originally, all or some of the rights created in the Bill could have been transferred or disposed of, but now no transfer or disposal can take effect without the consent of Redbridge council. None of that could have happened without the original objection, but equally Havering's central objection still remains.

I now refer to an important point on compensation. Clause 4*(b)*(i) states:

"The Director of Finance of the London Borough of Redbridge, acting as an expert and not as an arbitrator, shall within six months after the end of each financial year of the market's undertaking certify the amount of net profit calculated in accordance with paragraph (a)(i) above, and shall send copies of the certificate to the market operator and to the person entitled to receive compensation under that paragraph."

I highlight that for several reasons. I speak as a chartered accountant. I do not usually confess that in public, because it tends to turn people against me—erstwhile friends walk away and decide not to talk to me again—but it means that I have had some experience of drawing up accounts, looking at other people's accounts and, above all, completing accounts from incomplete records.

I freely confess that I have never audited a set of market traders' accounts, but I have carried out the audits of many similar undertakings. I am genuinely concerned about how that will effectively be carried out. Let me make it clear that that is no reflection on the director of finance in the London borough of Redbridge, who I am sure is a well qualified and good representative of the accountancy profession.

Let us think about it for a moment. What evidence will he have for purchases? I doubt whether there will be invoices. My experience of the sort of business undertakings we are talking about strongly suggests that the chances of many invoices being available for the purchases by the market trader are very slight indeed. We shall be relying upon approximations, because much of the business is not accompanied by invoices.

Mr. Thorne: Is my hon. Friend being misled, in that he has not read the Bill? Clause 4(2)(a)(i) contains the words

[Mr. Thorne]

"in each year ten per cent. of the net profit accruing to any person holding a market".

It does not say "market stall": it says "market".

Mr. Squire: If I have got the wrong end of the stick in that respect, perhaps, either now or in winding up, my hon. Friend will clarify the point. In other words, is it a fixed, finite, easily established figure? If it is, I wonder why it is necessary for the director of finance to verify it. If, as I fear, it is not but needs considerable assessment, I am a little concerned.

Since I have presented one side, and a good accountant always tries to present both sides of any case, the obvious other side is the takings. If my theory is right, if the problems of accounting for expenses are there, I judge that the problems of accounting for takings will be even more significant. I suspect that the average inspector of taxes would be the first to agree with that statement. The thought occurs to me that, if the assessment is based on the actual profit of the market traders, presumably it could also be based on their audited accounts, which would have been agreed, so that there would be no great difficulty.

These are major points, because we are talking about compensation. So far, people have said that this is a considerable improvement, and they welcome it as against what was originally proposed. But from where I am standing at the moment, it seems to me that that could be 10 per cent. of very little, which, I need hardly remind the House, is even less. I would appreciate some clarification from the sponsor of the Bill at some appropriate time.

Mr. Pike: The hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) said that the markets would be in competition for only three days a week, since Redbridge would be doing six days and Havering only three. But is it not true that trading on the three days when Havering traders were in competition would be affected, because people go to a market usually once a week and, if they were able to do so on a different day, that would obviously have an impact within Havering?

Mr. Squire: The hon. Gentleman, who is on a Select Committee with me, where we usually discuss matters relating to the environment, has made a very good, clear point. Obviously, there is some limit to the amount of money that people will spend in a particular week or other period, and if they have already spent it in one market, say in Redbridge, they cannot spend it a second time—something that even Governments have learnt over the years.

I want to turn now to a letter from the leader of Redbridge council, John Lovell, who I am sure is a very good Conservative and does a very good job. This letter was addressed not to me but to one of my hon. Friends, and it has come into my possession. I know that it is open to anyone to write to any or all right hon. and hon. Members, but I wonder whether there is any change in this in the private Bill procedure. Very strict procedures are laid down, for instance, requiring the promoters to supply a statement, which has to go to all hon. Members. I am sure that you will confirm that, Madam Deputy Speaker.

A selective statement has been sent out by the leader of Redbridge council, which I have not received. I see that my silent hon. Friend the Member for Romford indicates that he too has not received a copy of this letter, in which case he may be very surprised at some of the contents. I have no way of knowing how many people have received the letter. Perhaps all other hon. Members present have received it, in which case they may be rather bored if I highlight some of its contents, but it may be that they too have been the victim of the selective amnesia of the leader of Redbridge council. I do not even know, Madam Deputy Speaker, whether he managed to include you. We draw a veil over that.

In the third paragraph of his letter, Mr. Lovell writes:

"We are obliged to do this because our neighbouring Borough of Havering enjoys the monopoly protection of an ancient Royal Writ which prevents us from affording shoppers in Redbridge the choice they enjoy elsewhere in the country as a matter of right."

The letter could have pointed out the 288 constituencies we have already mentioned, where the same market rights exist. Whether the letter is saying that we should include all the 288 or whether we are only threatening the one is not clear, but the point I want to take up concerns the words "monopoly protection."

What is a monopoly in this context? There are some 300 traders—we have conceded this—who are competing not only among themselves in Romford but also against the shops and stores in Romford. That is scarcely the standard definition of a monopoly. There is a very active retail trade there. If a hypermarket were to be created, since it is unusual to create more than one hypermarket in an area, would that be a monopoly position or would one say that it was competing with other forms of retail trade? I would argue that the word "monopoly" in this case is misused.

The second point about the letter is even more important. It says:

"You may also have received correspondence from the National Market Traders Federation seeking support for the Havering case. The allegation that we, as promoters of the Redbridge Bill, are weakening the rights of street traders is far from the truth—Redbridge in effect seeks an expansion of open market trading and it is Havering relying on its ancient and anachronistic Writ, who is denying the freedom of choice and opportunity which Redbridge seeks."

The only comment made about the letter from the National Market Traders Federation is in the quotation about this Bill weakening the rights of street traders. That is the only point picked up in this criticism.

Many people may have had the letter from the federation and lost it or not seen it; or it may not have reached them, because these things happen in this place, and they may think that this was not much of an objection. But if they were to read what the federation said they would find that it was quite a bit more than the leader implies.

Mr. Bendall: I am not sure what my hon. Friend is trying to prove. Clearly, the National Market Traders Federation letter came some time ago. It was totally against. It was lobbying in a fair way, so I do not see why other people should not lobby.

Mr. Squire: I fully accept what my hon. Friend says. The act of lobbying is a legitimate and almost ever-present part of the proceedings of the House. He says that the original letter came some time ago. Many hon. Members receiving this letter from the leader of Redbridge council might have thought that the only complaint was about a weakening of the rights of street traders. It goes into considerable detail and quite simply says—I will just read their concluding sentence or two.

Mr. Bendall: I received a letter a few days ago from the National Market Traders Federation asking how I intended to vote and reminding me of its previous letter.

Mr. Squire: My post bag may have been even more selective, because I have not received that letter. It appears that a sustained attack has been launched upon me.

I shall read the concluding part of a letter from the National Market Traders Federation, which says:

"The Federation"—

the National Market Traders Federation—

"is opposed to the Bill as it believes it would set a dangerous precedent if a Private Bill was allowed to take away common law rights. This could pave the way for another Private Bill that could remove the common law rights of traders, which, with the exception of the few traders who have tenancies, are the only protection that traders have."

The Federation of Street Traders Union—I am delighted to announce to the House that I have received this letter—underlines that message. It says:

"Market traders do not enjoy statutory rights, their only rights being derived from common law. They are concerned that the Redbridge Bill is an attack on common law rights of market franchise owners and thus weakens the few rights that market traders have."

If the Bill is a precursor of future legislation, changes will be made in other constituencies. I have the list of the 285 constituencies that are affected, but I do not propose to read out the names of the hon. Members concerned. I note that both Front Bench spokesmen and you, Madam Deputy Speaker, have markets in their constituencies. They will therefore be listening intently to the arguments being deployed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), who is regarded as all-powerful by my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), is not present tonight, but he also has a market in his constituency. Most important, given my past, my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who might be assumed to be a clear believer in market principles—in this context, I mean the other market principles—represents the attractive and delightful area of Kingston upon Thames, where I had the privilege of being educated. If he were present, he would be listening carefully for any precedent being created to destroy the lovely and cherished market in Kingston.

In 1891, the Royal Commission set up by the then Government recommended the abolition of rules for the protection of market rights. For whatever reason, successive Governments and Parliaments have not seen fit to act on that recommendation. On the contrary, the most recent legislation, the Food Act 1984, expressly preserved the rights of protection against rival markets, even when those rival markets are set up by local authorities under statutory powers.

Why have Governments not seen fit to act on that recommendation? It cannot be because of insufficient time. Have no past Governments been anxious to pursue a market-based economy? I can think of one or two that have. Why have they not introduced legislation? Perhaps it is because of a lack of supply side zeal. Nothing restrained the Government from introducing a Bill on Sunday trading, which was not given a Second Reading. The Government were seeking to tackle what many people regard as an anomaly. Time was found for that legislation, so why could not previous Governments introduce legislation on markets?

We must assume that successive Ministers considered this, because people would have said to them "This is anachronistic, with its rules on six and two thirds miles, and so on." I suspect that the Government said, "Whatever changes we make, we shall face enormous problems of compensation, of measuring the loss that will be suffered by market traders and the benefit will be limited, even if we take the purest free market principles."

What Government and Parliament refused to do, or decided was not necessary, is being accomplished by a series of little Bills. First, there was the Bexley London Borough Council Bill, and now we have the Redbridge London Borough Council Bill. That should concern all hon. Members, because it cannot be the way to achieve logical legislation. The salami approach, by which bits of legislation are sliced away, makes no sense. We know from correspondence that such action is unpopular with market traders. If we must make changes, it should be by comprehensive reform in a public Bill, not by private legislation.

8.48 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I intend to speak only briefly because the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) and my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) made many of the points that I would have made. I must make it clear that I hold no brief for Havering or Redbridge. I know little about them, so I cannot be biased in favour of one or the other.

There is a principle in the Bill that threatens other charter markets, one of which is in Burnley. The 284 authorities must be concerned about the methods being used to overcome common law. It is not sufficient for the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) to say that there will be other private Bills. Private legislation is not the way to make these changes.

The charter for the market in Burnley was granted in 1264, and for the fair in 1265. Those dates are inscribed on the wall of the council chamber as notable and historic features in the development of the borough. Originally, the market was held on the doorstep of the church. Burnley was not recorded in the Domesday Book, but two centuries later it flourished around the market.

The hon. Member for Ilford, South dismissed the six-and-two-thirds-mile rule. He must recognise that many towns developed that distance apart, or slightly more, so that a market could be established in them. The pattern of development in many parts of this country was controlled indirectly by that early form of town planning. We should not disregard some of our important historic links.

Perhaps we should reconsider the correctness of the six-and-two-thirds-mile separation. If a sensible proposal to change the distance were introduced, I would not necessarily be rigidly opposed to it. But many factors would have to be considered, should such a change be thought necessary, and the implications would involve local people, market traders, authorities with and without markets in their areas and, of course, the views of hon. Members in all parts of the House.

We have been told that 98 years ago Parliament considered whether a change was necessary to the six-and-two-thirds-mile rule, and apparently it was decided to maintain the status quo. Few of us are likely to be here 98 years from now should further changes be proposed then.

[Mr. Peter L. Pike]

Many authorities have invested in markets in their areas. My local authority invested heavily in the 1960s in the indoor and outdoor markets in the area, and it is intended further to upgrade the outdoor market. Most of the outdoor market is already under cover, mainly because of the weather. My area is close to the Pennines, so we get more rain than areas further south. Genuine worries exist and we should not allow the Bill to proceed in its present form at this stage.

The material put out by the promoters did not deal with the charter conditions and various issues affecting other local authorities. The promoters and Redbridge council must have been aware for some time that such matters have led to the Bill being delayed. I find it surprising, therefore, that they did not address such issues.

Not knowing the areas involved and having read the material as an independent and neutral observer, I envisaged three separate market sites, not three different markets operating on different days on the same site. Whether the material that I read was intentionally misleading I do not know, but most people reading it would have got an incorrect view from what was stated.

It is essential that people, especially hon. Members, should have a thorough understanding of what is proposed. After all, having read it, some hon. Members may have decided not to attend tonight's debate, imagining that Havering has three different markets operating on three different sites, believing that there is no problem.

Mr. Squire: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that hon. Members have been known to vote without hearing the balance of the argument and have relied simply on a piece of paper that they have been sent? The point that the hon. Gentleman makes is overwhelmingly valid in a case such as this, when we have a near empty House.

Mr. Pike: The hon. Gentleman is right. That is why I read what private Bills are about, particularly if they concern an area of the country with which I am not familiar. Many private Bills relate to particular areas and issues, the details of which are not known nationally. There are, in those cases, only two ways for hon. Members to know what is proposed. One is to read the literature put out by the promoters and others who are interested in the matter, and in that case we depend on the information being correct and not misleading, intentionally or inadvertently. The second way is to come into the Chamber and listen to the debate.

Some hon. Members may have been influenced by the literature into thinking that Havering has three different markets operating in different parts of the borough, and have reached a view about the Bill on that basis. Issues of principle are involved here. I wish Redbridge no harm. I would be happy to see most of the Bill proceed and the proposed development and investment take place in that borough. However, I have doubts about certain aspects of the measure. If they remain in the Bill, I shall feel it necessary to oppose its passage at this stage.

Mr. Thorne: With the leave of the House, I shall reply to some of the points that have been made.

The hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) mentioned the importance of franchise markets, and I agree with him. But Food Act 1984 markets are important as well. They have played an important part in our shopping life since being introduced and they are to be encouraged.

The hon. Gentleman referred to low-income groups. Pensioners, who now have bus passes, still prefer to shop locally if they can. If he were to ask his constituents whether they preferred to shop in the vicinity of their homes or catch a bus and travel perhaps five and a half miles, he would find that, especially in later life, they preferred to shop locally. It is the desire of my local authority that they should be able to do so.

There is no intention of excluding the National Market Traders Federation from the site. On the other hand, there is no intention to give them a monopoly over it. I trust that the hon. Member for Normanton was not proposing that such a monopoly should exist. This is not a case for a closed shop.

I have referred previously to the location of the site. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman was not aware that Romford market has both an open and covered section. Neither Asda nor any other group has taken over the covered section of Romford market. This is often called "Rumford" market, which I believe is an old and original spelling of the word "Romford".

The hon. Member for Normanton also underrates my local authority and our colleagues on the Opposed Private Bill Committee because they certainly would not allow a situation to arise where a private contractor was able to introduce only his friends and colleagues into the market. I assure him that the London borough of Redbridge would be most assiduous in ensuring that it was kept open to all respectable people and that in any contract entered into by an operator—if that were the way in which it was proposed to operate the market—it would make sure that to do otherwise would be a breach of the contract, which would thereby be terminated. I have no hesitation in believing that that would not be allowed to happen. Our colleagues considered the matter in some detail; they were advised by counsel who were instructed by both the councils involved, and they were a good judge of the ultimate result.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) on his speech. He said that his friends tended to ostracise him when they learned that he was a chartered accountant. That could, of course, be the reason why he does not receive as much correspondence as the rest of us. He must have been struck off the lists that give us so much correspondence from the National Market Traders Federation and others on this issue. I am sorry that he was left out, but he has only to ask and he will always be kept fully informed.

I want especially to pick up one of my hon. Friend's points. There have been Bills before the House to vary the distance of six and two thirds miles and that is the right way to proceed. I do not believe that a blanket cover is necessarily the right answer. Each case should be dealt with on its merits, as has happened in this case.

Negotiation is a matter on which two parties must agree. I do not know whether my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch is aware of this, but I have tried hard to encourage negotiations to take place between his local authority and mine, and I have not been as successful as I should have wished. I have even pursued the point that the negotiations should take place in front of the six Members of Parliament involved, with the leaders and chief officers of the two authorities. Unfortunately, that suggestion has been turned down.

Mr. Squire: I did not make the point clear when I read the letter from my own borough secretary because I did not want to take up too much time. I must now make it clear that my borough secretary confirmed that an informal approach had been made, but, as he put it, as the purpose of the discussion would in no way reduce ultimately the presence of the Bill—and it is the principle to which Havering objects—no discussion took place.

Mr. Thorne: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. It is important that people try to get together in these matters and to resolve issues, because if that had been done at an earlier stage the defects that my hon. Friend saw in the Bill on Second Reading might have been overcome before the matter ever arrived in the House. Many of the corrections that have now been made would have been ironed out before the Bill arrived in the House —if it ever arrived at all. My local authority is not wholly to blame for the changes that have taken place—quite properly—as a result of the deliberations in the Opposed Private Bill Committee. We have already covered the question of the number of markets, so I shall not say more on that point.

The hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) raised an important point——

Mr. Squire: I am making the assumption that my hon. Friend has disposed of my argument. I hope that before he finishes he will tackle the question that I raised briefly about the measurement of profit and whether we are talking about market traders or someone else.

Mr. Thorne: I dealt with that point at the time and said to my hon. Friend that I felt that he was confusing the market operator with the market trader. We are, of course, talking about the profit to the market operator and that is the basis on which profit is to be calculated. It would not be difficult for a competent accountant to calculate that. It is a question of calculating the number of rents that have been received in a year, and the number of outgoings for the management and the running of the market. That would be relatively easy and straightforward, and it would not require many qualified people to cover it. I have every confidence that the right figure will be produced at the right time without too much difficulty. The Bill also provides for interest on late payments, so that matter has been covered. There is no point in any delay and I am sure that none will ensue.

The hon. Member for Burnley raised some interesting points, especially on the historical side. I was grateful to him for the way in which he described how various towns had been built six and two thirds miles apart, probably on the road from London to York. Eventually, through horrible ribbon development, they may have been joined up. Perhaps they are attractive towns or cities now with one franchise market at each end of the high street.

He also raised the question of substantial investment. If the market is to be successful, it must have major investment. It is no good any more doing these things on a shoestring. A piece of wood on a couple of wheels is no longer adequate. One has to produce something far more attractive to attract the customers to the stall.

We need to consider how frequently these markets take place nowadays, and whether that requires an overall view or whether the matter should be dealt with individually on its merits. Hon. Members have said that a change was last suggested about 90 years ago. My local authority would not want to wait 90 years for an answer. That is why it wants to pursue the matter now. This is not the first time that this has happened. There have been others—Bexley and so on—where reasonable agreements have been reached. That is perhaps the way that the public would wish the matter to be pursued so that it is properly considered.

It is not an inexpensive operation to bring a private Bill here. Counsel and others have to be instructed. It will not be done quickly or on the cheap. The Opposed Private Bill Committee, which comprises two Opposition Members and two Conservative Members, with an Opposition Chairman, investigated the matter thoroughly from every angle, instructed by counsel on behalf of the two councils. Therefore, I believe that we should accept what our colleagues have recommended to the House and that the Bill should proceed to consideration.

Question put, That the Bill, as amended, be now considered:—

The House divided: Ayes 56, Noes 24.

Division No. 63] **[9.06 pm**

AYES

Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Beith, A. J.
Bendall, Vivian
Boswell, Tim
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Chapman, Sydney
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Hague, William
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Lawrence, Ivan
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Nicholls, Patrick
Page, Richard
Paisley, Rev Ian
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Riddick, Graham
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilshire, David
Wood, Timothy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jacques Arnold and
Mr. Nicholas Bennett.

NOES

Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Cryer, Bob
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dixon, Don
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Durant, Tony
Gill, Christopher
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gregory, Conal
Haynes, Frank
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Meale, Alan
Nellist, Dave
Neubert, Michael
O'Brien, William
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Wareing, Robert N.
Wells, Bowen
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Robin Squire and
Mr. Peter Pike.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Bill, as amended, considered.

Clause 3

ESTABLISHMENT OF MARKET

9.18 pm

Mr. Squire: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 2, line 13, leave out '80' and insert '50'.

The first thing that I want to bring to the attention of the House is self-evident: that amendments can be moved to private legislation. It may be that some hon. Members were under the impression that it was not so. In recent weeks there has been considerable discussion about this matter in the context of other measures. As my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) said, it is open to the House on Report to amend what was done in Committee. I stress that hon. Members are not bound by the Bill.

This is a very important amendment. It seeks to reduce from 80 to 50 the number of pitches for which the Bill provides. In a sense, it is a probing amendment. As I was not privy to the Committee's detailed discussions, I have no way of knowing how the figure of 80 was arrived at. Perhaps it was estimated that the total yield from a site of 80 pitches would justify the existence of the market.

Is it perhaps that and a little bit more, which is my own view? Is it considerably more than would be reasonable? Is it perhaps—we had some discussion on this in our previous debate—related to the market traders or to the market owners? Does it emerge from a minimum range of different types of stall? The Bill simply states that there shall be 80 sites, but we have no idea of the mix of those stalls.

Many hon. Members will have markets in their constituencies and will recognise that there is a considerable difference between a market that may be 90 per cent. food and the impact that that has on existing shops or, as in this case, on an existing market, and a market that is more evenly distributed between different types of stall. We do not know the answer in this case. We must guess. What we know is that this is a precedent. As has been said, it is doing what the House and successive Governments for nearly 100 years have refused to do—that is, to change the charter under which markets operate.

That is why 80 looks a large number to me. We are creating a precedent and we should be going more gently. I do not know the size of markets elsewhere. I have no evidence on that and invite hon. Members who have markets in their constituencies to intervene and to give me their view, because I am not sure. We know the size of the Romford market—it has 300 pitches—but at this stage we know nothing more than that 80 is the number that the Bill requires.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): There are markets and markets. They are all over the place. There is one called the Common Market, and the hon. Gentleman supports that. He comes here, pottering about and wanting to stop this market because it affects his constituents, yet the Common Market has affected more of his constituents than the Bill ever will. I am here to listen to what the hon. Gentleman has to say and because I am interested in street traders. Indeed, I dealt with that matter the other week on a private Member's Bill. The London Local Authorities Bill will affect the hon. Gentleman's market as well. It will result in the traders in his market being picked up by local government officials, especially if it is a Tory authority —is it a Tory authority?

Mr. Squire: Most of the authorities in the south-east are Tory.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): Just say yes.

Mr. Skinner: Well, if that is the case, the hon. Gentleman's traders will be treated just like Lady Porter is treating the Westminster street traders, not a hop, step or a jump from here——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. The hon. Gentleman is making an intervention, which is already long. He is trying to tempt the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) to talk about different markets. I am sure that he will not do that.

Mr. Skinner: I am trying to draw a parallel between the London Local Authorities Bill which dealt with 32 London authorities including this area, but not the City of London. That means that the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) has a problem not only with this Bill, but one over and above it, and because of the Bill that went through the House the other week. I think that you were in the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for at least part of that debate, so you know the problem. I am simply saying that the hon. Gentleman wants to be absolutely clear because he has a double-edged problem. He should concentrate on that in the next few minutes—or more.

Mr. Squire: I am enormously grateful to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) who has, indeed, given me a major and double-edged problem. I seek some support across the Chamber and I sense that a semblance of support is growing. If I were to be distracted—as you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, quite rightly say that I should not be —into considering matters relating to another market, clearly I might lose that support as well as antagonising you and that would be double bad news for me.

The hon. Member for Bolsover originally asked me about markets and mentioned what we might term a very common market. I am talking about a very uncommon market because, as the earlier debate showed, we are talking about something that breaks a precedent of over 100 years. Almost half of the right hon. and hon. Members in the House have at least one market town in their constituencies and-or an open market. They must be aware that the provisions of the Bill, which affect only the London boroughs of Redbridge and Havering, could easily be taken to affect every market in the country.

To return to the number of stalls, which is the subject of the amendment, I do not know what the mix of market stalls will be. Nobody knows. All that we know is that the market will be open six days a week and will have 80 pitches. That is an awful lot of trading. Without knowing the impact that the market will have, should we not proceed more cautiously? The amendment that I and my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) have tabled would allow 50 pitches. That would be a more reasonable number. It would still allow a range of goods, food and whatever else the market will specialise in to be sold.

If we are now agreed on the compensation terms, presumably it would cost less in compensation to have 50

pitches, if, as I am led to believe, the market will be profitable. I and several other people who have examined the Bill consider that 80 pitches is excessive. I do not wish to delay the House too long. I suggest that the Bill be amended and the number of pitches reduced to 50.

Mr. Thorne: The figure of 80 was put before the Opposed Private Bill Committee. In its wisdom it decided that that was the right figure. My hon. Friend is entitled to his view, but I am afraid that that was not the view of the Committee. It will be perfectly possible to object to the figure if the Bill proceeds to another place, where it will also be examined by a Committee. The Committee of this House believed that the figure of 80 was right. I believe that was the correct decision.

Mr. Squire: The House deserves a little more explanation of how the figure was arrived at. I can only put some of the questions about it. It is important that the House is aware of the reasoning behind the decision of the Committee. We should not simply accept it.

Mr. Thorne: The figure of 80 was arrived at in the same way as the figure of 600 was arrived at for Romford. It was decided to have 600 pitches at Romford because that was the number of stalls that could be fitted into the market when the cattle market was taken away. The figure of 80 at Redbridge is the number of stalls that can be fitted on to the site that I described previously.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 19, Noes 44.

Division No. 64] **[9.27 pm**

AYES

Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Nellist, Dave
Beith, A. J.	Neubert, Michael
Colvin, Michael	Pike, Peter L.
Cryer, Bob	Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*	Spearing, Nigel
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*	Wareing, Robert N.
Golding, Mrs Llin	Wells, Bowen
Gregory, Conal	
Haynes, Frank	Tellers for the Ayes:
Irvine, Michael	Mr. Robin Squire and
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*	Mr. Dennis Skinner.
Meale, Alan	

NOES

Amess, David	Janman, Tim
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*	Kilfedder, James
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*	King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Bendall, Vivian	Lawrence, Ivan
Boswell, Tim	Maclean, David
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*	Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Browne, John *(Winchester)*	Nicholls, Patrick
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*	Page, Richard
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*	Paice, James
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*	Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Chapman, Sydney	Summerson, Hugo
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*	Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Cormack, Patrick	Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Durant, Tony	Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Fearn, Ronald	Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*	Thorne, Neil
Fookes, Dame Janet	Thurnham, Peter
Forth, Eric	Widdecombe, Ann
Fox, Sir Marcus	Wilshire, David
Garel-Jones, Tristan	Wood, Timothy
Hague, William	
Harris, David	Tellers for the Noes:
Hawkins, Christopher	Mr Nicholas Bennett and
Jack, Michael	Mr. James Arbuthnot.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Squire: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 2, leave out lines 17 and 18 and insert—

'(2) A market established under this section may be held on such days of the week as the Council may determine, including Sunday.'

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we shall discuss the following amendments: No. 3, in page 2, line 18, at end insert

'save that the market shall not be held on more than two days a week'.

No. 4, in page 2, line 18, at end insert

'save that the market shall not be held on more than one day a week'.

Mr. Squire: I feel rather like a one-man band because of the unavoidable departure of my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor)—who began our opposition to the Bill in such a distinguished manner—and the continuing required silence of my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mr. Neubert) because he is a member of the Treasury Bench.

I remind the House and any new arrivals that the markets in Havering impose a duty upon me, as a residual Member for Havering, to put the arguments. These key amendments are intended to determine precisely on how many and on which days of the week the proposed new market in Redbridge will open.

Mr. Skinner: Thursday is no good.

Mr. Squire: Is the hon. Gentleman basing his remark on attendance in this House on a Thursday?

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Gentleman is talking about markets being profitable. If he compares attendance at the markets on a Thursday with attendance in this House on a Thursday, it is obvious that Thursday is not the day to have a market. The hon. Gentleman referred to the hon. Member for Upminster (Sir N. Bonsor) who opposed the Bill. He has gone. The hon. Gentleman then mentioned somebody else who has also pottered off. He said that the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Neubert) could not speak because he is a Minister. It is just like Fred Karno's army. All the troops have left the hon. Gentleman. I could mention someone else, but I will not.

What kind of outfit does the hon. Gentleman have? If he is going to carry on he must get his troops together. We have got our people. The hon. Gentleman has lost his little army. They have probably gone to the market and are setting up stalls. The hon. Gentleman thinks that he is opposing the Bill, but his troops could be playing a double hand. They could be putting up stalls ready for a Friday market. He cannot trust people in this place because there is all sorts of moonlighting. I would not put it past Tory Members to be making money on the side in that market. The hon. Gentleman should investigate that.

Mr. Squire: I am enormously grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his suggestions. However, in all fairness I must point out that my hon. Friend the Member for Romford is not missing. He is present, but the rules of the House deny him the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): Why?

Mr. Squire: That is a separate point about the legislature.

[Mr. Squire]

I confess immediately that one of the difficulties of having been in this place for only just over 10 years is that I have never taken part in the sort of activities for which the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has become a household name. However, I am learning.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) makes a serious point. There are a number of absentees from the Chamber tonight. I want an assurance from the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) that the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) is not already setting up a stall in Redbridge market and making another £200,000 per year. I feel sure that many right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House would regard it as an outrage for a right hon. Member to receive a salary of £26,000 a year after a 10 per cent. pay increase, and another £200,000 by moonlighting, when ambulance men cannot get a 10 per cent. pay rise.

9.45 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) said that he was learning, and he should not be seduced from moving his amendment.

Mr. Squire: I did not realise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the hon. Gentleman's intervention was going that way. I shall not comment on it.

The hon. Member for Bolsover also spoke of absent right hon. and hon. Members. If one adds together the votes in the last Division, they amount to a large figure. Perhaps it would be invidious to inquire why a large number of right hon. and hon. Members are not in the Chamber.

Amendment No. 2 tackles head-on why Redbridge market should not open on Sunday. In the proceedings of the past hour or two, I have detected a certain flavour or ——

Mr. Cryer: Nuance?

Mr. Squire: Nuance is a good word. There has been a certain free market approach from some of my hon. Friends in particular, who implied that the Bill's purpose is to do away with cobwebbed, dusty, outmoded and outdated legislation—yet they stop short of incorporating in the legislation the very provision that would reflect their belief in a totally free and unregulated market. I refer to the market's right to open on Sunday.

We should probe behind the Bill to establish why the market will not do so. Some Opposition Members may hold strong views about Sunday trading, and may have expressed them on previous occasions. However, even they might agree that legislation that purports to be a free market, one-off measure should include the right of the market to open on Sunday—when it would not compete with the one at Romford, and which would allow people to buy all the things that they want on Sunday.

Presumably the market's traders and operators want it to be successful and profitable. Instead of being open for only six days a week, it could be open for seven. Alternatively, the six days could include Sunday, so that the number of days stipulated in the Bill would remain unchanged. Either way, profitability would be increased.

Mr. Meale: The real reason is that had Sunday opening been included in the Bill, there is little likelihood that the Government would have supported it. Another reason is the risk of provoking a revolt on the Conservative Benches because of the church and shop lobbies.

Perhaps another reason is that the Government, having got themselves in such a turmoil over the ambulance dispute, which has caused such disquiet among the public —most of whom are totally against the attitude adopted by the Secretary of State for Health—and having created so much furore after giving a heck of a lot of money to their friends in the City, and in respect of many other industrial matters——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I cannot relate the hon. Gentleman's remarks in any way to the amendment.

Mr. Squire: You can rest assured that I shall resist the temptation to respond to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. However, at the start of his intervention the hon. Gentleman made a very good point when he referred to what happened a few years ago when the House last had the opportunity to discuss Sunday trading. It is arguable that since then a number of hon. Members on both sides of the House might have changed their minds. In a number of local authorities the key point has been whether people who break the law on Sunday trading should be prosecuted.

Mr. Meale: To return to the point about Sunday trading, the Sunday Sports Bill attempted to change the legislation to legalise sporting activities on Sundays. That failed abysmally because hon. Members on both sides of the House argued and campaigned against it. The promoters of the Bill and the Government were worried about that happening again.

Mr. Squire: The hon. Gentleman helps the discussion on the amendment.

The argument on Sunday trading may have shifted substantially. Many local authorities complain because they do not know what the law is at present. They want clarification and they are not getting it. Many of us are being contacted by constituents either saying that they want the opportunity to go shopping on Sunday and buy a three-piece lawnmower or whatever, or asking why the council is not enforcing the law and saying that it is wrong that shops should be open.

Tonight we have one of the first opportunities for a long time to discuss Sunday trading in the context of this private Bill. I have already said that I believe that the private Bill procedure is inadequate and should not be used for such legislation, but the House has already voted that it should. I disagree with that, but since we have it, it is only right and proper that we should explore whether Sunday trading has become more popular with hon. Members.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): I am in two minds about the amendment. I do not know whether to support it or to oppose it. What is the attitude of the people in Redbridge? Has there been a survey of the churches and the shops or any general consultation? Can the hon. Gentleman inform us about that so that we can make up our minds?

Mr. Squire: The hon. Gentleman asks a very good question. I can give him only half an answer, but it is

germane to the amendment. Havering is next to Redbridge and they have similar-minded people. Opinions may have changed, but when Sunday trading was being considered, many people wrote to me saying that they wanted the law to be changed. They were disappointed that time. It may be different in the hon. Gentleman's constituency as I cannot speak for that area. Nor can I speak for Redbridge as my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) will undoubtedly do when he returns and I hope he will address that point. My knowledge of Ilford is only a fraction of that of my hon. Friend as he has been a distinguished Member of Parliament for 10 years or more. I am sure that an awful lot of people in Ilford like going out on Sundays and would shop if they could. An awful lot of people would trade on Sundays if they could. That is one reason why I tabled the amendment.

I do not want to talk only about Sunday trading. The key point that has been made against the Bill, other than the objection in principle to the legislation being used to change the law, is the impact that it will have on the existing Romford market. Nobody could possibly know what the impact will be. All we know is that the more the new market is allowed to trade in Redbridge, the more impact, logically, that will have on existing businesses.

Mr. Meale: It will have an undoubted effect. The argument has been put in many circles, particularly in local authority circles, that perhaps a one-day market can positively encourage trade. But if it is over a period of six days—and we are talking about 480 units—that will undoubtedly have a major effect on the shopkeepers surrounding this major new marketing operation.

Mr. Squire: I am grateful for the support of the hon. Member, who makes his point well.

In our early discussions this evening we touched several times on the compensation and the way in which it had been changed. No one can deny that it has been improved. When the Bill was introduced the compensation was disgraceful and totally inadequate. It has now been amended, and that is welcomed, but only relative to what it was before. The underlying aim of the legislation remains—to prevent the existing market in Romford, which is identical to the 287 other markets throughout the country in constituencies represented by right hon. and hon. Members, from being as successful in the future as it has been in the past. There is no argument about that.

Mr. Pike: The hon. Gentleman says that the compensation is now acceptable. I remind him that in the earlier debate it was indicated that the compensation would be paid by the people who ran the market. As the people who run the market fix the rent at a certain level for stallholders, they very much influence that profit figure. So the compensation is completely in their control and may not be realistic compensation at all.

Mr. Squire: That is one of the key points.

Of course, I could say that people in Romford welcome the compensation, and that would be the end of it. But I am arguing for a reduction in the number of days that they will trade which, logically, would lead to a reduction in the compensation. It is a measure of the concern felt by Romford and Havering that I should be saying that, although the compensation will not be sufficient, none the less we wish to see the activities of this new non-charter market, created only by legislation of this Chamber, restricted to a fewer number of days.

I have an open mind as to whether it should be one day or two days and I thought it only right that I put down more than one amendment—indeed, they have wisely been grouped together—because this would, in theory at least, give hon. Members on both sides of the House the opportunity to say which they thought was the better. Both are significant cuts in the six days presently included in the Bill.

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Gentleman should also consider what will happen in the area where the market is situated when it is not operating. On different days during the week different activities can take place. The mind boggles at the extent to which——

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): They could sell shares.

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend says that they could sell shares. They could be like yuppie street traders. The area could be a car park. Football could be played on it. If the hon. Gentleman considers the matter he might find that there are possibilities for large groups of his constituents and other people's constituents to engage in all sorts of leisure activities on that area. If he is a bit unsure of his ground, he should think in terms of what could happen on the market place when it is not being used for a market.

Mr. Squire: Not for the first time, I am indebted to the hon. Member for Bolsover. I promise not to release that in Bolsover, if he promises not to do so in Hornchurch. He rightly said that Redbridge should be more imaginative about the site.

Mr. Meale: Will the hon. Gentleman enlighten me about compensation? The Government are pushing for the privatisation of local government management services. What will happen if the management services are privatised——

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Further consideration adjourned till Thursday 8 February—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Civil Aviation (Borrowing Powers) Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Civil Aviation Authority (Borrowing Powers) Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 1

BORROWING POWERS OF CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY

10 pm

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 8, leave out '£500' and insert '£450'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): With this, it will be convenient to consider amendment No. 2, in page 1, line 8, leave out from 'million' to end of line 11.

Mr. Wilshire: I move the amendments as one of the Members of Parliament representing Heathrow airport. Some 70,000 electors will be seriously affected by parts of the Bill if certain plans go ahead.

I felt compelled to table the amendments earlier this week because of what has occurred since the Standing Committee considered the Bill on 18 January. On 23 January, British Midland Airways published a report calling for exactly the changes at Heathrow that were discussed when the money resolution was debated on 17 January and when the Committee considered the Bill on 18 January. The report estimates the cost of the changes at Heathrow at £50 million—exactly the sum that I seek to delete, thus making it impossible for the Civil Aviation Authority to spend money on what was suggested in those discussions and in the report.

On Second Reading, the Minister for Aviation and Shipping gave two reasons for wanting the Bill to be enacted, one of which concerns us now. He said:

"One project is the central control function; it has been called the tunnels in the sky concept. It involves a major restructuring of the airspace over south-east England and will increase capacity in the terminal manoeuvring area over the south-east by at least 30 per cent. when it is fully in place in 1995."—[*Official Report, Second Reading Committee*, 20 December 1989; c. 3.]

So far so good. I have no objections if the Bill does that, but the problems start when one asks where the 30 per cent. will land. When the Bill was considered previously, various hon. Members urged the CAA to spend money to enable much of that extra 30 per cent. to land at Heathrow airport.

Two suggestions affecting Heathrow were made in those previous discussions, both of which will need the use of the borrowing powers if they are to be implemented. They are, first, ending the daily runway switch at 3 o'clock and, secondly, allowing more night flights. Those were the common themes that ran through much of the discussion on how further to utilise Heathrow. Surprise, surprise, those were two of the five proposals put forward by an independent airline, which it costed at £50 million, the amount which I seek to delete from the Bill. In case anyone doubts whether an independent airline's proposals for Heathrow affect the CAA, I tell the House that in order to get the details of what was being proposed by British Midland Airways I had to ask the CAA for them. So it is involved and must be stopped.

Let us look in some detail at the purpose of trying to spend the £50 million that I am anxious to prevent being spent. It is to try to create 75,000 extra slots—extra landings and takeoffs—at Heathrow. That would represent about 22 per cent. additional traffic movement a year through that airport.

The report, in seeking to spend that money, suggests that five alterations should be made. They are that mixed mode operations should alter the runway switching; that there should be a reduction in the lateral separation of aircraft as they are flying around the airport; that there should be new taxiways to make it quicker for aircraft to get off the runways; that there should be an extension of the working day; and that airline efficiency should be improved.

When the Bill was considered previously, those of us who opposed such matters were described unflatteringly. My hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen), for example, said in Standing Committee:

"The environment lobby groups—comparatively few—suggest that all the people around the airport are up in arms about noise. That is not true. It is a 'not in my backyard' approach, because while they are happy to have the M25 and other major roads nearby for their convenience, a lorry driving along the M25 creates much more noise than an aircraft".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 18 January 1990; c. 6.]

My hon. Friend went on to try to persuade everybody that quieter aircraft would get rid of the problem.

I give that quotation to make the point that my opposition and that of my constituents to some of what is proposed is not a mindless, knee-jerk, "not in my backyard" approach to everything that might be suggested for Heathrow airport. My constituents and I have no objection in principle to some of the money that is to be borrowed being spent to improve air traffic control. Indeed, if that makes life safer for us, we are happy. Nor have we any objection to the money being spent on improving the taxiways, and if it means spending money to improve airline efficiency, we would welcome that.

But if any of the £50 million is to be used to enable mixed mode runway use to take place at Heathrow or to increase the number of night flights, I must make it crystal clear that I and all my constituents, irrespective of party, will fight the proposals tooth and nail.

In trying to persuade the House to clip the wings of the Bill, it is vital that I explain to the Minister in detail what bothers me and thus give him a chance, if he can, to reassure me that the money that is to be spent will not be spent on the aspects to which I have referred.

What is it about mixed mode runway use to which we object so much? At present, at Heathrow airport at 3 o'clock each day the runways are switched round so that a runway used for takeoff in the morning is used for landing aircraft in the afternoon, and vice versa. That came about because an aircraft taking off makes much more noise than an aircraft landing. That is equally true of quieter aircraft and older noisy aircraft; there is still more noise on take-off.

Switching runways was felt to be a way of helping people living near the airport to come to terms with the situation, so that they would have trouble in the morning and less trouble in the afternoon. They would know where they stood and at what times the switch would take place.

Lest the House does not think that that is important, I will explain what goes on in my constituency. People get to know the switching times for the week. If they must go shopping or visit friends, they do it when the nearest runway is noisy. If they want to be at home or do

gardening, they look up the runway arrangements for the week and plan their lives accordingly. So it is as relevant now as when the scheme was first introduced.

If the CAA is tempted to spend some of the money to make it possible for that 3 o'clock rule to be relaxed, it should be warned that not only will it be resisted but that is will be wasting its money. When the Bill was considered previously, two points were made about the arrangement, and we should consider them because they show what happens when people who are not connected with the airport are allowed to try to pose as experts and tell their colleagues what is going on.

When the money resolution was debated, my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams said of the arrangements there:

"I wonder whether my hon. Friends are aware that at Heathrow every day at 3 o'clock the runways are changed, rather like the changing of the guard. That results in about a half-hour gap in operations as the CAA changes the runway pattern."—[*Official Report*, 17 January 1990; Vol. 165, c. 362.]

When the Bill was considered in Committee the following day, my hon. Friend said:

"Heathrow is closed for about 20 minutes as the runway configurations are changed."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 18 January 1990; c. 4.]

Within a matter of hours, half an hour had become 20 minutes.

This afternoon, I rang up national air traffic control services to double check that my memory was correct. It confirmed that the switch round at 3 o'clock is almost instantaneous. It does not stop operations and there is no drop in the hourly rate of aircraft movements in that hour. As well as being opposed by us, if the CAA is tempted to spend any of the money in getting rid of the 3 o'clock rule, it will not find any more slots from that manoeuvre.

There seems to be a suggestion that some of the money could be used to increase the number of night flights. The British Midland Airways report does not say that. It says, "Let's not get into the argument about night flights. Let's turn night into day and extend day-time by half an hour at either end." Instead of having a ban from 11·30 pm until 6 am—not a complete ban, but a very severe curb on flights in and out of the airport so that my constituents can sleep—and instead of giving them peace and quiet during those hours in the summer, it is suggested that the hours should be midnight to 5.30 am. Again, it is suggested that that does not matter because aircraft have become quieter. My constituents are not overfussed about whether they are woken up abruptly or gently; they simply object to being woken up. Until my hon. Friend the Minister, the CAA or British Midland Airways can come forward with a silent aircraft, we are implacably opposed in my constituency to any increase in night flights or any tinkering with times, so that, by a sleight of hand, people can say that it is not night time after all.

I have tabled two amendments. My hon. Friend the Minister is keen to have 30 per cent. more aircraft circling over London. I do not necessarily oppose that. British Midland Airways is keen to spend £50 million of the money that we are considering tonight to divert 75,000 of the extra slots to Heathrow. The test we have to apply is to consider for what the money will be used. For what will the £50 million—which my amendment seeks to restrict—be used? If it is to be used for airline efficiency, that is fine. I support it if it is to be used for better air traffic control. I also support new taxiways, but unless my hon. Friend can assure me that the money will not be spent on more night flights, that it will not be used to turn night into day and that it will not be used to scrap the arrangements that have been worked out over the years to protect the interests of my constituents, I hope that all hon. Members will join me in opposing spending money in that way, which will harm my constituents and will do no good to civil aviation.

The Minister for Aviation and Shipping (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on his ingenuity in tabling amendments to raise some of the serious issues which concern me and all hon. Members who have constituencies around Heathrow airport. With some precision, my hon. Friend quoted some of the comments made on the money resolution and in Committee. I am sure that he has also noted in those debates the words of our hon. and learned Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Ground), who put the case well for the residents in the area, although I know that my hon. Friend was not a member of that Committee.

I hope I can go some way to reassure my hon. Friend that the money that we are talking about is not intended to increase the amount of time for night flights. I answered a question from my hon. Friend on that matter just yesterday. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has rejected the CAA's argument for a relaxation of the night restrictions, because of some of the well-known fears that my hon. Friend and his neighbours have put to us many times. There is no intention of changing the night-time restrictions until 1992, when they will be reviewed. We will need to see where we go then. The money is not being used for that. I ask my hon. Friend not to press the amendment to a vote.

10.15 pm

I should emphasise that we are not adding £500 million to the CAA's borrowing limit. The CAA is already close to reaching the existing limit of £200 million, which was set in 1980. The limit represents an increase of £300 million. As my hon. Friend will be aware, the CAA is embarking upon an ambitious capital investment programme, amounting to £600 million over the next 10 years. Much of the programme will need to be financed by borrowing, because many of the individual projects are long term, and the CAA will not be able to recoup all the cost from the airlines which use the improved air navigation services which will result until the equipment is fully operational. Therefore, it will take time.

The new equipment includes a new en-route centre costing £200 million, a central control function at £30 million, Scottish radar at £18 million and computer ware at £22 million. The list is substantial. If my hon. Friend were to push his amendment as drafted, it would reduce considerably the borrowing powers of the CAA and impede the programme which it is important to accommodate. It would also mean that we would need further legislation in the not-too-distant future.

The Bill is in two parts. First, it allows for a borrowing requirement of up to £500 million and, in due course, a possible extension to be given by affirmative resolution of the House. Therefore, there will be other opportunities to see whether the CAA is spending the money as my hon. Friend wishes, and whether it is investing and providing the efficient utilisation of air space that we all want.

I commend my hon. Friend on the way in which he presented his proposal. I hope that I have reassured him that the money is not meant to get rid of the mixed mode operation or to end night-time restrictions. I understand my hon. Friend's concern about that. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who is present, also understands his concern. I hope that my hon. Friend will not press the amendment to a vote. We have heard loud and clear his message on the two issues that he has raised.

Mr. Wilshire: I hear what the Minister has said, and I thank him for it. Perhaps I could do a deal with him. If I were to withdraw the amendment, perhaps he would be willing on occasions to come and have tea with me at 3 o'clock so that I can remind him of what happens. Perhaps from time to time, or even tonight, if the debate goes on a little longer, he will have a nightcap with me at 11 o'clock or half-past 11 so that he can notice how much quieter Spelthorne becomes when the planes stop rumbling overhead. If that is acceptable to him—I hope that he will nod his head vigorously—

Mr. McLoughlin *indicated assent.*

Mr. Wilshire: —I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment by leave, withdrawn.

Order for Third Reading read.

Motion made and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

10.18 pm

Mr Snape: The House will have heard the plea both for late-night drinks and for less aircraft noise from the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire). We have noted the Minister's reply. Perhaps he does not want to say in public whether he will meet the hon. Gentleman later in his constituency; we can understand if he wants to keep that quiet. The plea of the hon. Member for Spelthorne about aircraft noise is common. Like him, I was surprised to hear the hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) speak about it earlier in a cavalier fashion.

I have some questions to put to the Minister. I hope that by so doing I shall not unduly detain the House or prevent the Minister from keeping his late-night tryst with his hon. Friend, either within the confines of the Palace or in his hon. Friend's constituency. Nevertheless, I think that the House needs some reassurances from the Department about the effect of the measure, especially its effect on air safety.

First, can we be assured that the Civil Aviation Authority has enough capital to make the investment that will be necessary for all the new safety and capacity requirements envisaged for the aviation world in the 1990s? A second question arises directly from that one: can the Minister give us any assurances about the accuracy of the CAA's forecasting over the next decade? He will, I hope, agree—or he may agree; I had better not put words into his mouth—that the CAA made a fundamental error in the early 1980s in cutting the number of air traffic controllers, and that it has taken us until now to recover from that decision. I hope that he can assure us that the predictions about aviation in the 1990s will prove more accurate than those of the last decade.

Did the Minister see the "Scottish Eye" programme on Channel 4 on Saturday evening? It raised a number of disturbing questions about air traffic control and aviation safety. The travelling public—or at least, those who watched the programme—will have been alarmed to see air traffic controllers expressing fears about what they described as the cutting of corners in air traffic control training, and referring to considerable under-investment in such training. Perhaps most important and worrying of all was what air traffic controllers said about the under-recording of "near misses": it seems that recording them reflects badly on air traffic control procedures, and on traffic controllers themselves.

The Minister looks a little pained at that. I did not see the programme—although I know that some hon. Members on both sides of the House did—but I feel that some of the questions that it raised are serious enough for him to examine and answer.

I was even more concerned—these will be my last words on the subject of the television programme—to learn that the air traffic controllers who were interviewed were silhouetted rather than shown full-face, and that their voices were distorted to avoid identification. If those safety fears exist—and the fact that they were expressed in the programme suggests that they do—why should those expressing them have to do so in semi-secret, in order—as they put it—to avoid persecution and disciplinary problems at work?

Have the Government considered the impact of deregulation in the 1990s, especially on air space? We must bear in mind the fact that more smaller aircraft are likely to use British airports as airlines make use of the fifth-freedom rights that the Government believe will be introduced during the decade. Is the extra demand on air traffic control being catered for, and can the Minister assure us that an increase in the number of smaller aeroplanes will not lead to a reduction in safety measures, or even to more delays?

If my memory serves me right, it was at last year's Conservative party conference that the Secretary of State for Transport announced a new control centre to replace the one at West Drayton. That was one of the few good things he said. One could be even more cynical and say that it was one of the few things he said, but, as cynicism would be inappropriate from Opposition Members—especially at this time of night—I think that we should hear more details from the Minister. Now that the tumultuous applause at the party conference has died down, I think that he should tell us when the work will begin, where the new centre will be and when it will come into operation.

Mr. McLoughlin: Can the hon. Member tell us when the Labour party debated transport at its conference, or whether it is still reviewing its policy?

Mr. Snape: The Minister surprises me. Strictly speaking, that is not a matter for this debate, but I hope that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will allow me to reply briefly. If the Minister had been tuned in to the Labour party conference on the Tuesday——

Mr. McLoughlin: Was the hon. Member there?

Mr. Snape: Actually, I was not there, but I had a very good reason. I was ill and unable to attend the conference at all—the first time for over 20 years that I had been deprived of a fraternal week by the sea.

I think that it was on the Tuesday of the conference week that my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston-upon-Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) made his usual pugnacious contribution, which—remarkably for a Labour party conference, because we do not usually go in for these things—was greeted with a standing ovation. It was not quite as tumultuous as the one that greeted the Minister's right hon. Friend, but then it was not as well rehearsed as the ones——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that hon. Members on both Front Benches will now set a good example by returning to the Third Reading of the Bill.

Mr. Snape: I apologise for having allowed that intervention to lead me astray momentarily. Of course I will come back to the Bill.

Does the Under-Secretary of State, as regulator for what was the British Airports Authority—now BAA plc—intend to have any consultations with the Civil Aviation Authority about the forecast increase in landing charges in the current year? Does he believe that the CAA will take any action, as it did last year, to restrict fare increases? I want briefly to draw his attention to a cutting from the *Sunday Times* of last week.

In an article headed "Bargain flights grounded as airlines' costs soar", Francis Rafferty pointed out:

[Mr. Snape]

"The CAA has just spent £50m on a new radar network and £20 million on an air traffic control computer which will be in operation this summer as part of a £600m programme.

The CAA last week said it was relaxing the 10-day notice period to allow airlines to put up fares quickly.

'Our landing fees at Gatwick will increase by 49 per cent. from April,' said Malcolm Naylor, managing director of Bryman Airways. 'Changes in the pricing structure mean that our tiny 46-seaters will be charged £382 per landing, the same as a Jumbo Jet.'"

I do not know whether, at this time of night, the Minister can give us any reassurance about the likely impact of such costs on airline fares. I hope that he will concede that it is a worrying trend and not likely to assist the Government's well-publicised, albeit very unsuccessful, battle to reduce inflation.

Finally, I want to draw to the attention of the Under-Secretary of State an aspect of air safety in this country that is often overlooked. I hope that this Bill will go some way to tackling it. I refer to the increasing use of foreign registered and operated airlines leased by British airlines.

My understanding is that these aircraft are neither maintained nor operated to United Kingdom standards; nor are they subject to normal checks and controls by the Civil Aviation Authority. I hope that the Under-Secretary of State will be able to tell us—preferably tonight, but, if necessary, at some future time—that the increase in borrowing powers will go some way towards reducing this problem.

Many British aircrew believe that foreign crews leased to British airlines fly longer hours than would be permitted if they were United Kingdom nationals flying with United Kingdom airlines. In some parts of the industry, there is considerable concern that in these cases maintenance does not conform to United Kingdom levels.

There is no point in the Government and the CAA insisting on United Kingdom airlines adopting more stringent maintenance practices and reducing crew flying hours if the result is that airlines bypass the laws and bring in foreign crews and aeroplanes. Many passengers fly with British airlines because they feel safer doing so, and it would surely be a betrayal of their faith and trust if, through Government policies, there was even greater use of foreign aircraft in the future.

As a side issue, we allow crews and aircraft to operate in this country from countries that would not allow us to operate there. I refer especially to the United States of America. Certain aeroplanes that are certified for use in that country fly in the United Kingdom—one has done so for over two years now—without any United Kingdom certification, whereas the reverse would not be permitted in the United States of America. In our view, it is not something that should be permitted here.

Although I have asked the Minister a considerable number of questions, I hope that he will be able to answer them, if not this evening, at least in the very near future —in which case the Opposition believe that the Bill should receive its Third Reading tonight.

10.31 pm

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): In the Second Reading Committee, I said that I had no objection to the principle of the Bill. I still hold that opinion and I do not criticise its basic concept.

When I entered the Chamber I intended to add to the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) when he moved his amendments seeking to reduce the limit on borrowing, because I wished to comment on the actual process of borrowing which, after all, is the real content of the Bill. However, I felt that it might damage my hon. Friend's comments and the Minister's reply if I raised yet a different issue and the matter was not, therefore, dealt with separately.

Although wishing the Bill good speed, I still wish to express my concern about the way in which it is likely to operate in practice. I give my hon. Friend the Minister fair warning that when he comes to the House with the affirmative resolutions that will be necessary before each of the individual tranches of borrowing is made, I shall want to know more than simply the amount and the general purpose.

As I tried to make clear at an earlier stage, the Bill provides for the CAA to borrow in a range of currencies. It does not state that it must spend those currencies in the country to which they apply. If the CAA borrows Dutch guilders, for example, it does not have to buy Dutch radar equipment. It can purchase British equipment. However, that involves changing the guilders back into sterling. Given the volatility of sterling these days, there is almost certain to be either a gain or a loss on the process over a period.

It was to that point that I sought to direct my hon. Friend the Minister during the Second Reading Committee debate. Although he answered my question, I should not have raised the matter again tonight except that, frankly, the more one reads his answer, the less intelligible it is in providing a serious answer to my question about the amount of money that is being put at the disposal of the CAA as compared with the nominal amount that it can borrow.

In the Second Reading Committee, when I asked the Minister whether it would be possible to engage in such operations, he replied no. On careful reading of the *Hansard*, I have concluded that he meant to say, "Yes, they cannot do it." That is a different matter. He will be faced with the difficulty of explaining how sums that were borrowed in one currency, but were not spent on one occasion in the country of that currency, will affect the total borrowing requirement of the CAA.

My hon. Friend explained to us in the Committee that there will not be an addition to the borrowing powers of the CAA of, say, £500 million or £750 million, but that the CAA will borrow in anticipation of the revenues that it will receive from those who use the airports. I am told that those revenues are paid entirely in sterling. There will be a major accounting problem. My hon. Friend seems to suggest that that will not be so. If the CAA receives its revenues in a variety of currencies, the position will be even more complicated. Perhaps he will clarify the matter.

When affirmative resolutions are brought before the House, shall we know in what currency the original borrowing was made, in which country the purchases will be made and, if there is a difference between the amount borrowed and the amount spent, the purpose for which the difference was used? My hon. Friend may well regret that complication when orders come before the House.

I do not wish to detain the House further or to oppose the Bill, but I give my hon. Friend fair warning of a complication which, to some extent, is of the Government's making.

10.36 pm

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): In welcoming the measure, I wish to take this opportunity to ask my hon. Friend some questions about how it will affect air services to the north-west—in particular, Manchester airport and Speke airport at Liverpool, which may be expanded.

My hon. Friend the Minister will be aware that Conservative Members from the north-west have fought for services into Manchester airport. Will he, either now or by letter later, spell out how Manchester may benefit, particularly in air traffic control facilities, from the equipment that the additional borrowing powers may be used to purchase? Many people use Manchester airport to begin their holidays. They are tired of the endless excuse that their flight is delayed because of air traffic control problems. We are trying to win additional services to Manchester to take away some of the burden from overcrowded airports in the south, to which other hon. Members have referred.

Will my hon. Friend respond to the points that I have raised on behalf of air service users in the north-west?

10.37 pm

Mr. McLoughlin: I shall respond to as many of the points raised as possible. I begin by welcoming the general approach of the Opposition to the Bill, which is important for the overall future of air traffic control and air safety.

When we discuss air safety, it is important to put in perspective the record of the United Kingdom. We give safety the highest priority. That can never be compromised. There is no doubt that there is sufficient money to cover safety requirements.

The number of air misses related to aircraft flying hours has halved over the past 10 years. I do not take comfort from that, because I should like the number to be much lower. However, it is important to put it in context. We have a reporting system, and all air misses are investigated. I hope that that goes some way to reassuring the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape).

Like the hon. Gentleman, I did not see the television programme to which he referred, but I shall seek to find out a little more about some of the points that were made. I am told that a representative from the CAA said that safety was its business and that it was not concerned just with carrying passengers, but with carrying them safely and making sure that aircraft get from A to B safely. There can be no doubt about our commitment to air safety. That is fundamental.

The hon. Gentleman was critical of our failure to forecast growth as well as might have been done. That is always a problem with forecasting. Sometimes we get it right and sometimes we get it wrong. Air traffic has increased by about 48 per cent. during the past 10 years. It would have been a brave person who made that forecast. Air traffic has grown by 7 per cent. in the past 12 months, due partly to our liberalisation policies, which have meant cheaper transport and more people travelling by plane.

Mr. Snape: I am perfectly prepared to accept that to forecast a traffic growth of 48 per cent. in the 1980s would have been fairly difficult, but I was complaining about the fact that the CAA got it so wrong that, until five years ago, it was reducing the number of air traffic controllers. I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that that was a fundamental error.

Mr. McLoughlin: A lot of effort has gone into reversing the shortage of air traffic controllers.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the training of air traffic controllers. We cannot make safety a high priority and then cut the training programmes for air traffic controllers. We are considering the possibility of training people in different aspects of air traffic control, such as the flying tunnels concept, as opposed to airport work. I hope that that will help to reassure the hon. Gentleman.

My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths) made an important point that I am sorry I was unable to clarify in Committee. The CAA can already borrow in foreign currencies and the Bill extends its powers to ecu. One reason for that is that much of its revenue from Eurocontrol will come in ecu. It needs Treasury approval for any borrowing in foreign currencies, and that will be clearly shown in its accounts. If my hon. Friend is not satisfied, he will be able to make his complaints when we deal with the affirmative resolution to increase the sum to £750 million.

There is no doubt about the importance that the Government attach to regional airports. We are committed to the role that they can play. It is nonsense that someone from Derbyshire, Manchester or Sheffield should have to travel to London to join a flight. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had a meeting in the United States on that issue and we hope to make further progress. If the matter had been easy to resolve, it would have been resolved a long time ago. Regional airports can play a vital role in air traffic control and in making travel more convenient for our constituents. My constituents probably use the East Midlands airport, but we are not too far from Manchester.

I hope that hon. Members will give this useful and valuable Bill its Third Reading. It gives the CAA the flexibility that it needs to organise the finance for its ambitious and vital capital development programme.

Mr. Snape: I made three or four other points in the course of my speech—deregulation and smaller aircraft and the impact of fifth-freedom rights on United Kingdom airspace; landing charges and their impact on fares throughout the United Kingdom; and the use of foreign-registered planes and crews. I do not expect an answer immediately on those points, but I should like an assurance from the hon. Gentleman that he will consider them and write to me in due course.

Mr. McLoughlin: I shall certainly write to the hon. Gentleman in greater detail about the three points that I have not covered, particularly the last one.

I was not wholly surprised at the amount of debate which the Bill has generated, even though it could easily be seen as a mere technical measure both in Committee and the House. Aviation is an important subject. I fully understand that, whenever hon. Members have the opportunity to debate it, they use it to bring to the Government's attention some of the issues which are important to them and their constituents. It is right that they should do so, and we shall take note of the number of comments made not only by Members who have airports in the vicinity of their constituency, but by those who would like more development of regional airports, to which the Government are wholly committed and feel is important.

[Mr. McLoughlin]

In the light of those debates, I commend the Bill to the House and trust that hon. Members will agree to give it a Third Reading.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. At column 405 of yesterday's *Hansard*, 31 January, the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) complained to Mr. Speaker that he understood that, without any notification, the Minister had made an attack on him, and that he regretted that. I understand that, in the previous debate today, the hon. Member for Bradford, South attacked my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) without warning. Will you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, rule whether it is in order for a failed Minister, failed Member and failed Member of the European Parliament, with one of the most marginal seats in the country, to complain one day that he is being attacked without warning, and the very next day to attack one of my right hon. Friends without any warning?

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If that point of order is in order, is it in order for the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) to use exactly the same type of language about my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer)?

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke and I did the hon. Member for Bradford, South the courtesy of advising him that we intended to raise this issue. Will you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, rule whether it is customary in the House to raise points of order affecting individual members of other parties, without doing what we had the courtesy to do?

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. With reference to that same extract from *Hansard*, is it in order for a colleague in the House to eulogise his past achievements when his track record indicates—as I personally experienced as a small business man at the time—that he was quite outstandingly the worst Minister with responsibility for small businesses that there has ever been? For such a person to present a case in the House about one of the finest Ministers there has ever been is surely a gross error. Does the House recall that, prior to the hon. Member for Bradford, South being a Minister with responsibility for small businesses, he took on the job after the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) had jumped into the Mersey rather than support the Labour Government in their desire to join the European Community?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Eulogies of past achievements are not unknown in this place. I can confirm to all the hon. Members who raised points of order that it is customary, if an hon. Member wishes to criticise another hon. Member, for him to give notice to him or her before doing so.

First Aid Training (Schools)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.]*

10.48 pm

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): It is always a great honour to have a subject chosen for discussion by the House. I am grateful that my subject was selected for debate this evening. I am also glad that my hon. Friend the Minister is here to reply to the debate—first, because, as we all know, he has a high reputation for care in the community, particularly of school pupils. Secondly, I well remember his able presentation of prizes to winners of the St. John Ambulance three-cross award at Britannic house a few weeks ago—an award sponsored by British Petroleum. I remember how well he did so, how well it was received and how well the event was organised by the director general of St. John Ambulance, Mr. Robert Balchin, and his able wife who organised the school pupils in a convincing way. I hope that my hon. Friend will agree with that.

I wish to declare two interests—one in the health industry and the other as the unremunerated parliamentary representative for the Order of St. John, which is the parent body of the St. John Ambulance Association and Brigade. The subject before us is first aid in schools. Two points are involved. The first is the teaching of first aid to school pupils. Under the new national curriculum, that could be included in the optional subjects. The second point is that some core subjects lend themselves to a certain amount of first aid. For example, to facilitate safe instruction in science there may be some leaning towards protection and first aid. Another example of physical education, where first aid might be involved in swimming activities.

I welcome the fact that the National Curriculum Council is to give guidance on first aid. I also welcome any moves in schools towards the teaching of first aid with the one, two and three-cross awards of St. John for children of six, 10, 12 and beyond. That has been highly successful.

The main thrust of the debate relates not so much to the teaching of first aid, although that is important as to the first aid cover available for school pupils. The Government have wisely pushed preventive medicine in diet, screening processes and so on. I welcome the fact that the National Health Service is being streamlined, which makes it more efficient and effective in offering health care.

First aid is part of the whole process of preventive medicine. If it is correctly administered, first aid can minimise damage—for example, by restraining the loss of blood which, if excessive, could lead to brain damage. It can also reduce the long-term knock-on costs to the NHS. If an injury is properly treated immediately it happens, there may be less long-term damage to the patient and therefore much less long-term cost to the NHS. Of course, the most important prerequisite is that it is correctly applied, so training is absolutely vital. If it is wrongly applied, it could be extremely dangerous and could even cause death. For example, if someone with spinal or neck injuries is moved incorrectly, he could easily be killed.

Training in first aid is offered by the British Red Cross Society and the St. John Ambulance Association and Brigade. The latter is ably directed by Mr. Robert Balchin, who is well known to my hon. Friend the Minister. First aid means the local availability of qualified first aiders. Training to become a qualified first aider takes about three days. First aid also means the location and the contents of first aid boxes. It also means the publication of lists and telephone numbers of local general practitioners and local casualty stations. We must always remember that first aid is not simply the ability to dial 999 for the emergency services; it is much more than that.

There are more than 250,000 accidents in the United Kingdom every year, which represent a serious drain on the resources of the National Health Service. That is a clear example of the need for the wider availability of qualified first aid cover. To meet that historical but increasing need, previous Governments introduced the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, which requires that places employing more than 150 people must have at their disposal at least one qualified first aider.

When I examined that legislation, I was stunned to discover that no such cover is required in schools. There are some 8·5 million school pupils in this country, and the absence of any legal requirement for first aid cover in respect of those young people concerns me. I would have thought that a school was inherently more dangerous than a bank. Short of a hold-up, a bank is a relatively safe place to work. A member of the staff could get electrocuted by a computer, but the same is true of a pupil using a school's computer, which might be less well insulated electrically.

Young people of school age are also more prone to accidents. It is often at school that, for the first time, young people light matches and illicitly smoke cigarettes—when there is a risk of their clothes catching fire and of other accidents. Youngsters also swallow things that they should not, break their legs, and so on. The school age population is more prone to accidents than the employees of an industrial or commercial company.

The record shows that last year there were more than 8,000 accidents in schools—some of them fatal, and all of them serious. That figure does not include minor accidents. But while there is a legal requirement for first aid cover in industry, no such requirement exists in respect of schools, at which 8·5 million pupils work. Instead, the Government rely on guidelines that are essentially voluntary.

In the past, Governments have resisted the temptation to legislate, preferring to rely on voluntary co-operation. What is the result of that approach? The St. John Ambulance Brigade undertook a survey of 13,000 out of the country's 23,500 schools—18,500 of which are primary schools. St. John received 4,256 replies, which statistically is an excellent sample. What is not so excellent is what the sample reveals.

It showed that only 32 per cent. of schools follow the Government's voluntary guidelines. Worse still is the mirror image of the 68 per cent. of schools that do not follow them. The survey also revealed that 76 per cent. —or more than three quarters—of all schools do not have the first aid cover that is required by law of commerce and industry under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974. It showed also that 20 per cent., or one fifth, of the schools have no cover by a qualified first aider. Those figures suggest that the Government's guidelines are not being observed but are being honoured in the breach.

The guidelines also require the display of lists of local general practitioners and casualty stations, but the survey shows that 72 per cent., or just under three quarters, of schools do not display such information. Indeed, 63 per cent. of the schools do not even have the lists.

[Mr. John Browne]

In summary, the facts show that when schools are not required to have the same cover as industry, they do not bother. Why is there such discrimination? Why do the Government allow a voluntary regime for schools while there are legal requirements for industry and commerce?

The Government guidelines are not working. Obviously there is a need to strengthen the law, beef up the health and safety at work regulations, extend them to schools and make the voluntary guidelines legal requirements. That is a priority need, as was demonstrated in the last Session of Parliament, when I tabled an early-day motion which received the cross-party support of no fewer than 336 hon. Members. It was the 11th most strongly supported early-day motion since records began. Surely that must tell the Government that the House really feels that action should be taken as a matter of priority.

I urge the Government to amend the legislation to bring schools up to the standards of places of work. As I said, Ministers have resisted demands for change on two grounds—cost and excessive work load on the schools. The costs are very small. The training to qualify as a first aider costs roughly £70. A qualification lasts for three years, so for a school of 150 or more pupils and staff, the cost would be £70 spread over three years, or about £25 a year. I appreciate that the Government have made many changes in education, including the introduction of the national curriculum and first aid provision would require extra effort on the part of school administrators and staff. I do not say it lightly, but I believe that that added duty should be introduced because it is a priority—even above some of the duties they are already being asked to undertake.

In allocating that requirement I urge my hon. Friend to consider three things: need, priority and precedent. As I have said, the need is obvious. There are 8,000 serious accidents in schools each year; 8·5 million schoolchildren are vulnerable and, under the voluntary system, three quarters of the schools are not offering the first aid cover that is required legally of industry and commerce. The priority is that old adage, "safety first", and 336 right hon. and hon. Members believe that we must put safety first now as a matter of priority. Finally, there are precedents. The Health and Safety at Work etc Act already applies to industry and commerce, so why should it not apply to schools?

I am asking the Minister to overturn any advice he may have received to continue avoiding the extension of the regulations on the grounds of cost and excess work load. I am asking him to act now in response to a really obvious market need and in response to demands from the House. I am asking him to give 8·5 million schoolchildren in the United Kingdom safety first in their schools now. I very much look forward to a robust reply from my hon. Friend. I hope that he will fill that urgent need for schoolchildren and the priority demand by Members of the House to put safety first.

11.4 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Alan Howarth): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne) on raising on the Adjournment a topic of the greatest interest and importance to us all—the safety of schoolchildren. His championship of first aid in schools is well known. I hope that what I have to say will give him and other hon. Members some reassurance about the seriousness with which the Government approach this question.

The debate covers two separate but related matters—the provision of first aid in schools and the teaching of first aid in the curriculum. I shall deal with each in turn.

First, the debate covers the regulations that govern the provision of first aid in places of employment and how these relate to the situation in schools and other educational establishments. I am sure that the House will agree that, for any such arrangements to be effective, they must be seen as primarily the responsibility of those who are directly providing the services concerned. That is, indeed, the case under our law. The responsibility falls, in the case of maintained schools, to the local education authorities to ensure that proper arrangements are made, and, in the case of other sorts of school, to the relevant governors or other providers of the schools.

I shall go into more detail later about the nature of those legal responsibilities and the moral responsibilities that stem from them. Meanwhile, what implication has this for the role of the Department of Education and Science and other education departments?

There is, first, a valuable inspectorial function to be carried out, and I pay tribute to members of Her Majesty's inspectorate for the work done in their day-to-day monitoring of the system and in the advice they give, drawing on that experience, to authorities.

Secondly, there is a further role for the Department and for other education departments in making sure that the system has available to it an up-to-date and useful range of guidance on all important safety matters. My Department's "Safety in Education" series has provided regular bulletins of advice for teachers to help them to be more aware of the kind of hazards they are likely to meet at their work and to cope with accidents and emergencies occurring at school. I pay tribute to the many teachers who have displayed great presence of mind and great practical skill in some very difficult situations in recent days and particularly last week during the great storm.

We also issue a range of publications going into more detail on particular aspects of safety. The most recent of these, concerned with safety in outdoor education, was published last year. It has been our practice to include in each of these publications a specific section on first aid.

Nevertheless, a little while ago it became clear to the Department that local education authorities and others would benefit from more specific guidance on various matters concerning the provision of first aid. Accordingly, following an extensive consultative exercise that included some extremely valuable assistance given by the St. John Ambulance and the British Red Cross Society, the Department of Education and Science, together with the Welsh Office and in co-operation with the Health and Safety Executive, sent all chief education officers in England and Wales a document of guidance on arrangements for first-aid provision in schools and colleges. At the same time, the document was sent to relevant organisations in the non-LEA sector.

It may be useful if I look briefly at the main content of that document. First, it provided advice on an issue that clearly concerns hon. Members—the background of legislation, regulation and common law. In particular it drew attention to the desirability of paying heed to Health

and Safety Executive guidelines on such matters as the contents of first-aid boxes, and specifically recommended that education authorities should take account of criteria laid down in the approved code of practice stemming from the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

Next, the document gave information on other relevant publications and other useful materials, such as films and videos produced by a range of agencies with an interest in this area, including the Health and Safety Executive, the British Red Cross Society and St. John Ambulance.

Next, we thought it right to lay emphasis on the resources needed for proper first-aid provision and in particular on the need for suitable training for teachers. As the document says:

"it has been a long-standing principle that all teachers should have a basic working knowledge of first aid and for them to be able to recognise situations where medical advice is necessary. It is highly desirable that a proportion of the teaching staff of every school and college should have attended a course of training and have acquired a relevant certificate."

That clearly states the Department's policy over the years on the importance of proper training for teachers in each establishment. The document describes in greater detail what should be done and gives some practical recommendations about particular types of training that may be helpful.

The next section of the document provides guidance on the very important question of procedures, including arrangements for contact with medical and other emergency services, and suggests some practical measures, such as displaying up-to-date lists of addresses and telephone numbers, which could easily be followed and with little resource implicaton. Advice is also provided on procedural matters such as the recording of accidents, which is a most important consideration if lessons for the future are to be learned. There follow sections on the prevention of accidents, on the particular problems created by the AIDS virus and a reference to the particular treatment needed for children with special needs of various kinds.

The final component in the document is a checklist of 15 important questions, which were aimed at individual establishments rather than local education authorities, with the intention of prompting them to think again about their practices and procedures.

I hope that that brief account of the Department's most recent comprehensive publication will reassure my hon. Friend that this is not an issue which the Department is reluctant to consider or on which we are backward in giving a lead.

Mr. John Browne: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Howarth: Will my hon. Friend allow me to proceed? I have little time left.

As my hon. Friend said, our friends in the St. John Ambulance organisation—like my hon. Friend, I pay tribute to Mr. Robert Balchin—reported to us last year on the results of a survey that they had undertaken of a large number of schools, and which, among other things, looked at how the schools were in practice implementing certain of the Department's recommendations, including some of those that I mentioned.

The picture that emerged was mixed, with generally good practice on some issues, such as the response to the AIDS threat, and a less obviously adequate response on other matters, including some simple ones such as the provision of notices about emergency procedures. I am bound to say that, like my hon. Friend, I was disappointed overall by what it indicated—that there was some way to go before we could be confident that the schools and other educational establishments were doing all that they reasonably could to observe the best practice.

My Department has accordingly undertaken a consultation exercise, on the basis of the St. John's findings, with a number of relevant national bodies, including the Health and Safety Executive, the Welsh Office and the main local education authority associations, in order to consider jointly what further steps might sensibly be taken.

We have already received a number of responses to that, but the consultative exercise is not yet complete and it will need to be followed by careful consideration of the options for change or further action.

One obvious subject for further consideration is the regulatory background to first-aid provision in schools. Perhaps I could remind the House what the present position broadly is, as there is a certain amount of mythology on that point. First, it is not the case, as is sometimes claimed, that schools or other educational establishments are exempt from the general provisions of the main relevant statute, the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. I hope that I can reassure my hon. Friend on this important point. Like all other places where people are employed, they are covered by those general requirements, which require employers to have regard for the health and safety not only of employees who are on their premises but of other persons. In the case of schools and colleges, the latter category obviously includes students or pupils who are on the premises.

The confusion has arisen because of the detailed provisions on first aid set out in the approved code of practice accompanying the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981, which come from the 1974 Act. The requirement concerning provision for 150 or more employees is in the code of practice. Again, in the nature of things, that requirement is unlikely to bite other than on the largest schools.

But it is sometimes forgotten that there is another and, in my view, at least equally important legal provision that applies to the schools but does not apply to employment generally. That is the common law doctrine of in loco parentis, which has the effect of placing on those responsible for schools a duty of care towards pupils in their charge of a kind that a responsible parent would expect to carry out.

That is a fact that we shall certainly have to bear in mind in considering the outcome of the consultative process to which I have referred. Would an overt attempt to equate educational institutions more closely with industrial and commercial premises with respect to safety be a positive move in practice? I stress that we shall look at the issue in an open-minded way.

Inevitably, an important consideration in looking at the way forward will be the issue of resources, whether of staffing costs or others, and we shall have to pay careful attention to what the local authority providers say to us on that point. I am sure that there will be many opportunities in the House to look further into those matters.

My hon. Friend also mentioned the importance of first-aid education for pupils taking place in schools. I have no doubt that schools have a significant part to play in providing young people with guidance about first aid.

[Mr. Howarth]

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents has estimated that over 500,000 people are admitted to hospital each year for accidental or other violent injuries. A further 11 million new cases are dealt with by hospital accident and emergency departments annually. Those figures demonstrate the value of first-aid skills among the general population. There is no doubt that they can help enormously in relation to both minor and life-threatening accidents and injuries.

My hon. Friend spoke of the preventive value of first aid in terms of saving health and resources that can be put to better use. He also referred to the work of St. John Ambulance in connection with first-aid education in schools and the fact that he and I recently attended the launch of the new St. John Ambulance video on emergency aid for use in its three cross award.

My Department has been associated with that award since its inception in 1984, the scheme having been launched originally by my noble Friend Lord Joseph when he was Secretary of State for Education and Science. I understand that since then, over 200,000 children have taken part in the award scheme. St. John Ambulance is to be congratulated on the success of the award in such a relatively short space of time.

Whether or not schools cover first aid in the curriculum is, of course, at present a matter for individual schools to determine. That is likely in the main still to be the case under the new national curriculum, but there will be opportunities for schools to cover first aid as a direct result of a number of provisions contained in the national curriculum.

All the foundation subject working groups so far established have been asked to cover relevant aspects of health and safety education in their recommendations. My hon. Friend referred to specific aspects of the national curriculum.

In recent years, education about first aid has increasingly featured in the context of personal and social education. I know that this is often the case with the St. John Ambulance three-cross award. PSE is an area which the Government regard as particularly important. As a result, the National Curriculum Council is in the process of issuing guidance to all schools on the place and content of PSE in the curriculum. I understand that it is likely to include guidance on the need for education about first aid, and that is also to be welcomed.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seventeen minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 2 February 1990

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

Roads (Nottingham)

9.34 am

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): I beg leave to present a petition, collected over only the past three weeks, on behalf of more than 4,500 people living in the constituency of Nottingham, South who will be directly affected by a decision soon to be made by the Secretary of State for Transport.

They acknowledge that there is not a proposal for a major road development that does not upset someone, but when there is the possibility of a dual carriageway through a major open area, even when there is no alternative, you, Mr. Speaker, will understand that they are justifiably worried and deeply concerned, but when there is a viable alternative that takes the road away from the residential area and provides an ideal solution to Nottingham's access problem to and from the great motorway spine——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but he must not make a speech; he should draw attention to the petition.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: The petition reads:

"To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of the residents of the constituency of Nottingham South sheweth:

That there is a need for a balance to be struck between the needs of the countryside and the quality of life for those who live in our towns and cities:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will ensure that proper and due consideration be given to the many thousands of residents within the City of Nottingham who live on the southern bank of the River Trent, who support the modified 'Green' route, known to the Secretary of State for Transport as the 'Purple' route, which they believe is the best resolution of the traffic problems of the City and its southern access.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound will ever pray, etc."

To lie upon the Table.

Orders of the Day

Interest on Debts Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.36 am

Mr. Michael Mates (Hampshire, East): I beg to move, that the Bill be now read a Second time.

This is a Bill to help small businesses. I can guarantee that all hon. Members, whether or not they agree with the merits of the Bill, will agree that this is a time when, above all, small businesses need all the help that we can give them. High interest rates, high mortgages on homes and the introduction of the new business rate have hit the small business man particularly hard. When one adds the slower growth that we are experiencing as a result of matters that we will not want to discuss this morning, I hope that every hon. Member will agree that anything that can be done to help small businesses through this difficult period should be done. That is what I am seeking to do with the Bill.

The Bill aims to tackle the scandal of the late payment of debts—and I hope to be able to show that it has become a scandal. I am seeking to ensure that commercial debts owed to small businesses are settled in due time, and that if they are not, those small businesses will not suffer from late payment but will be able to charge interest.

In a sense, the Bill is unusual because it creates no new offence under civil or criminal law. It does not change the law of contract or the interaction between supplier and manufacturer, and it makes no difference to the operation of the market. It provides that those who do not meet their contractual liability must pay interest for their failure to honour their contracts.

For many people, the Bill has been a long time coming. As long ago as 1978, the Law Commission decided that those who do not pay their bills on time should be liable to interest on their debts. It published a report and draft Bill to support that independent view of some of the best lawyers in the land. Our former colleague, Mr. Richard Ottaway, took up the issue when he was a Member and, no doubt, he will return to it when we see him back on these Benches. He introduced a Bill in 1987 which, unfortunately, was not debated.

Some will wonder why, when the Government have taken some action—for which I commend them—the idea of legislating to create a statutory right of interest has been revived. I have done so not to criticise the Government —they should be praised—but to point out to them as clearly as I can that their action, although an honourable attempt, has been nothing like enough and has not had the effect that they would have wished. The Government produced a pamphlet entitled "Prompt Payment Please!" It showed the way that they sought, by encouraging good practice, to persuade companies voluntarily to settle their debts on time.

"Prompt Payment Please!" was a worthy document and all its sentiments were laudable. It was a genuine attempt to make things better. The Government's words on the front of the document are important because they say under the heading "The Payment Problem":

"There is a special responsibility on large firms to deal fairly with small suppliers, who may be severely damaged by delayed payment".

[Mr. Michael Mates]

The Government's reason for producing this voluntary code of practice is primarily to help the small business man and, as such, it is entirely commendable. Alas, it has not been successful.

All the great and the good signed up. The document stated:

"Industry Supports Payment on Time."

It continued:

"the Department of Employment, in conjunction with the Confederation of British Industry, Institute of Directors, Association of British Chambers of Commerce and Institute of Purchasing and Supply published 'Payment on Time', a booklet offering practical guidance to suppliers and buyers."

That was thoroughly laudable.

I am a little reluctant to mention names in my comments on the scandal of late payment and I am determined not to abuse my parliamentary privilege in doing so. But so notorious is one of these large companies that I feel that I must mention it because it is such an outstanding example of what is wrong and what the Bill could put right. It is the General Electric Company plc. It signed up to the document and agreed with the principle that it should pay debts on time. In the document, the company stated:

"The separate units of this Group operate autonomously and make purchases through their own buying departments. They are required by Head Office to settle accounts, whether with big or small firms, in accordance with contractual arrangements."

I mention GEC because of the hundreds of letters that I have received. Many people have complained about this firm and its notoriety in not settling its debts on time. I see from their indications of assent that other hon. Members have received similar complaints.

Having made this accusation, I must back it up. One of GEC's subsidiaries, Marconi, issued a letter last November which stated:

"There has recently been some confusion with our suppliers with regard to the credit terms that Marconi used to pay invoices. To clarify the situation, I have to inform you that Marconi's standard credit terms for all suppliers are 90 days' credit. Under no circumstances are we now able to agree to terms less than that."

That answers the first of the objections that my hon. Friend the Member of State raised on the "Today" programme this morning when he said that he feared that, if the Bill became law, more and more large companies would extend their terms because they had to pay interest and that, instead of the norm being about 30 days, it might grow to 60 or 90 days.

That is happening anyway. It is happening not because of my Bill, or even the threat of this legislation, but because of what is happening in the commercial world. Times are getting tough; interest rates are high; and large suppliers are screwing down their small suppliers even harder. I do not quarrel with that, because I do not want to interfere in this interchange. I certainly do not want to distort the contractual arrangements that are made between the big business man and the small business man. However, as that is happening anyway, the little man will be better off if he knows that on the 91st day—in Marconi's case—he will get interest. I say that because of the evidence that I have received. I will not name the people who have written to me because they want to continue doing business with these companies and do not want to be discriminated against for having come to me. I have undertaken to protect their confidentiality. If any hon. Member wants to see their letters, they are available at my side.

Although Marconi is demanding 90 days' credit, it is not paying up until after about 150 days have passed.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Does not the significance of my hon. Friend's comments lie in the fact that in this specific case—there are many others—the company that receives the goods dictates the payment terms and specifies 90 days? I remember when the terms were a matter of negotiation and agreement between supplier and customer. Does my hon. Friend agree that there is too much evidence today of the customer dictating not just specifications and delivery but terms of payment?

Mr. Mates: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. He has reinforced my point about the need for this sanction. I have evidence that the average period for Marconi is 150 days and I have evidence of payment as late as 170 days —about six months. If that is what GEC means by the fine words in the document

"It is our policy that contractual arrangements should be met"

I am a Dutchman.

I should like to read another letter because it shows what goes on. It is from a small business man who wrote to me in support of my Bill. He said:

"However there is one practice which I find very irritating, and which seems to be indulged in notably by companies in the GEC group. This is a sort of progressive 'taking advantage' which operates as follows:

(1) The officer who actually wants to buy negotiates a price. Usually a discount will be asked for"—

that is fine—

"(2) Then the purchasing department tries to negotiate a lower price, and longer payment terms.

(3) Then even those longer payment terms are ignored and the company takes as long as they like to pay."

The man went on to say:

"The whole business is a bit ludicrous, because they place so much stress on negotiating payment terms but then just ignore them. Apart from costing money, this makes it quite impossible to quote reasonably and to predict finances. It also wastes my time in negotiations which I know to be meaningless anyway."

If that is not a cause for doing more to put these things right, I do not know what is.

I have another letter that arrived this morning and which I have not quite finished reading. It is addressed to Lord Monson in the other place and is about his comments about large companies deliberately putting off payment to smaller companies. I shall not bore the House by reading the whole letter, because it rehearses old arguments, but at the bottom, it states:

"Examples given: 45 days late—not too bad. Our current age of debt is approximately 87 days, although our trading terms are 30 days.

45 days—not too bad

The Army, four months"—

by that, the writer means the Ministry of Defence—

"GEC, seven months."

That is a scandal and the House should be doing something about it.

While getting ready to present the Bill, I had cause to talk to the press. At that stage, I had from Rolls-Royce a letter, which I want to share with the House. As I said at the time, I believe that what Rolls-Royce did in this case, although indicative of the need for my Bill, was thoroughly

honourable in that it had at least kept its suppliers informed of what was happening. The letter, addressed to all suppliers, says:

"Dear Sirs, You will be aware that in the fourth quarter of 1989, Rolls-Royce was adversely affected by two major industrial disputes—one at Boeing and one at our own facility at Hillington."

The letter then describes the difficulties that Rolls-Royce has been having and says:

"However, we must look to our Suppliers to share in the cost of this problem. Accordingly, we will be delaying payments due to Suppliers by one week, commencing at the end of January, for a period of eight weeks. I can confirm that there is no suggestion of passing on the full impact of the disputes to our Suppliers."

I suppose that they are meant to be grateful for that. The letter continues:

"We are advising you of this action in advance so that you can make the necessary arrangements."

That letter was courteous and fair, and I understand that Rolls-Royce has a good relationship with its suppliers. I am not seeking to knock the firm, but I want to point out that the letter is a unilateral breach of contract for which the small man has no redress.

The House may consider it even more significant that, as a result of this case appearing in newspapers, I had a telephone call from Mr. Dominic Sheahy who is the director of public affairs. He wrote a letter in which he said that he did not want there to be any misunderstanding and that Rolls-Royce had taken that action with regret. I repeated that I thought that the firm had been honourable —and rather more honourable than other large firms—in telling its suppliers about the position. However, I pointed out that the firm was unilaterally in breach of contract. He said that it was, but that it could not help it. I asked what the position would be if my Bill were law, so that Rolls-Royce had to pay interest because it was paying a debt late, in breach of contract. He said that if the Bill were law, there would be no point in the firm undertaking that operation because there would be nothing in it for Rolls-Royce. If that is the case, I am interested to know why the Government oppose the Bill. For the life of me, I cannot see the reason.

I want to emphasise that all my examples are cases where there is no dispute over the invoice or the goods. That is another matter with which my Bill does not seek to interfere. They are simply cases of late payment. I want to give credit where it is due. Marks and Spencer pays all its suppliers within seven days of receiving the invoice. That is its standard practice and it keeps it through thick and thin. If it does not, its management wants to know why. If Marks and Spencer can do that, why cannot other firms, such as Marconi, GEC and Rolls-Royce?

The Government are not innocent in the matter. I do not want to put words into their mouth, but that may be why they are reluctant to support the Bill. The terms of the Bill will apply to central and local government. I know of one Ministry of Defence contractor on a major project who has simply stopped working on it because he has not been paid. He has walked off the site and has said that he is not coming back until he is paid. That is a special case about which I heard only yesterday and I have my own ways to take up the matter with the Ministry of Defence to find out what has gone wrong. Nevertheless, I feel wholly justified in quoting that case to the House. When such incidents happen, some of the sub-contractors are the worst hit, because they are not paid as a result of the main contractor remaining unpaid, which simply accentuates the problem.

A vet has told me that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food pays 30 days late as a matter of routine. The vet works regularly as a licensed veterinary inspector. He submits his invoices regularly and they are always paid 30 days beyond the due date. I find it odd that the Government should publish a code of practice urging prompt settlement of debts when they are not paying their own debts on time. It is even odder that the Government seek to defend those practices while they insist that those of us who do not pay our tax or VAT on time are charged interest on our debts and there is no messing around on that because the process is automatic. What is sauce for the goose should be sauce for the gander.

The problem of non-payment is so bad that some companies have ceased to do business with big companies or with the Government because of late payment. J. J. Hamilton and Sons of Oxford have ceased working with a major building contractor just because they are always paid late. As I am sure many of my hon. Friends know, some companies have ceased trading because of late payment. A sad example brought to my notice is a company called Rathoprint of Greenock, which had traded for 17 years. In the end, its bankers refused to sustain its overdraft because it regarded the debts that the company was owed as too old. That is one of the main difficulties that face small firms and one of the reasons why I believe that the Bill is important. It will give small companies an additional confidence with their own bankers. They run up against banks that tell them not to pay their own bills while they wait for the big man to pay them. They are reluctant to do that, as I should be.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I am sure that we all respect my hon. Friend for introducing this Bill. My hon. Friend is a fair man and I am sure that he would not want to give the impression that this is simply a conflict between small business and big business. He has, no doubt, seen the press release from the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, which represents 98 chambers of commerce with 76,000 members, many of them small business men, who voted 3:1 that they were unable to support this legislation. I am sure that my hon. Friend would not want to give a false impression.

Mr. Mates: I do not intend to give a false impression and I shall come to all the objections, if my hon. Friend will be patient.

The banks regard debts of three months or more as likely to be bad debts, so they threaten the company concerned with closure. I am rather surprised by that, because the banks themselves benefit from late payments because of the enormous interest they charge us on our overdrafts. It is important to ask why debts are not paid on time when there is no dispute about the goods, the services or the invoice. The basic reason, as I have mentioned, is that large businesses have something to gain by not paying their sub-contractors on time, keeping their money in the bank—or hoping to borrow more—and earning interest for as long as possible.

I believe that it is necessary to focus these proposals on small businesses, as what is seen by a small firm as a large debt is seen by a big company as a small debt. It is of no importance to one of the large plcs that somebody is owed

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£5,000 when its total debts may amount to millions of pounds, but to that man, the £5,000 might be the difference between life and death, between being able to pay his mortgage or having his house repossessed, and between being able to stay in business or to go out of business. The human side of this may have been overlooked in the welter of figures that have come out. The point of the Bill is that liability of interest as a right makes it no longer worth a company's while not to pay on time. Companies will have nothing to gain.

I believe that that answers the second point made by my hon. Friend the Minister on the radio this morning when he said that he doubted whether the proposal would be enforceable. I do not believe that it will need to be enforced. Most of the companies about which we are talking, and certainly central and local government, are law abiding. Public limited companies have to obey the law, or they can be had up for it at their annual general meeting. If the Bill were to become law, not only would companies obey it, but, as in the case of the company I mentioned, they could dismantle a large office that is employed solely to delay payment on the basis that a simple calculation has been made that the company can earn more by keeping its money on deposit while paying two or three people to juggle the bills around and to wait until the writs arrive. That would come to an end because there would be nothing in it for the company. After all, businesses are pragmatic organisations.

The statistics vary but there is no doubt that the problem is getting worse—another shot at the argument that we do not need the Bill. Dun and Bradstreet, the largest debt collectors in the country, conducted a survey, in which 77 per cent. of the 500 firms questioned said that they would be able to reduce their bank borrowing if their bills were paid on time.

It may help the House if I cite a few examples. Mr. Peter Valentine of CASMU Contracts wrote to me and said that he is owed £500,000 in overdue payments—one quarter of his turnover. He has calculated that he is spending £25,000 a year on interest, purely as a consequence of unpaid bills. Of that £500,000, a total of £152,882 is owed in overdue payments by just six large firms. I ask the Minister to imagine what effect that has on a small man struggling to make his way. I hope that I have shown conclusively that the Government's code of practice is simply not working.

A business man from the Isle of Wight wrote me a fairly long letter saying that he had tried to raise the problem before:

"I should therefore like to add my wholehearted support for your campaign in the hope that this time you may achieve something more positive than David Trippier's ineffectual pamphlet, 'Payment on Time'."

I shall not join the criticism of my hon. Friend who is now the Minister for the Environment and Countryside because what he did was laudable. It was right to approach the problem on a voluntary basis at first. But I hope that I have been able to show the House that that has not been enough. It may have made some difference, but we must now tackle the problem in a more robust way and bring large businesses and central and local government to account.

One might think from all the examples that I have cited that all those who have anything to do with small businesses would be in favour with the scheme. I am sorry to say that not all of them are as strongly in favour of my Bill as the Forum of Private Business, the Institute of Directors, the National Chamber of Trade and the Union of Independent Companies. It is most significant that the Institute of Directors, which represents directors of large, medium-sized and small firms should have changed its mind. I hope that all my hon. Friends have received a copy of the IOD's parliamentary brief. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] It was in the mail this morning. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I did not post it. *[Interruption.]* I do not want to go down a blind alley.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): Our secretaries are reading it now.

Mr. Mates: I must say that I thought to myself, "What the hell is this doing arriving on a Friday morning?" I sent my research assistant to the wastepaper basket and we discovered that it had been posted first-class on Monday so I do not blame the Institute of Directors, although its late arrival is an interesting comment on the times in which we live.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Perhaps that is another reason for late payment—that cheques do not arrive through the post on time.

Mr. Mates: I think that if it was a question of postal delays, no business would seek to charge interest, so great would be the sigh of relief that the payments were close to being on time.

The IOD's letter is interesting:

"Thank you for sending us details of your Bill. As you know, the IOD has always opposed legislation on this subject in the past as an unwarranted interference in freedom of contract which, in any event would not have had the effects desired by its proponents. . . . Your Bill, however,"—

some of my hon. Friends may not quite realise this—

"differs from previous proposals in two significant respects . . . Thanks to these changes, your proposal is better targeted, more likely to be effective and more compatible with freedom of contract."

I hope that the Minister has received the letter—I believe that I sent him a copy—in which the IOD explains its change of heart. I note that he is completely dumb.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): The hon. Gentleman did not have the benefit of seeing the Minister's face when he produced the Institute of Directors' letter; he showed some shock at the hon. Gentleman's revelation. I think that we may conclude that he has not yet received it, but no doubt he will ensure that the civil servants in the Box provide him with it as quickly as possible.

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Mr. Tim Eggar): For the avoidance of doubt and the discomfiture of the leader of the SLD, let me make it clear that I opened my mail at 8 o'clock this morning, and among the letters that I received was one from the IOD.

Mr. Ashdown: In that case—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. We cannot have interventions on interventions.

Mr. Mates *rose*——

Mr. Ashdown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mates: Certainly.

Mr. Ashdown *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman did not hear me the first time. It is not our practice to allow interventions on interventions.

Mr. Mates: I would not challenge your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I thought that I was on my feet and had given way to the right hon. Gentleman. I trust that you will allow me to do so now.

Mr. Ashdown *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Mr. Ashdown.

Mr. Ashdown: I thought that the hon. Gentleman might like to know that perhaps the Minister's look of surprise came from the fact that although he had received the letter, he had not yet read it.

Mr. Mates: I should have listened to your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I stand corrected.

Among those not in favour of my Bill is the National Federation of Self-Employed and Small Businesses. I find that most surprising as I have received letters from many members of that federation all of whom have said that they are 100 per cent. in favour of the measure. At a meeting of many small businesses at which I was present, Mr. George Thorpe of the national federation said that he ran a small business and that he was so fed up with late payment by local government with which he mostly dealt, that he had simply refused to work for local authorities any more. He made those remarks in the context of his opposition to the Bill. I find that a little difficult to understand, but perhaps he, too, had not realised how different this Bill is from the Law Commission's Bill and the Bill that Richard Ottaway attempted to introduce four years ago. One must ask whether in this case headquarters speaks for its members.

Let me now come to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh). Less puzzling to me now that I have learnt more about the matter is the fact that the Association of British Chambers of Commerce is not in favour, although more than a dozen individual chambers of commerce, not all members of the association, have indicated their full support. I started to understand why the association is against the Bill when I realised to what extent large companies are members—often controlling members—of chambers of commerce in their areas. One must not look at the association as purely a small business organisation.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): My hon. Friend will have seen the press release from the Association of British Chambers of Commerce which says that nine out of 10 of its members have small businesses.

Mr. Mates: I did not say that the majority were not small businesses. I said that some of the controlling members—those who get the chairmanships and offices —come from large businesses. I am not cavilling at that; I am simply pointing it out, and I want to give the House an example.

A small business man wrote to me to say:

"All the best with your 'prompt payment' Bill. I run a tiny firm—two part-time girls and me part time also yet I am owed over £30,000 beyond my 30 day settlement request (¼ of my turnover)".

The business man enclosed a cutting from *The Northern Echo*, which deals with my Bill and the ABCC's view of it:

"Mr. Giles' views are held by the Association of British Chambers of Commerce which yesterday told small firms minister Tim Eggar it cannot support Mr. Mates' Bill."

The small business man has written on the cutting:

"Little wonder Chamber of Commerce are against it—they are the people sitting on my money. Have no sympathy with them."

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): My hon. Friend has quoted the example of a real small business, so it is important that we know how he defines "small business" in terms of the numbers of people employed.

Mr. Mates: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am coming to that point, but first I am trying to give some illustrations to show the necessity for the Bill before I take the House, as briefly as I can, through the mechanics of what I am trying to do.

One reason why some small business organisations have not come round to my point of view is the speed with which we have had to conduct our campaign prior to today. Members of those organisations have not had time to realise the differences in this Bill and to make their views known to their headquarters. I have no complaint about that, because that is the system that faces us with measures in private Members' time. Another argument for allowing the Bill its Second Reading is that that will allow us a month for mature reflection before we go into Committee. That will give us time for various views to surface and for them to be properly presented. The Minister knows full well that I am not seeking to override any properly conceived views, and that my willingness to meet him almost anywhere to get just some part of the way down this road is absolutely boundless—*[Interruption.]* I do not know whether hon. Members are laughing about my reasonableness. Perhaps that is what I am so well known for.

The mechanics of the Bill are simple. It establishes a statutory right to interest on commercial debts owed by central and local government and all the agencies that act for them, and by nationalised industries and large companies—that is, those that are not small and medium-sized enterprises as defined in the Companies Act 1985. There is a clear distinction between small and medium-sized enterprises for accounting purposes, based on criteria of turnover, capitalisation and the size of the work force. Any enterprise that meets any two of those three criteria qualifies in accounting terms and in the way in which its accounts are presented and its tax is paid. Therefore, there is already a clear distinction in law. Those companies that are in the category of small and medium-sized enterprises will not be affected by the legislation except, of course, as beneficiaries.

Interest would run from the payment date agreed in the contract. Once again, I am not attempting in any way to interfere with the way in which contracts are arrived at and negotiations are carried out. The Bill simply states that if no contract date is specified, the interest will run from 28 days after the demand for payment has been made.

I have made two important changes to the provisions in the Law Commission's draft Bill, First, small and medium-sized enterprises, as I have defined them, would not be statutorily liable for interest on overdue payments. I shall explain that in a moment. Secondly, companies will not be able to exclude any right to interest in the contract. The reason for the first change—the exclusion of small and medium-sized enterprises from the statutory interest scheme—is that the bulk of those that pay late are large

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companies, not small ones. In addition I am anxious that the Bill should impose as little in the way of additional bureaucracy on small businesses as possible.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): I am interested in the comment that my hon. Friend has just made, because therein lies a fundamental flaw in what he is proposing. I say that, although I support the Bill. When I was at agricultural college, we were told that suppliers were a source of credit. In those balmy days, suppliers used to give farmers—I am one—a discount if they paid promptly. I am afraid that those days are gone, which is regrettable. My hon. Friend's case would be a great deal stronger if the concept of interest payable on outstanding debt were to apply to everyone, and not relate only to big businesses that are paying small businesses.

Mr. Mates: If that applied to everyone, it would, indeed, be a counsel of perfection. My hon. Friend is right. In logic, the provision should apply to everyone. However, I ask him to look at what would happen when the chain broke down, because that is why I decided to restrict the provision. Companies such as Rolls-Royce, Marconi and GEC, pay their bills late simply for internal accounting reasons and because they would like to make a bit more money from their cash flow, but when the chain breaks down at a lower level, it adds to people's woes. If one small business man cannot pay another on time because he has been let down, the interest continues to accrue and the small business man gets into an ever bigger slough of despond. We must remember that some of these enterprises consist of only two or three people working part time. As the additional bureaucracy involved in extending the application of the provision would be unreasonable, on the whole, it is better to leave small businesses out. However, if arguments were raised about that in Committee, I should listen to them, as I have already advised my hon. Friend the Minister that I shall listen to him.

Mr. Leigh: I am grateful to my hon. Frienf for giving way again. He is most generous. I should like to put a point to him in the robust language of the market place. The director of the Coventry chamber of commerce, which represents 1,800 small firms, has written:

"It is also our own experience that small companies are every bit as likely to pay slowly as large ones and when it comes to absolute refusal to pay, they come top of the league.

We have no current mandate from the membership to support this Bill and I must warn that, once the legal experts translate your aspirations into statute, the by-products in terms of 'buggeration' are more easily handled by large firm accountants than by the small trader."

Mr. Mates: I am most interested in the temperate language of the Coventry chamber of commerce, which I should have hesitated to use. However, it is evidently wrong, because no legal experts will do any picking over and there will be no increase in bureaucracy for small businesses because the provsion will not apply to them. My hon. Friend has just produced a resoundingly clear argument in favour of my distinction between small and medium-sized firms, which will not be affected by the liability to pay interest. They will suffer no difference——

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Mates: Yes, but I am trying to make the point that many people who have written about the Bill have got their facts wrong.

Mr. Favell: Will my hon. Friend take it from me that he puts his Bill in jeopardy with that provision, because some people, such as myself, believe that prompt payment is a good thing and should apply to everybody?

Mr. Mates: I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend. It is a counsel of perfection. However, my hon. Friend must ask himself whether it is better to try to introduce a massive change such as that—he may say yes——

Mr. Favell: Yes.

Mr. Mates: —or that the alternative is better, which is to do nothing and not to try to beef up what the Government have done which is being so blatantly ignored by so many large businesses which, frankly, should know better. I am aware that I am not going as far as some people would like, but I hope that my hon. Friend will come with me part of the way down the road. If, in a year or two, we find that the provisions are working so well that we can extend them, that will be another matter. My hon. Friend might even be as lucky—or as unlucky—in the ballot as I have been.

Some of the Bill's critics have misunderstood the right to interest. Any company statutorily entitled to interest could waive its rights if it so chose. Likewise, if someone owes me money and I choose not to charge interest on it, I am free to do so. If that is my relationship or friendship with the supplier I can opt out of the provisions. What the Bill states is that the big man cannot opt out of his liability. Again, that is an advantage for the small man, which I hope that the House will feel is a reasonable way to go about things.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): How does my hon. Friend reconcile that apparent voluntary opting out with his desire in the Bill to have no opting out of the right to statutory interest?

Mr. Mates: I have made it quite clear that the creditor can opt out in just the same way as if my hon. Friend owed me £100 and I chose to say, "Give me only £50" because I like the cut of his jib so much. I am free to do that. It is a freedom which a person who is owed money has always had. He can ignore the debt if he wants to. However, the Bill must not allow the big man to opt out of his liability by contract because the whole thing would be rendered worthless if that were to happen. Indeed that ability was included in the Law Commission's proposals and in the Bill that Richard Ottaway sought to introduce.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): While I agree with my hon. Friend that the big man should not be allowed to opt out, it is, in my experience—I declare an interest as chairman of a group of companies that often deals with medium-sized companies tha are often under-capitalised—the medium-sized companies that are the worst offenders in this area. They take credit from other suppliers, which they would not be able to get from the bank, and they do not have to pay for it. From my reading of the Bill at the moment, I understand that quite a lot of those companies will be outside the provisions that we are discussing.

Mr. Mates: Yes, we are about to come to a point on which we can have a useful debate both this morning and in Committee. I am not saying that the Bill is perfection. I have acknowledged the counsel of perfection already. The logical conclusion of what several hon. Members have said would be to make the provision apply to everybody, but I do not think that that is practical politics. The large firms instigated, in conjunction with the Government, a voluntary code of practice. We should seek to regulate them first because, statistically, they are the worst offenders.

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend said that his decision not to allow opting out was in the Law Commission's proposals. Paragraph 99 of its proposals says:

"We have concluded that an agreement to exclude the right to statutory interest should be no less effective than a provision for the payment of contractual interest, at whatever rate. The creditor should not be entitled to recover statutory interest where the right to it has been excluded by contract. We recommend accordingly."

Would my hon. Friend like to reconsider?

Mr. Mates: That was written in another day—1978. I have read to the House a letter from Marconi saying that it automatically increased the period from 30 to 90 days. If it then added that no statutory interest would be payable if it were late, which it would do, the Bill would become meaningless. I came to that conclusion largely because of the change in climate during the past 12 years.

I have taken the rate of interest payable on the debt which already applies. It is the rate of judgment debt—currently 15 per cent.—which is set by the Government from time to time and varies as circumstances change. The rate is well understood. It is the same rate that we have to pay if we are late in paying our tax or VAT. Once again, it is sauce for the goose as well as sauce for the gander.

Let me rehearse some of the arguments of those who are against the Bill or have reservations about it. Some particular points of difficulty have been raised and I shall be more than happy to listen to arguments in Committee, to consult all those involved and to make changes that are seen to be necessary.

The first fundamental argument against the Bill is that it is both unnecessary and undesirable. Some say that it is unnecessary because the problems are exaggerated, that there is no great problem and that such problems as exist are caused as much by small companies being poorly run as by large companies choosing not to pay on time. All the small business organisations accept, as I do, that, in the long-term, education in financial management is important. However one considers the statistics, it is clear that there is a problem and that it is getting worse. Some people seem to forget that those who fail routinely to pay within the agreed time are routinely in breach of the law of contract. That should not continue.

The second argument is that it is undesirable for Parliament to impose extra regulations on industry and commerce. I have covered most of that with some of the examples that I have given. I have great respect for that argument. It has merit and I do not dismiss it lightly. The weakness in the argument is that we have tried the voluntary way. I hope that I have shown the House that the voluntary way does not work I see no alternative to legislation.

I dealt with the argument that the measure will be unenforceable in referring to what my hon. Friend the Minister of State said on the radio this morning. I shall make two points briefly. I am sorry to have detained the House for so long. First, the Minister is well aware that only three countries in the European Community apart from Britain do not have some form of legislation covering late payment of contract debt. They are Greece, Portugal and Ireland. I make no comment about that, in case we run into other arguments about the Community. I simply state the fact and ask the House to bear it in mind.

Legislation on late payment of debt will come. When the time comes, there will be a harmonised practice, just as there will be a single market. It is almost unthinkable that harmonisation will not happen. My argument is that we must put something on the statute book now so that we start from a position where we have a modest base. We should not be one of the few countries that does not have legislation. To have legislation would be greatly to the Government's advantage, as well as ours.

Many people say that the Bill would impose a great deal more work on the courts. That would be important if it were true. If it were true, I doubt whether I should be here today. I have consulted about it. Dun and Bradstreet advised me about it. It does more debt collection and, presumably, more court appearances than anyone else. It is absolutely sure that the Bill would not impose more work on the courts. On the contrary, it might save court time. No one will go to court to obtain the interest that I propose should be charged. People will have to go to court for the debt. That would be subject to precisely the same process as we have today—cajolement, persuasion, threats and writs.

Mr. Favell: The only way in which one can claim interest, unless it happens to be provided for in the contract, is by obtaining a judgment debt. The only way to start interest running is to go to the courts.

Mr. Mates: That is what my Bill will avoid. It will unclog the courts. If the interest has started to run statutorily, no one will have to go to court. I am grateful to my hon. Friend who makes that point from his experience. That is another good reason why my hon. Friend the Minister should withdraw his opposition to the Bill, if he can. It is a free country. It is Friday today, he can do what he likes. This is private Members' time. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) made that point so potently. The Bill would create considerably less clogging of the courts.

The Bill will not impose a great burden on industry. Far from it; once everyone has accepted the legislation, it will be a once-and-for-all exercise. That is a most important point. Once late debt became liable to interest there would be no cause for firms to continue to pay late. There would be a vast unleashing of funds once and for all into the system. Large companies would pay on time and that would go all the way down the chain of debt. Hon. Members may be interested to know that the current debt sloshing around the system is £57 billion. That is a huge sum of money. By breaching that dam once, everyone, particularly at the bottom end of the chain—the people we wish to help—would have the chance to draw breath. From then on, even if the terms of contracts were changed and longer terms were negotiated, people could be certain that they would be paid or, if they were not paid, that it would not cost them money.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): My hon. Friend is generous in giving way. He has presented his Bill

[Mr. Anthony Nelson]

persuasively and with a conciliatory attitude. May I stir matters a little by suggesting, as one of the sponsors of the Bill, that it would be a gross political error of judgment, which would be widely misunderstood outside the House if Ministers and Conservative Members—both those who are here and those who are not here—prevented the Bill from proceeding either by a closure or a vote on Second Reading? If this Bill cannot be supported, what can be supported? We have all received representation in support of it.

Mr. Mates: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's remarks which, no doubt, my hon. Friend the Minister has heard.

The cynic in me tells me that some attempts may be made to prevent my Bill from receiving a Second Reading and that some hon. Members may have come here to speak against it. I hope that they are now better informed and that they will not raise matters that are not really problems, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle, did, in all innocence. The letter to which he referred to is fundamentally wrong. If we have cleared up some misunderstandings, perhaps hon. Members who thought that they would help the Government by coming here today will go home and have a good lunch with their wives.

This is not a party political matter—and in saying that, I am not trying to highlight the solitary miseries of the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish). I am very grateful that he has come along.

If there are any serious flaws in the Bill—and there always are flaws in any Bill that has not been drafted by the Government—if the Government want changes and think that I have gone too far, and if they think that they should set the example, I am prepared to listen to all the arguments. I am not telling the House that only the Bill as drafted will satisfy me. However, I want us to take one pace down the road of good practice. The voluntary way has been tried, but it has not worked, as I hope that I have shown. The time is right for some form of legislation. However small a step we take, we shall all take it to help the small business man during this particular difficult period of his life.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This morning we have learned of the speech made by the President of South Africa, in which he announced the unconditional release of Nelson Mandela on a date soon to be fixed and the removal of the ban on the African National Congress and of 33 other groups——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. What is the hon. Gentleman's point of order?

Mr. Hughes: My point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is whether, the Government will arrange, through the usual channels, for a very early opportunity for the House to respond to that news.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It is not the responsibility of the occupant of the Chair to arrange for statements to be made. Doubtless the hon. Gentleman's remarks have been heard.

Mr. Hughes: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I thought that I had made it clear that the hon. Gentleman had not raised a proper point of order.

Mr. Hughes: I raised the matter, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because there has been no indication this morning that any statement is to be made. The urgency of the matter arises from the interrelationship between the announcement and the current visit to South Africa of the Minister for Overseas Development. She has, perfectly properly, put on record the Government's views in respect of the current tour by British sportsmen and the problems that it has caused. If the Government can find an opportunity to make a statement today, a united, across-the-House view could be represented to those who are undermining the steps being taken in South Africa, which would be widely welcome. I hope that the announcement is deemed to be sufficiently important for the Government to make a response in this House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has had a good run at this, and doubtless his remarks have been heard by Ministers.

10.32 am

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): Given the lack of attendance by my right hon. and hon. Friends, I am enternally grateful to the hon. Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) for remarking that the measure before the House is not political, only technical. I therefore feel slightly more at ease giving a brief resume of our views.

The hon. Member for Hampshire, East referred to the scandal of late payment.

Mr. Favell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is absolutely outrageous that the leader of the Liberal party, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), remained in the Chamber only for as long as a bogus point of order was made by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), and then left. Certain people are abusing the Standing Orders of this House for the purpose of achieving television coverage.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman makes an allegation that may or may not be unfounded.

Mr. Couchman: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It seems to me that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) raised his bogus point of order to exploit the televising of our proceedings. He may be the hero of the Rose theatre, but he is not the hero of this Chamber on this Friday morning.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The House should resume debate on the Bill.

Mr. McLeish: I am more and more impressed by the excitement being engendered this morning, and I am encouraged to attend on a few more Fridays, to participate in such activities.

While the hon. Member for Hampshire, East, and I may differ as to the extent of the scandal of late payment, no-one disputes the fact that it is becoming an increasing burden for a large number of small firms. I hope that the Minister, when he responds, will go further than was suggested in *The Daily Telegraph* of 26 January, which stated:

"The Government says it is adopting a 'neutral' approach to the Bill. But Tim Eggar, small companies minister, is

making it clear the Government is against the measure and there is concern that he will use the differences to argue the Bill has only limited support."

It would be a mistake for the Minister to adopt that approach. Although there are differences of opinion about the Bill's implications, that will always be the case with any legislation that is brought before the House.

We can surely agree that there is a problem, and that was emphasised in a debate in April 1987, when the then Minister with responsibility for small businesses, the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Mr. Trippier), said:

"First, we agree that there is a serious problem. During my time as Minister responsible for small firms, few issues have struck me as forcibly as this."—[*Official Report*, 10 April 1987; Vol. 114, c. 641.]

The Bill attempts to highlight the best way of tackling that problem

The hon. Member for Hampshire, East, referred also to the history of the matter, which stretchs back to the then Lord Chancellor's interest in 1974 and the Law Commission's report in 1978. Certain changes were made in the Administration of Justice Act 1985, but otherwise Governments of both parties have resorted to codes of practice to encourage prompt payments of business debts.

Efforts to improve the situation were also made by the Confederation of British Industry in 1980 and by the Department of Employment, together with business community groups, in 1986, with a document on prompt settlement of business debts. While all those efforts were helpful, the incidence of late payment has dramatically increased. It is difficult to gauge the scale of the problem, but no doubt the hon. Member for Hampshire, East, has much evidence that he has not been able to put before the House to support that contention.

The problem with voluntary arrangements is that they have no statutory back-up, and in an environment in which many small businesses feel that they are the victims of creditors, it is clear that something more significant must be done. In essence, there is compelling common sense in the hon. Gentleman's proposals, but I sense that many right hon. and hon. Members are concerned about the practical aspects of his Bill. Nevertheless, we can all embrace a basic sense of justice.

The problem dealt with by the Bill has been simmering in this House and in the business community for 10 or 12 years, and one wonders why no decision has been taken to deal with it more effectively. I hope that the Bill will receive a Second Reading, because while it may present practical difficulties, it will bring to an end a debate that has simmered on without any conclusions being reached. The Government's activities have been littered with documents such as "Prompt Payment Please!", but it is evident that they have had no effect in the business community.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): If the Opposition support the Bill, why is it that not a single Member of the hon. Gentleman's party, other than the Whip on duty, is in the Chamber with him today?

Mr. McLeish: In view of the number of hon. Members who wish to speak I shall treat that intervention with the contempt that it deserves.

I was about to quote the right hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Cope) who states in the document "Prompt Payment Please!":

"Everyone in business is concerned about cash-flow. Firms of all sizes need to receive prompt payment, but small firms are more vulnerable and do not often have the cash reserves to carry debts."

That highlights the reason why the Bill should be supported.

There is increased pressure on small businesses. In an earlier debate this week we talked about interest rates, the prospects of the uniform business rate and the coming together of a number of pressures which make cash-flow more complex and difficult at present. A low level of indebtedness or late payment has a disproportionate impact on many small businesses. They do not have the overheads and apparatus which big companies have to deal with their particular burdens.

There is evidence that not only are large companies, Government, and local authorities indulging in late payments, but they are building it into their systems and institutions. A few hon. Members may have seen a press report earlier this week on Lothian health board in Scotland which—in its eyes—is suffering from cash cuts. I do not want to go into the merits of the National Health Service, but the health board has gone on public record as saying that it will get through to the end of the financial year by not paying its Bills. It is scandalous that a public authority such as that should state publicly, after a board meeting, that it will not be paying its debts on time as a way of helping its cash-flow until the end of the financial year.

The most telling reason why the Bill should be supported relates to the experience of small companies with these difficulties. I have a letter from a managing director sent to my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) who has kindly allowed me to use it in this debate. It states:

"I am pleased to learn from the Forum of Private Business of which I am a member, that you support Michael Mates' Private Member's Bill 'Interest on Debts'.

Given the importance of this proposed legislation to the small business community at large I am writing to ask you to demonstrate this support by attending the Bill's Second Reading on February 2.

It would be a tragedy to see such worthy proposals jeopardised by a poor attendance in the House so I trust you will do your utmost to support the Bill. This business owes less than £10,000 to suppliers the rest being paid by direct debit. We are owed an average of £200,000 per month every month of the year and if this Bill were to go through Parliament it would change our business from standing still to one capable of expansion."

That is a practical illustration of the fact that if there were a faster movement of payment in the business community many companies would feel the financial benefit which would allow them not only to expand, but possibly create more jobs in the process.

The efforts that have been made have had no real impact on what is happening. The Bill is symbolic of Parliament's anxiety about what is happening and, more importantly, it is a demonstration that the Government, who frequently say that they support small businesses, actually do so. The Bill gives them the opportunity, not to welcome the measure with open arms, but to take it into Committee, as the hon. Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) suggested. If that were done, many other aspects could be discussed. We are discussing a principle, which is why the Bill should be supported.

The debate will send a clear message to the business community that the House is angry about what is happening, especially in relation to central Government

[Mr. McLeish]

and the corporate sector. Someone suggested that we are talking about morality in business. It cannot be right for companies to institutionalise processes which they know, by their very nature, will harm companies and—as the hon. Member for Hampshire, East said—force them out of business. That cannot be right. We should send a clear message that this corporate morality must be maintained. If companies could push the flow of debt around quicker, that would ease the burden and would not require legislation. Sadly, we may need to bring in legislation to achieve that.

I hope that when the Minister responds he will not, as *The Daily Telegraph* article suggested, merely give us platitudes about the benefits of small businesses and their contribution to the economy. He should go further and accept that the Bill, if it gets through the House, will provide a useful opportunity in Committee to air the issues that we do not have time to discuss today. More importantly, it would reassure people who are suffering that the House is concerned. Although my hon. Friends are not jumping up behind me to support me, there is all-party support for this measure.

The hon. Member for Hampshire, East has given many ilustrations for his argument and identified GEC. I think that hon. Members would agree that that company is not alone. It was right to highlight GEC because the institutionalisation of its procedures is folklore throughout the country. However, for the business community to look towards 1992, we must have cohesion in our economic policies to ensure that we obtain the benefits from 1992 and beyond. I appeal to large businesses, whether public or private, to acknowledge that we need the small business community which contributes a great deal to the economy, prosperity and jobs. If the problem of late payment is reinforced by high interest rates and the UBR, the problem will only get worse. some day in the future, as the hon. Member for Hampshire, East said, we shall have to return to the House for legislation. Let us take action now and prevent any further deterioration of the late payment problem.

10.47 am

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on this matter today. As a solicitor I have attempted to recover, on behalf of creditors, literally thousands of debts. I have also sought, on behalf of debtors, to avoid the payment of thousands of debts. I speak with the benefit of some experience.

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): Is my hon. Friend speaking today as a poacher or a game-keeper? It is most important to know.

Mr. Favell: I hope that I speak as an honest broker.

During the 25 years that I have been in practice I have never understood the argument against an automatic right to interest on bills which are paid late. Therefore, I am broadly in favour of the thrust of the Bill. However, I have some reservations about it and until they are dealt with I cannot give it my unqualified support.

Like it or not, there are unscrupulous firms. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) mentioned one or two firms which I have come across during the course of my professional career. One that he did not mention was the British Steel Corporation while it was in the public sector. BSC was referred to by our late colleague Mr. Richard Ottaway, who I hope——

[HON. MEMBERS: "Former colleague."] Yes, former colleague. I beg his pardon, wherever he may be. We hope to see our former colleague, Mr. Richard Ottaway, back in the House soon, perhaps even representing the constituency of Nottingham, North. He mentioned during an Adjournment debate in April 1987 shortly before the election, that Sir Charles Villiers, the former chief executive of the British Steel Corporation, said at a press conference organised by the Forum of Private Business that small firms encountered two major problems when considering their cash flow. The first was taxation—primarily because present legislation requires quick payment and why not? As a taxpayer, I like late payers to pay their bills quickly and if they do not they should pay interest for the benefit of their fellow taxpayers.

Sir Charles Villiers said that the second problem was the late payment of debt. He estimated that of the 2,500 suppliers to the British Steel Corporation during his stewardship, 500 went out of business merely because they could not get their debts paid. That is a disgrace. One fifth of the British Steel Corporation's suppliers went out of business because they were paid late.

Since it was privatised, British Steel has behaved a great deal better. I practised as a solicitor in Sheffield and I had several clients who went out of business because British Steel, the biggest employer in Sheffield, paid late. My clients were often little firms whose sole customer was British Steel, so there was nothing that they could do. They used to ask me what to do and whether I would sue British Steel. I asked what would happen if I did. They replied that they would lose their sole customer. The British Steel Corporation had them in a vice when it was in Government stewardship and doing so badly. All that was appalling and sad, not only for my clients but, in turn, for their suppliers: each time a firm went bankrupt, it took several firms with it.

Mr. Mates: If my hon. Friend feels as strongly as he does, and if he will not give my Bill unqualified support, will he at least give it total support in so far as it applies to central Government, local government and nationalised industries?

Mr. Favell: I would support it if it applied to everyone else, too. There should not be one law for one body and another law for others. Then I would give the Bill my wholehearted support, except as it applies to contracting out. I do not agree with the provision that customers cannot contract out. I agree with the views of the Law Commission, as outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot).

Mr. Mates: It is not customers but suppliers that I am talking about.

Mr. Favell: I beg my hon. Friend's pardon.

The Government have tightened up. I listened this morning to the "Today" programme, on which my hon. Friend the Minister——

Mr. Mates: He was not very good.

Mr. Favell: I thought that he was excellent and put the Government's case well—but I have a certain interest in saying that.

Mr. Leigh: If the Government have been so successful in tightening up their procedures, surely they should have no objection to the Bill applying to them? If it applied only to the Government, I should withdraw my objection to it.

Mr. Favell: Given my special connections, I should not go down that road.

What my hon. Friend the Minister had to say on the programme was interesting. Since he was made the Minister responsible for small businesses, he said, he had had only three complaints of late payment by Government Departments, two of which he had found unjustified and one of which he was investigating. That bears out my experience. Since the Government came to power, Government Departments have honoured their obligations to small businesses commendably.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Does my hon. Friend accept that problems have emerged in my constituency with the Ministry of Defence, especially in its relations with prime contractors, and in the relationship between prime contractors and sub-contractors? They cause great concern.

Mr. Favell: I have no personal experience of that; no doubt we shall hear from my hon. Friend on the subject later.

My hon. Friend the Minister pointed out on the "Today" programme that some bodies are regarded as Government bodies, yet are not—that is, health authorities. I know from experience that health authorities having trouble with their budgets towards the end of the year pay late.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Does my hon. Friend agree that the early payment of debt is a matter of morality and of agreement that applies to everyone in the land—not only to Government authorities or to large companies, but to small companies and people?

Mr. Favell: I quite agree. One of the arguments advanced by the opponents of the Bill is the idea that we are all big boys now and when we enter into a contractual obligation to supply or buy goods we must make our own decisions on whether to include interest. That does not apply to many people, however. Many still believe that an Englishman's word is his bond. Many small firms dealing with a large company such as British Steel, or GEC, or a health authority or local authority, believe it when they are told that they will be paid in 28, 30, 60 or even 90 days. They are terribly surprised when they are not paid on the stipulated day, as they were promised by those august bodies that they would be. By that time, it is often too late.

Small firms must continue to pay wages; people must continue to pay their mortgages; they get caught in a downward spiral, and the banks charge them interest. The banks do not defer interest simply because a firm has been let down by someone else. It is a tremendous disadvantage to a new small firm to enter a contract with a large company that does not honour its debts.

The Department of Employment has issued a couple of pamphlets, and they are fine for people who believe that codes are to be followed and words kept. They are fine for the scrupulous, but the unscrupulous will take no notice of a voluntary code, especially as they will make 15 per cent. on the money by not paying it to the supplier. Why on earth should they follow such a code? There is big money to be made in paying late, and the bigger the company, the more money to be made.

The man in charge of paying suppliers is told to pay as late as possible—that is his job and if he wants to keep it, that is what he must do. For some concerns, the law of the jungle operates, not the law of the code. I see nothing wrong with the Government legislating against people who believe in the law of the jungle and in bringing down little people who have taken them at their word.

The Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise know that if interest runs from a certain date, people pay up. Lawyers know that, too. I intervened in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East on the subject of courts. The Supreme Court Act 1981 went some way towards the recommendations of the Law Commission by laying down that if proceedings were brought, interest became payable on debts paid late; but if proceedings were not brought, interest did not run. So if a seven day letter is sent by a solicitor asking for payment, the recipient can avoid paying interest, even if there has been a six-month, 18-month or two-year delay, merely by paying up quickly before proceedings are issued.

Such a case went all the way to the House of Lords in 1984. There had been an appeal against a decision of the Court of Appeal that interest was payable on a late-paid debt. Lord Scarman's judgment ran as follows:

> "I also reach with regret and reluctance the conclusion that the appeal must be allowed. The sooner there is legislation along the lines proposed by the Law Commission or some other solution achieving the same end, the better."

I agree.

Ms. Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): On a point of order of which I have given notice, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Have you received a request from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to make a further statement to the House on the sale—perhaps I should call it the giveaway—of Rover to British Aerospace? The point of order arises from the disturbing report in today's issue of *The Guardian* that the European Commission may request British Aerospace to repay up to £283 million. That sum is well in excess of the——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady must not tell the House what she might have said had there been a statement. I have not seen any request for a statement to be made. No doubt what has been said will have been heard by Ministers.

11.1 am

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): It is a pleasure to know that the hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) agrees with the Bill. I am sorry to be a little rough with him but he seems to have jumped to a conclusion about my brief absence from the debate for a total of about three minutes. He and the hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) sought to draw the conclusion that I had left the Chamber because the business for which I was here related only to Nelson Mandela. The hon. Member for Stockport should have taken the trouble to look into the background or should have consulted his hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) who has known for at least 24 hours since I wrote to him yesterday that I would be taking part in the debate because I have had a long interest in this matter. During the debate I shall have to leave the Chamber from time to time because of events relating to

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the release of Nelson Mandela. I apologise to hon. Members in advance for those absences. I assure the House that in no sense do they diminish the importance that I attach to the Bill.

Mr. Favell: I apologise to the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) for having jumped to the conclusion that he was here merely to hear the totally bogus point of order. I reached that conclusion because he left immediately afterwards. However I am glad to see him back in his place. Perhaps he will understand my annoyance because I am sure he agrees that there have been an enormous number of bogus points of order since the television cameras arrived. It is most annoying to have to sit here from 3.30 until 4 o'clock every day listening to bogus points of order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is not a debate on procedure. Let us return to consideration of the Bill that is before the House.

Mr. Ashdown: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman, not on raising a bogus point of order but on making an imaginative point in an imaginative way. I am grateful to him for the courtesy of his correction.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Hampshire, East on preseting the Bill and on deploying a most powerful case in its favour. He has left others of us who would like to comment in favour of the Bill with little to say, so I shall be brief. As I think the hon. Gentleman knows, my presence here is not just in relation to the importance that my party attaches to the Bill and to the whole matter of assisting small businesses. My interest dates back to the time when I was trade and industry spokesman for my party in the 1983 Parliament.

At that time I conducted a long debate with the then Minister with responsibility for small businesses, the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Mr. Trippier) who is now the Minister for the Environment and Countryside, about the importance of doing something about the problem of late payment. That is part of a problem, referred to tangentially by some Members, which is a big problem in its own right. That problem is the power of the buyer in the marketplace. We all know about the problem of the monopoly seller but the problem related to the buyer has grown to an extent that should concern those who, like me and the Government, are interested in a competitive free market. The word that describes the power of the buyer, monopsony is a fairly new one. Such buyers have power to effect discriminatory discounts. That should be looked at because it is one side of the problem. Late payment is another.

At the time when I took the matter up with the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen he shared all my concerns. I do not pretend to have been instrumental in anything other than a minor way in getting the Government to act on a code of practice. We had a long debate about whether legislation would be better than a code. At that time I took the view that legislation would be better, but I was persuaded by the Government that as a first step at least a code of practice would be more appropriate.

The debates on those matters sometimes took place in the House and sometimes they were carried out in correspondence with the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen. He told me that he thought that a code of practice would be right in the first instance, but that if it did not work the Government should consider further action. For that reason this is an appropriate time for the Bill to be brought before the House. It is evident beyond any misunderstanding that although the code of practice may have been right as a first step and was put forward in a manner with which I agreed, it has not had the effect that the Government must have hoped it would have.

I remind the House that the figure for late payments is £57 billion. The Dun and Bradstreet report referred to by the hon. Member for Hampshire, East clearly indicated that the code of practice is not working. If I were to be overly critical I would say that the Government have not done much to publicise the code beyond its initial launch. The code has not worked to achieve what the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen hoped for as recently as 1987.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Is not the right hon. Gentleman being a little restrictive in his answers to the problem? He referred first to legislation and then to a code of practice about debtors. Does he agree that there is a third action that creditors could take by improving credit control? Would the right hon. Gentleman like to explore that?

Mr. Ashdown: That is a perfectly fair point with which I agree. I do not think that we will solve the problem overnight by a code of practice or by any single Act. It will require a combination of Acts. However, the case is clearly proved that part of the armoury that will solve the problem of late payments—which, as the hon. Member for Hampshire, East said, is borne disproportionately by the small business sector—is a decent framework of legislation. That is not the only instrument to solve the problem, but it is a major weapon.

Three questions need to be answered. The problem has persisted, indeed grown, according to figures that are available to us. The first question is whether the means that we have available to solve the problem are sufficient. The conclusion that we must draw is that they are not, because the code of practice has not worked. Secondly, should we go further and, thirdly, will the Bill help? The legislation will assist.

I accept the case made so well by the Minister on the "Today" programme that in the last analysis the Bill is probably not enforceable. Many of our laws are not perfectly enforceable but nevertheless they perform a reasonable and useful function. The law on speed limits is an example. We know that all speed limits cannot be enforced because there is not the ability to do so. However, that is not to say that a speed limit does not have a prophylactic effect on people driving through towns and villages. The success of a law cannot be judged simply by the number of successful prosecutions; it must also be judged on the basis of the number of infringements that it has prevented, and that, surely, is the major argument for the legislation.

I am delighted that the hon. Member for Hampshire, East has presented the Bill. I do not consider that it is perfect; the hon. Member for Stockport made a good case for the opting-out procedures. On Second Reading, however, we are dealing with a principle. Amendments can always be made later.

The time has come for the Government to put into effect their rhetoric on small businesses. They should seize

the opportunity to legislate. The legislation will not distort the free market; if anything, it will help to create competition and to shore up that market. Many small businesses, at least in the south, are soon to be faced with the burden of the uniform business rate in addition to the current extraordinarily high interest rates: no doubt Conservative Members, like us, have received many representations about the effect of that. Now, however, the Government have to hand a sensible piece of legislation that will carry forward their original moves to establish a code of practice, help to create a framework of competition in the free market and assist small businesses. Why do they not wish to take up that opportunity?

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): The right hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. At the last general election it was his party's candidates who called on the Government to redress the north-south divide, and that is the specific aim of the uniform business rate. Do we gather that he cannot follow the Liberal path when it has to be paid for?

Mr. Ashdown: We have strayed slightly from the subject of the Bill, but the hon. Gentleman's question deserves an answer. He ought to recognise that correcting the widening north-south divide is the Government's problem, involving general taxation. There is no earthly reason why small businesses, especially retail outlets in the south of England, should pay the whole price for the economic regeneration of the north, as they are being asked to do. The uniform business rate may well achieve an aim that I would support, but it will do so through a mechanism that I consider utterly impractical and extremely damaging. Britain needs a proper regional policy, rather than an inadequate spatchcock system like the uniform business rate.

The Minister and the Government now face the danger that their policy of encouraging enterprise, small businesses and self-employment—a policy with which I wholly agree; if I have a criticism, it is that they have not gone far enough or fast enough—will be subjected to close scrutiny. To avoid that, the Minister must be prepared to show the public and the House that he at least accepts the principle of the Bill, and is prepared to take it into Committee and make such amendments as are practical and necessary, so that we can implement legislation that is not only properly balanced and well-timed, but, in my view, extremely necessary.

11.13 am

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I fully support the Bill, which will have the important effect of redressing a balance. Over the past few years the burden of delayed payments borne by smaller businesses—indeed, by industry in general—has risen from £45 billion to £57 billion, and all the current developments in the economic world militate in favour of an increase in the level of unpaid debt. Higher inflation, higher interest rates and greater financial sophistication all contribute to that effect.

Large firms gain a decided advantage from delayed payments: the transgressors are smart-aleck company treasurers who fully understand the importance of free balances and increased funds. They are the adepts of financial engineering. Equally guilty are incompetent administrators in the payments departments of large companies, and it is ludicrous that we should give them an incentive to be inefficient. Apart from major companies, the principal transgressors are central Government and local authorities, and I appreciate the way in which the Bill concentrates on them.

Delayed payment of suppliers, especially small suppliers, has added unplanned and uncosted pressures. Not a few of the bankruptcies of recent years have been caused by insolvency that has not been financed by banks, which will not extend overdrafts to deal with this problem.

There have been a number of unlikely spin-offs from delayed payment by Government. One of the strongest cases for it is the comparative advantage that it gives local financial management in schools. County councils have been among the worst offenders. Now they finance the schools and provide them with chequebooks to pay suppliers of services, books and so forth. Many suppliers had stopped doing business with the councils because of the delays in payment. Now schools have been able to go to suppliers and say, "Deliver today, at a good price, and we will pay today."

11.17 am

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) and I had an agreeable discussion over supper about the merits and otherwise of his Bill. I told him that I intended to be here this morning, and that I was generally fairly hostile to the intent of the Bill. He asked, "Have you read it?" I blushed a little and said, "No." He said, "Go and read it." He then proceeded to give me a fairly full trailer for his speech this morning.

Mr. Mates: It was a very good dinner.

Mr. Couchman: At the end of his trailer my hon. Friend said, "I have a convert." I said, "Not a convert, but a waverer."

My hon. Friend should have held on to his first piece of advice, which was that I should go and read the Bill. When I did just that, I found that my wavering had stopped, and I am afraid that I am still generally hostile towards its intent. Its aim is laudable: there are some legendary bad payers, who have been named and who include national Government. My hon. Friend has said, from a sedentary position, that the Ministry of Defence is notorious in this regard, and my hon. Friend and near neighbour the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) mentioned local government. I can never understand why small builders and others in the building trades wish to get on to local government lists. They carry out contracts, probably in innocence, not realising that payment will be delayed, and in the end far too many of them go bust.

My hon. Friend has mentioned some large public limited companies with very bad payment records. I must be careful when I mention GEC as it is the largest employer in my constituency. By virtue of that it is the largest contractor to small firms in my constituency. GEC is important to the local economy and has supported the local community. It has supported the Medway towns through some extremely difficult times since Her Majesty's naval base and dockyard at Chatham closed in 1984. Therefore, I shall be soft on GEC and support it to the extent of pointing out to my hon. Friend that GEC is an enormous supplier to the MOD which, as my hon. Friend

[Mr. Couchman]

has said, is a notoriously bad payer. It may well be that GEC's bad paying is the result of contracting to the Ministry of Defence for many large contracts.

Mr. Mates: In that case, would my hon. Friend consider supporting that part of the Bill which applies to central and local government?

Mr. Couchman: I am very sympathtic to that, but the Bill that he has introduced includes large companies.

Large companies are increasingly outsourcing for components for their products to many small suppliers. I had the opportunity to visit General Electric in America to watch the manufacture of expensive medical diagnostic equipment. I asked what the proportion of outsourcing was. In terms of components it was virtually 100 per cent. The expertise that the large company brings to the product involves putting together components, testing them and bringing them up to a working specification.

It is the nature of business today that large companies buy in many of their components from small suppliers. Putting aside the question of naivety, small companies generally understand their credit relationship with large companies. In the light of its settlement record, those who contract with GEC will build into their contract prices a component for that difficulty. Small companies appreciate that large companies are, in effect, sucking in small companies' credit lines.

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): That is an important point in understanding the relationship between the small company and the big purchaser. If a small supplier has the opportunity to build it into his price, he will do so, but only if other suppliers do the same. However, he is taking a gamble because he will build in an expected payment date which, in the case of GEC, may be 100 days. GEC may pay in 130 days and that adds unreasonable uncertainty to the payments.

Mr. Couchman: Perhaps the greatest merit of my hon. Friend's Bill is that it will produce more certain credit dates.

The House will know because I have declared my vested interest frequently that I run a small business. However, I admit that my situation is very different from those whom my hon. Friend seeks to help. My major supplier is my own landlord, so I am not in much of a position to place long credit terms on my supplier. My supplier is much bigger than my own company and grants me but short credit and expects payment by direct debit—an increasing habit among large companies when they are selling as opposed to buying. Because mine is a retail business, so long as I keep my stocks right, my products are sold before I pay for them even by fortnightly direct debit. So I understand that there is a difference.

However, 25 years ago when I was a representative for the Regent oil company, now Texaco, I was expected to spend a large proportion of my time each month chasing up small customers for payments for products that were sold on a retail basis very rapidly after delivery. Therefore the question of late settlement of debt is not confined purely to national Government, local government and big plcs. It is almost endemic throughout the business world.

Apart from the fact that my hon. Friend's Bill runs against two of the 1978 Law Commission recommendations on contracting out and universality, my major disagreement is that it will distort adversely the relationship between contractors and suppliers. It represents an intervention in the market, and that is what concerns me. I believe that the market is best left to its own devices with regard to credit.

My local chamber of commerce somewhat belatedly asked me to telephone yesterday afternoon and put across rather a weak case on behalf of the Association of British Chambers of Commerce. I suspect that my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East is smiling because GEC may well be the largest contributor to that chamber of commerce. The chamber of commerce has come out against the Bill, not because GEC may be a major contributor, but because it envisages the relationship between contractor and supplier breaking down to the extent that those small companies that have the effrontery to ask for interest—my hon. Friend has said that they may opt out of taking the interest, but there is a fine line between that and having a contract which excludes statutory interest—are likely not to gain repeat orders from their substantial contractors.

Mr. Favell: I understand my hon. Friend's desire to represent his local chamber of commerce to which he says GEC may be a large contributor. If I were in his shoes I would probably take the same line. However, does he find it surprising that chambers of commerce and other organisations are ambivalent about the proposal simply because they represent good boys and bad boys? Late payers and quick payers are members of chambers of commerce, the CBI and the Institute of Directors, so it is not surprising that they cannot make up their minds. Does it surprise my hon. Friend to know that my local chamber of commerce in Stockport is in favour of prompt payment so long as the same rules apply to everyone. Maybe in the north we have different ideas about these things than they do in the south.

Mr. Couchman: My hon. Friend refers to a central feature of the Bill. His chamber of commerce would favour the Bill so long as it applied to large and small companies.

My last point relates to the size of companies. I think that is arbitrary. I accept that it is defined by the Companies Act 1985 which includes quite definite terms for capital, turnover and staff. I cannot remember the capital or the turnover term for a medium company, which is defined as one employing 250 people or more, but they are substantial compared with my company which employs 30 or 40 people and has a turnover of about £1·5 million.

Mr. Mates: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise that point as it causes me some concern. I should be happy to discuss in Committee whether there is another difinition that would exclude some of the larger medium-sized companies. The reason that I have not included it in the Bill as drafted is that I did not want to make more complicated bits of law and thus give my hon. Friend even more reason to object to the measure. The virtue of that is that it is implicit in the Companies Act. If that is one of the reasons why my hon. Friend the Minister of State is unhappy about the Bill, let him say so and let us debate it in Committee, because that is what I am longing to do.

Mr. Couchman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that offer, which I am sure my hon. Friend the Minister will consider most carefully.

The problem with a medium-sized company employing 250 people, given the limits on capital and turnover applied to them, is that they may be the United Kingdom subsidiaries of large overseas corporations. Under the Bill, they would be drawn into the net of medium-sized companies, although they are representatives of vast corporations.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Will my hon. Friend accept that the problem is not precisely where the line is drawn but the fact that there is a line at all?

Mr. Couchman: I accept what my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) said earlier. If the Bill applied to large, medium and small companies—the good boys and the bad boys—I would have more enthusiasm for it. The alternative is to limit it strictly to the public sector —central Government, local government and health authorities.

The Government want it both ways. I must pay value added tax. I know well that if I do not complete my return and send a cheque this month the clock will start pretty smartly, and the master of my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport will want some interest. Clearly, the Treasury has one law for itself but another for everyone else.

I have some sympathy for the Bill and hope that it can be made workable in Committee. I am not sure that the changes that it proposes should be made by a private Members' Bill. Such initiatives should come from Government, wth the full panoply of Government draftsmen to work them out properly.

Mr. Hanley: Such as on abortion?

Mr. Couchman: My hon. Friend should not tempt me down that road.

The Bill is complex and contains issues which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) has freely admitted, he has been unable to address completely and to the satisfaction of all hon. Members.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will say that the Government will consider this proposition to see whether the Department can do something more than the issuing of pamphlets, which my hon. Friend the Minister for Hampshire, East praised faintly.

I have sympathy for the aims and intentions of the Bill, but it is imperfect because of the two exclusions that I mentioned. I wish my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East luck, but I am afraid that I will be unable to stay until 2.30 pm; he may see that as an advantage rather than as a disadvantage. I hope that this interesting debate will continue, because the House should be more enthusiastic about it and consider it more often.

11.34 am

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): I shall not detain the House long because much has been said already.

Before becoming an hon. Member, I was in the banking business. I was responsible for lending not only to big and medium businesses but to small businesses. Much has been said about the small business man, but I should like to include in the debate the small business woman. The Government have encouraged many young people to start their own businesses. In the north-west, especially on Merseyside and definitely in Southport, many young men and women have set up their own businesses.

I have seen quite a few bankruptcies and many small businesses fold. The main reason for their doing so was delayed payment not by the Treasury but by business or local government.

I remember when bills were paid within 14 to 21 days, but we are aware, not only from what has been said this morning but from correspondence sent to us, that on average that limit has been extended to 75 days, which is far too long for new businesses and small businesses. In the past year, an almost record number of bankruptcies were recorded; I have received correspondence endorsing that point.

The Bill offers some help not only to the small business man but to the medium business man. Delayed payment is the illness of business. To exist, a medium-sized building company must deal with local authorities. Large contracts from housing associations are rarely available, so those building companies look to local government to provide large contracts, which used to be so profitable for them.

Having to wait three months for payment places pressure on those business people. I have seen many small business men ask banks for help when they are in difficulties. The banks are prepared to go only so far to help because usually they have the security of a private house. In the end, when delayed payments cause too much trouble, the banks must decide what to do with the deeds that they hold. Banks are not as soft as they used to be, and nowadays they must foreclose on properties. That leads to family disruption, and as a banker I saw quite a few divorces because of payments being delayed to small businesses. The Bill may cause the Government to consider the plight of small businesses, especially the plight of young people who have started their own companies.

Many small businesses would like to continue, would like the help that banks offered in the past and would like the help of local finance. That involves the Government's scheme of letting businesses help themselves through themselves, but it does not happen when large concerns that have large amounts of capital demand credit. I hope that we can encourage local government, which faces squeezes, and big businessmen to read *Hansard*, look at the Bill and examine the Government's response. I hope that the Government will not try to talk out the Bill but will do something positive.

The Liberal Democrats initiated the discussion on small businesses in the House on Wednesday. It had been some time since that matter had been debated and I was pleased to hear hon. Members' contributions. There are many small businesses in all our constituencies. The Forum of Private Business is taking a grip on what business people are saying. It sends us queries on all aspects of small business so that we can ask questions and find out what can be done to help.

I hope that the Bill will be given a Second Reading and proceed to its Committee stage. The theories that are discussed in Committee will expose some of the base practices imposed on the small business man by those in power. I hope that the Bill will be successful.

11.41 am

The Minister of State, Department of Employment (Mr. Tim Eggar): My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) has raised an important issue. I congratulate him on choosing this topic and on his argument and the great care that he has taken to discuss the Bill's implications with small business organisations and individual small companies and with the Government and other interested parties. That is typical of the way in which my hon. Friend tackles these issues. I regret that I shall not be able to stay for the whole debate—I gave my hon. Friend notice of that earlier. I have made arrangements to be here as long as I can.

As the Minister with responsibility for small firms, I appreciate my hon. Friend's intention in the Bill to assist small businesses and the small business community. That community is vital to our economy and has been remarkably successful over the past decade. I shall not rehearse the arguments that we heard in the debate on Wednesday on the small firms sector. In 1988, there was a net increase in VAT registrations of 1,200 firms every week. The latest figures indicate that in 1989 there was a net increase of 1,500 firms every week. That shows the vibrancy and strength of the small business sector, despite the slightly more difficult economic climate, to which a number of hon. Members have referred, in which small businesses operate.

Mr. Page: No doubt, we all take great pleasure in the 1,500 new businesses created every week, but I urge my hon. Friend to be cautious about his pride in that figure in case other people fasten on to it. Logically, we cannot have millions and millions of small businesses—there must be a finite number. Eventually, the number of small businesses created will decrease. I should hate anyone to use that as an argument that the Government are failing in their duty to small businesses.

Mr. Eggar: I understand my hon. Friend's point. I was making a point not about the absolute number of new businesses created—1,500 a week—but about the trend. As I pointed out in the debate on Wednesday night, early indications show that there were 80,000 new VAT registrations in 1989, compared with a net increase of 85,000 VAT registrations between 1974 and 1979. I was trying to show the strength of the small business sector in comparative terms. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page) knows, there has been a sharp increase in the number of self-employed people, from 2 million in 1980 to 3 million now. It has been a strong sector.

In previous debates on this topic, a number of my hon. Friends have referred to the major role played by the former Member for Nottingham, North, Richard Ottaway. I pay tribute to him for the way in which he raised the profile of this issue and gained much support throughout the House for his campaign. In debates that he initiated, the Government made it clear that we recognised that the late payment of bills was a problem for companies of all sizes in the United Kingdom, but one that particularly affected small businesses.

Mr. Hanley: My hon. Friend may recall, if he has read the two major debates that Richard Ottaway initiated on this subject, that on 24 July 1986, the then Under-Secretary of State for Employment—my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Mr. Trippier)—stated that legislation would be introduced if the voluntary code did not work. The debate and the Bill show that, in spite of the excellent voluntary code, the system is not working. It is four years since the then Minister made that suggestion, yet my hon. Friend the present Minister seems to be saying that now is still not the time. Will he comment?

Mr. Eggar: My hon. Friend obviously has a crystal ball. I did not think that I had revealed the Government's attitude to the Bill during this debate.

Mr. Hanley: I happened to hear on the radio this morning an indication from my hon. Friend's own lips of what he might [illegible]

Mr. Eggar: I understand my hon. Friend's point. I just wanted to make it clear that I was not aware that I had stated the Government's position from the Dispatch Box.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Might my hon. Friend say when he comes to it, not that now is not the time but that this is not the Bill?

Mr. Eggar: I am afraid that my hon. Friend will have to wait, and I hope that the suspense will not harm his health, as I develop my arguments and explain the Government's position. He has made a valid point.

To revert to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), I have, of course, read the debates to which he refers. It is clear, as the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) said, that there was a feeling that as a first step, we should consider issuing "Prompt Payment Please!" and other documents to try to influence the climate of opinion. The Government have never completely ruled out legislation in this area. If my hon. Friend listens to what I have to say, he will find that my policy is not unlike that of my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Mr. Trippier).

We have always recognised that the late payment of bills is a widespread problem. By definition, it affects small businesses more than larger businesses, for reasons that we all understand. Cash flow is a more critical element in the survival of smaller companies than it is, generally, for larger firms. I know that late payment causes some small firms real hardship.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Does my hon. Friend accept that it is not always late payment of bills that have been demanded which causes the problem, but a reluctance by some firms to submit an account at all when they know that it is likely to be disputed? Although we have introduced in VAT regulations a threshold for firms with a turnover of £250,000—below that level people can account on the basis or receipts rather than invoices—there are many firms that he and I would not regard as large which have a turnover in excess of £250,000. The average solicitors' practice with two partners would qualify, although neither of us would call such a firm, or any small professional firm, "large". Their difficulty is that they are deterred from submitting an account if they know that it is likely to be disputed because they know that they will have to pay 15 per cent. VAT. In many cases, they choose to negotiate rather than——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions should be brief. I call Mr. Eggar.

Mr. Eggar: My hon. Friend has raised a technical point which is properly for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. There are several other reasons why small companies are reluctant or simply fail to submit bills. One reason is a less than perfect credit control system. One of the most interesting events that I attended recently was the launch of an open learning package which was devised, with financial help from my Department, by the Cranfield institute of technology and the Open university among others. It was a modular system specifically geared towards providing specialist training for small businesses and it was especially designed for small but growing businesses. A large element of that package was designed for accounting and credit control, which are recognised to be weaknesses of many small businesses.

Mr. Couchman: Does my hon. Friend agree that a problem with many building firms and building trades firms that find themselves in difficulties and eventually founder is that their accounting is dreadful? I frequently find myself having to push people into giving me invoices for work done on my business premises.

Mr. Eggar: I hear what my hon. Friend says. I remember having had some work done in my home and receiving effusive thanks from the builder who had done the work when I paid almost on receipt of the bill. I suspect that he was as surprised as I was naive. My hon. Friend's point is understandable. It is not only in the building industry that that problem arises. There are several other areas in which small companies are not geared up to a proper system for submitting bills, which surprises me. With the present relatively low price of computers and software packages that have an automatic follow-up system, there is less reason for not being up to date with credit control than there once was.

No hon. Member would deny that there is a real problem in late payment. However, the real question is how we deal with that problem, which goes to the heart of the issue. That is recognised not only in the House, but by the small firms' organisations, many of which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East mentioned, have severe misgivings about the Bill. My hon. Friend will recall that when he first came to me with the suggestion that he might introduce a Bill on late payment, I approached the proposal with a completely open mind. I had not formed a view on whether that would be the right way forward. His proposal prompted me to look into the matter carefully. I have given it much consideration and I have tried to examine whether my hon. Friend's detailed proposal would have an effect on late payment, and what effect that would be.

I have reached the same conclusion as my two predecessors, and I have talked to them about this. Each of them went into the issue in considerable detail and tried to weigh up the conflicting arguments. I have come to the conclusion that the Bill is not the way forward at this time. One factor that has weighed heavily with me is that we are a Government who are rightly committed to less regulation. We believe that the best way to achieve economic growth is to create the general framework within which businesses, large and small, are free to go out into the marketplace, and to create jobs and wealth in the way that they think best, subject always to a general framework in areas such as health and safety. I believe that I carry my hon. Friend with me when I say that if we are to introduce legislation in this area, there must be an overwhelming and clear-cut case for doing so. Small firms' organisations have said that they also attach importance to that.

Mr. Mates: My hon. Friend carries me all the way with him. First, in his analysis, he has acknowledged that there is a problem and that the problem is growing. Secondly, he has said that he approached the matter with an open mind and I accept that absolutely, as I remember our first conversation. Thirdly, I do not think that I am betraying a confidence in saying that he said that he would be very much influenced by the attitude of the representatives of small firms.

I hope that my hon. Friend will comment on the fact that at that stage, there was only one such organisation in favour, but that now, after a relatively short time, there are five of six in favour. The mood is changing as quickly as those small firms are appreciating the difference between this Bill and the previous Bill. The one question that I hope that my hon. Friend will address is, as the Government said that something must be done, what are they going to do if they do not accept the Bill?

Mr. Eggar: I shall come to all the points that my hon. Friend has raised, and if he feels that I have not addressed any of his arguments as I proceed, I hope that he will intervene on me. I shall certainly be willing to give way.

I would not claim for one moment that the issue is clear cut; indeed, it is not. As my hon. Friend said, the fact that a number of small firms organisations continue to oppose the Bill, whereas the Forum for Private Business has argued for it through thick and thin, is testimony to the balanced nature of the argument. When I was first appointed to my present job I spent a great deal of time meeting all the small firms organisations to give them an opportunity to raise issues of concern to them. The only organisation that chose to raise this issue, when it could have raised anything at all, was the Forum for Private Business. Other organisations raised different issues but not this one.

Mr. Leigh: I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will say that the Association of British Chambers of Commerce also opposes the Bill. That organisation said that companies could be inclined to stipulate in the contract a much later date for payment, and that is the main objection to the Bill. But will the Minister consider a suggestion that I made earlier in an intervention—that the Bill should apply solely to Government Departments? Would my hon. Friend then consider dropping his objection to the Bill?

Mr. Eggar: As I shall say later, we believe that much of the concern about late payment by Government Departments is not well founded. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East has said that he is open to persuasion over the contents and final form of the Bill, and I should have to consider what my attitude to a revised Bill should be. For the moment, however, I can comment only on the Bill that is before me.

Mr. Mates: Would not a Standing Committee be precisely the forum for the Government to make that decison?

Mr. Eggar: We are now discussing the Second Reading of the Bill.

Mr. Mates: The principle.

Mr. Eggar: Absolutely, and I am trying to explain the Government's attitude to it. If the Bill goes into Committee we shall have the opportunity to discuss this and many other issues, such as the division between small and medium-sized firms and whether the Bill should cover all firms. It is, of course, for the House to decide whether the Bill should have a Committee stage.

Let me follow the lead given by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) and point to a few of the Bill's drawbacks. Most importantly, I believe that the Bill will in practice make little difference to small firms' ability to obtain prompt payment of debts owed to them. As my hon. Friend implied, the problem stems from an imbalance of negotiating strength between small and large businesses. The Bill would have little impact on that fact of commercial life. There is an imbalance of power between contracting parties in many commercial contracts.

Mr. Gill: Does my hon. Friend accept that customers weigh up the cost of paying their suppliers against the cost of not paying them? The purpose of the Bill is to ensure that the cost will be equal. The cost of not paying will be as great as the cost of paying. There will be no decision to make and the incentive will be to settle promptly for the sake of good relations between customers and suppliers.

Mr. Eggar: I should be more persuaded by that argument if my hon. Friend had used it in the context of present contractual terms. At the moment, standard business practice is to request payment on 30 days, although sometimes the period is longer and sometimes it is shorter. Some firms pay regularly on 30 days; some pay earlier and some later. I am not convinced that the fact that interest would be borne past the contracted date would make any substantive difference. It seems to me more likely that either the contract terms would be elongated beyond the present 30-day period, or price calculations would take account of statutory interest that may have to be paid if there is deliberate late payment. I think that the market would simply take account of the new legislation, which would not, therefore, make much difference.

Mr. Gill: Would my hon. Friend care to consider an analogy with Japanese industry? I understand that it is axiomatic that Japanese customers pay their suppliers promptly as a matter of honour. If they do not pay promptly, the manager will be hauled over the coals. Is it not significant that the small and medium-sized sector in the Japanese economy is far stronger than it is in the British economy? The longer we delay in acting on the proposals in the Bill, the more we shall prejudice the medium-sized company sector, and we shall do that to our great disadvantage.

Mr. Eggar: I completely agree with my hon. Friend's basic point, and I think that most British firms would do well to look at the practice that has been developed in Japan and the relationship between large companies and their small company suppliers, just as they would do well to observe the similar practice of a number of their British counterparts, most of which would accept they have adopted Japanese practice.

The importance of a long-term stable relationship between a large company and its supplying companies is vastly underrated. If that relationship simply depends on an annual or even more frequent contract price negotiation—I am talking mainly about the manufacturing sector—there is at least a case for saying that the large company suffers as much as the small company from that uncertainty and lack of mutual loyalty.

I join my hon. Friend in hoping that British industry will look at the lessons that can be learned from Japan. I recently had an interesting discussion with the managing diector of Unipart, a company which, I understand is benefiting very much from that kind of supplier-producer relationship with the Japanese motor company Nissan, in the north-east and is seeking to develop exactly the same kind of relationship with its own suppliers. Therefore, I join my hon. Friend in hoping that that trend will increase. However, we cannot legislate for that kind of relationship and I do not believe that the Bill would effect such a relationship.

Mr. Butterfill: Does my hon. Friend also agree that the history of what has happened in the construction industry is not very encouraging? A system of liquidating ascertained damages has built up and is now used to enhance disputes between companies. Does my hon. Friend agree that a Bill such as this would be inclined to lead people to dispute that a bill was due and payable, which might ultimately operate to the disadvantage of small firms, rather than to their advantage, as has already happened in the construction industry?

Mr. Eggar: I was about to come to a number of the key points that are now being raised. The short answer—I shall, of course, develop it—is——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I apologise for interrupting the Minister, but he should not turn his back on the Chair so frequently.

Mr. Eggar: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

There is a lot in what my hon. Friend has said. One of my concerns about the Bill is that people who do not want to pay will find other reasons for not paying. They will ask, "Were the goods actually delivered at the time that it is alleged that they were delivered? Were they properly packaged? Was a smaller number delivered than was shown on the documentation? If that happened, it would bear disproportionately on small businesses which lack large numbers of people to follow through such practical problems. Larger businesses probably employ people to do just that. I believe that the Bill would tend to increase the number of disputed contracts.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I have been following what my hon. Friend has been saying and entirely agree with him, so what I am about to say goes slightly against my own conclusions. My hon. Friend referred to Japan, but I believe that Japan is one of the very few countries—if not the only country—to have had some legislative success in this area. It introduced the Law for Prevention of Slow Payment to Small Sub-contracting Firms in 1956. I do not know whether that legislation has been part of Japan's build-up of success in creating good practices in its firms. Would my hon. Friend care to comment on that?

Mr. Eggar: I am about to come to this point, not only in relation to Japan but more particularly as it applies to the rest of the European Community. The Commission's conclusion is that the differences in payment practices within the Community have not been brought about by the

different legislative position, but by different cultural attitudes towards payment and the relationships between different businesses.

Existing provisions allow firms to sue for debts and for interest. As small firms do not tend to go to court at present to recover the principal debt owed to them, not least for fear of losing future business, they are even less likely to do so if the Bill becomes law, simply to obtain the interest element. In most cases, the interest owed would be a comparatively small sum in relation to the principal outstanding. Another reason for the reluctance of small firms to use the courts is that the process is inevitably costly, especially in time, which is a precious commodity for small firms. Debtors know that only too well. As they take advantage of it now, I suggest that they would continue to take such advantage if the Bill were on the statute book.

Mr. Mates: I am sorry to keep interrupting my hon. Friend, but those two arguments are strong arguments in favour of the Bill. If he makes it clear that the force of those arguments goes against his conviction, that is fine. Of course, no firm will go to court simply for the interest when the principal is owned in any case. Therefore, the situation would be no different from now. A small business man will not seek to go to court. He will show the same reluctance to go to court as now because of his contractual relationships. However, if he has to go to court, interest will be running from the date on which the debt was owing, so he will be that much better off.

Mr. Eggar: My point is that small firms do not go to court at the moment for commercial and time reasons, so why on earth do we think that they would go to court because they have a Bill that entitles them to the interest accruing on the principal? My objection—my difficulty with the Bill—is whether it will address the problem. I do not dispute that there is a problem, but I do not believe that the Bill will meet it.

My hon. Friend questioned whether the business atmosphere would be affected by the enactment of the Bill. Of course, I hope that the passing of the Bill—if it were to be passed—would have a marginal effect on the atmosphere. However, it is unlikely to have a major impact on the way in which the majority of firms operate in this country. We need a change in attitude and a recognition that there is a mutual relationship between small and large suppliers and, indeed, between small suppliers and small companies. Indeed, much has been made of the fact that small companies are excluded from the provisions, except in so far as they might benefit from them.

In answer to an intervention, I said that, like a number of small business organisations, I feel that one of the effects of the Bill would be an inevitable lengthening of the credit terms that large customers would seek to extract from their smaller suppliers. Firms in a weaker market position—in other words, generally small firms—would have to agree to those longer credit terms if they wanted to retain that business. I have read that some of the Bill's supporters have conceded that argument and that although they believe that a longer credit period could result from the Bill, they feel that that would be a price worth paying for a gain in certainty. However, I wonder whether that is really in the interest of small firms as a whole. A longer credit period would apply to many small firms, but the certainty would probably benefit only a few small firms. I raise that question. It must be borne in mind.

Mr. Gill: I appreciate what a difficult task my hon. Friend has to persuade the House that his case is right. He should not make the assumption that there is any certainty in the terms that small companies enjoy with large customers at present. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) has instanced one large public company, well know to us all, which agrees to pay its suppliers in 90 days but takes 150 days to pay. What certainty is that?

Mr. Eggar: My hon. Friend make a good point, but if there is a lack of certainty around 30 days now, would he rather that there was a lack of certainty over 90 days in future? We cannot be certain that the Bill will introduce the change in attitude that many of my hon. Friends seem to assume. All my hon. Friends, even my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East, recognise that in practice few small firms will go to the courts in order to obtain the amount due to them with the accrued interest that would apply under the Bill.

Mr. Ian Taylor: I think that we are missing one major point. If a small companies wishes to have certainty above all else, it can factor the debts because large companies are good collateral. That is the way in which companies create certainty, not through legislation.

Mr. Eggar: With his financial expertise, my hon. Friend points out one way to proceed. That point was made to me by the Association of British Factors when it came to see me recently. I would not want to appear to support one particular commercial way of proceeding on debt collection.

Mr. Hind: As a director of a company that does a large amount of factoring, I know that it is an expensive way of dealing with the problem, though it provides one with certainty, providing that the proper credit checks are made on the company. Will my hon. Friend consider that there is a better way of dealing with the matter which, as a lawyer, I know is not followed by companies? That is simply to put in a statutory demand which would cause payment within 14 days. If it is not paid within 14 days, a wind-up petition automatically follows. In my experience, that is the best way to obtain one's money. Never mind the interest, a company is interested in being paid.

Mr. Eggar: I assume that my hon. Friend's businesses are extremely prosperous.

Mr. Hind: They have no customers!

Mr. Eggar: I am sure that they go from strength to strength. I listened with considerable interest to what he said. I look forward to hearing the reports of what my other hon. Friends have said about my hon. Friend's suggestions.

Mr. Hind: I make that point because I recognise that it is difficult to obtain money from large businesses with which one is doing business. I accept that, but the majority of cases of which I have had experience are companies where there are lengthy gaps and where the suppliers of services have decided that they will not do business with

[Mr. Hind]

that company again. Those are the circumstances in which one would use a statutory demand. It is effective and it is not used enough. The ignorance about it is remarkable.

Mr. Eggar: I am grateful for that advice. I am sure that several commentators will take note of it when they read the *Official Report*.

I have already said that I am worried that a provision such as that in the Bill might cause an increased number of disputes over contracts. I have given examples of what I think might happen. If there were an increase in disputes as a result of the Bill, small companies would suffer most.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East and several other of my hon. Friends have commented on the payment practices of several large companies. I am not aware of the precise details, but it worries me to hear about large companies that abuse their powers and deliberately delay payment to suppliers. That is not a reasonable way to behave and it is not the way in which I believe that the majority of responsible large companies behave. I hope that those large companies mentioned in the debate will examine their payment practices and consider whether in all conscience they act in a way that is not only fair to their suppliers, but is in their own interests. That was the point that I was developing in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill). I referred to the practices of business in Japan and to what is happening among a considerable number of British companies.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that many large firms such as Marks and Spencer recognise that the prosperity of their suppliers is very much in their own interests? They play a major part in ensuring that their suppliers are prosperous and they help them as they expand.

Mr. Eggar: My hon. Friend refers to Marks and Spencer, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East. There are other similar examples. One must be realistic about the diversity of attitudes among large companies towards their small company suppliers. In general, large companies do not take account of their suppliers' position in the long term. It is not for me to make a judgment, it is for the management of the companies but they probably do themselves harm, as well as harming their small suppliers.

It should be remembered that small firms have a responsibility to their customers and to other small firms. I have already said that several studies have shown that there is a lack of management expertise in many small companies. One of the areas in which there is such a lack, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) said, is in the collection of bills and the system that each small company operates. I hope that small firms will examine their own systems and will use available methodology to the best effect in making their cash flow as good as it can be.

I have referred already to some interesting open learning programmes of which I hope small firms will take advantage. From time to time, they do not take action that is within their own control and occasionally they could do more to help themselves, rather than always seeing problems with large companies as the cause of their cash flow difficulties.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East pointed to the example of other European Community member states who have legislation on late payment. A recent report prepared for the Commission shows that there is no direct correlation between good payment practice and the existence of legislation. The experience of countries having late payment legislation ranges from that of Spain and Portugal, who still regard late payment as a problem, to West Germany, where there appears to be no problem at all.

Mr. Mates: Perhaps I should not make this point, for fear of increasing my hon. Friend's opposition, but in Germany late payment is a criminal offence—"Ve haf vays of making you pay."

Mr. Eggar: I am not sure that my hon. Friend's supporters would appreciate the implications of making late payment a crime. If his Bill goes to Committee and he moves an amendment to make late payment a criminal offence, I doubt whether many of our right hon. and hon. Friends will support him. The Commission's report appears to make the point that the existence or otherwise of late payment does not depend on legislation but on cultural and business practices. The report states:

> "The effectiveness of specific legislation as an aid to small and medium sized enterprises in collecting payment must . . . be questioned."

It states also:

> "Our understanding is that there is a common frustration in member states where there is specific legislation covering late payment to small and medium sized enterprises that the process involved in pursuing the legislation is slow and sometimes costly. Small and medium sized enterprises are often reluctant to pursue major customers through the legal process as they believe, not unnaturally, that it may prejudice the business opportunities which they are pursuing."

The Commission's objective report points out that the late payments we experience in this country are exactly the same as those that continue to exist elsewhere in the Community in countries having late payment legislation, with the exception of West Germany.

My Department has launched initiatives and published the booklets "Payment on Time" and "Prompt Payment Please!", which give guidance to small firms on credit management and correct invoicing and to large firms on their responsibilities to suppliers, particularly small firms. Those booklets were prepared in conjunction with a number of organisations representing both small and large businesses. We have also written to all Government Departments, county and local councils, health authorities, banks, small firms organisations and accountancy bodies offering copies of both publications and making it clear that the Government believe that measures should be taken to improve Britain's record of payment on time.

I do not say for one moment that during the past three or four years we have succeeded in achieving a dramatic change in attitude, but we have got an improvement. There is more of an awareness from large companies, and certainly from Government, at both local and national level, of the need to pay promptly.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): My hon. Friend mentioned the increasing awareness of the Government. When I was at the Department of Health and health authorities were beginning to run up large debts towards the end of the financial year, the strong view was taken in my Department that that was inflationary and inimical to the public interest. It was thought that if the

suppliers came to believe as a matter of practice that Government Departments were delaying payments they would tend to puts up their prices. We took a strong view on that and an allocation of money was made so that the health authorities could meet their debts and reduce their credit lines in that way.

Mr. Eggar: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One of the major arguments for being a good and prompt payer is that one gets a keen price. There is no built-in effect making people think, "Well, they may not pay for 30 or 90 days and therefore we had better put in another margin." If my hon. Friend remains I shall assure her that the good work in which she was involved during her time at the Department of Health lives after her. I shall comment on the health authorities' present payment practices.

As time is pressing I shall turn to the Government's record as a major purchaser. Central Government are directly responsible for a purchasing sum of about £15 billion per year. As everyone knows, the proposed legislation would cover not just large companies, but Government Departments.

In preparing for the debate I checked with all the major Government Departments about their policy on payment. Without exception their clear and unequivocal response was that payments should be made promptly. That is how it should be. It is only fair and right that Governments should set a good example on payment practice. Therefore, I am worried when suggestions are made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East and other hon. Friends that in some way Government Departments have a particularly bad payment record.

Mr. Leigh: If the Government have taken this issue on board, why do they object to the Bill applying to them?

Mr. Eggar: I shall come to that point in a moment.

Government Departments are an easy target at which to aim, but there is little firm evidence to suggest that they are bad payers. During the past 10 years departmental payment procedures have been enormously improved and streamlined. I stress that it is our firm policy that all payments are to be made on time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East referred to the Ministry of Defence. It spends more than £8 billion a year on equipment and its major bill-paying centre in Liverpool handles no less than 1·3 million bills a year. The Ministry is often quoted as being a later payer, but I shall explain how the payment procedure works because that is part of the reason for the confusion over the Ministry of Defence. Contractors are paid by a monthly billing system by which they submit bills at four-weekly intervals and are normally paid within five or six working days of those bills being submitted. Other miscellaneous bills are submitted randomly and payments are usually paid within two weeks of the receipt of authorisation.

I know that anxiety has been expressed about Ministry of Defence sub-contractors—companies that have no direct contractual relationship with MOD but which rely on its main contractors. As a result of the concern voiced by these sub-contractors, the MOD has agreed a code of practice with the trade associations which provides that payment terms for sub-contractors should, in general, be as good as those enjoyed by the Ministry's main contractors. Of course, because the MOD is not in a contractual relationship with its contractors' sub-contractors it cannot enforce the code itself, but it has done everything that it is reasonable to expect it to do for sub-contractors.

Mr. Mates: When I said that the MOD was one of the worst offenders, I should have added that it is also one of the biggest spenders, so proportionately it is probably no better or worse than any other Government Department. I am happy to make that plain; I have a great many dealings with the Department in another capacity.

My hon. Fried is in danger of arguing against himself. He is saying that the MOD has a code of practice, but nothing with which to enforce it. That is precisely the problem that I have outlined about the large companies that do not pay on time. But the MOD does have a way of enforcing the code: it can refuse to deal with main contractors who do not pass on the benefits of prompt payment to sub-contractors. If my hon. Friend will acknowledge that, it is yet another reason why the small man should be given a lever against the big man such as that which MOD has tried to produce.

Mr. Eggar: I am not sure of the point my hon. Friend is trying to make. Is he saying that any company, however direct or indirect its relationship with Government Departments, should benefit from what amounts to strict contractual terms of payment? Does he want to intervene in the commercial relationship between companies to the extent that his question implied? I thought that my hon. Friend's main argument for one of the changes in the Bill was that he wanted to leave it to the market to decide the contractual terms in the way that it thought best.

Mr. Mates: I am certainly not trying to say that, and I am happy to put my hon. Friend right. Let us take the example of GEC, a major defence contractor. My hon. Friend's argument that he cannot make GEC carry out the MOD's code of practice because that must be left to the market is the very reason why we must approach the problem from the other end. If the MOD can do nothing about one of the worst offenders to which it gives major contracts, why should not we help the little man?

Mr. Eggar: That is predicated on the assumption—if my hon. Friend's Bill became law—that a small company would automaticaly and suddenly find that GEC, to use my hon. Friend's example, would pay promptly which it has not done before.

Mr. Mates: Yes, because it would cost the company not to.

Mr. Eggar: Not necessarily. The only way in which that would happen would be if the small company took the large company to court.

Mr. Mates: No.

Mr. Eggar: The debt has to be collected. Small companies will face exactly the same decision as they face now—whether to imperil their relationship with their major customer by taking action to recover their debt.

Several hon. Members have referred to the "Today" programme this morning. My hon. Friend must accept that it was significant that the representatives of both the small companies interviewed had doubts about whether his Bill would have the impact that my hon. Friend thinks it will have. The first point that I made in the debate was

[Mr. Eggar]

about the contractual balance of power in the relationship between small and large companies. I do not think that the Bill will make enough of a difference to that balance to justify adding to the legislative burden in this area. As I also said earlier, the Government are committed to less regulation and intervention and, therefore, the onus is on those who support the Bill to show conclusively that it will have an impact on the late payment problem.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) spoke about payment delays in the National Health Service. That was drawn to her attention when she was a Minister in the Department of Health and it has also been mentioned in a recent report by the National Audit Office. As a result of that report and my hon. Friend's efforts, we have been tackling that problem. Regional health authorities have been instructed to reduce unacceptable delays and this will be followed up by performance reviews of those authorities. They will also discuss with districts how best to move towards the target of payment within a normal commercial time frame.

Hon. Members have spoken about local authorities. It may interest the House to know that in 1986 an Audit Commission report almost suggested that some local authorities were too good at paying their bills early and that they should consider adopting more commercial practices. Other local authorities are not good payers. We are doing everything that we can to get central Government's record right. We have identified the problem with health authorities and have taken action to deal with it. Local authorities have what could be described as a mixed record.

I was surprised by the way in which my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East sought to cast doubts on the representative nature of the bodies that have put forward arguments against his Bill. I do not think that anybody has tried to enter into an argument about the representative nature or otherwise of the Forum of Private Business or to look in detail at the consultation the Institute of Directors has carried out with its members. The House accepts that representative bodies put forward their proposals in a way that they think best represents the interests of their members. That is the best way to conduct the debate.

I shall quote to the House the view of the Association of British Chambers of Commerce. It says:

"every effort must be made to reduce, and not to increase, the extent to which legislation interferes in the normal commercial relationship between businesses."

In reference to the Bill the association says:

"we fear . . . that large businesses will adopt much longer payment terms, ensuring that they do not become liable for interest . . . the Bill could lead to a worsening of the prompt payment situation."

The association's views are supported by the Association of Scottish Chambers of Commerce.

Mr. Hind: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Eggar: I have given way to many hon. Members and it is not fair to the House for me to continue with my speech for longer than is necessary.

The National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses has said:

"We believe that legislation could be self-defeating . . . Larger companies would alter their contract conditions to circumnavigate the measures . . .".

The federation goes on to mention the need for small businesses to be trained in credit monitoring and collection, and adds:

"Too often it is the businessman him/herself who is to blame."

That is an interesting reflection. On the evidence of its smaller firms council, the CBI has also made clear its opposition to the Bill.

I have always believed that the Government should pay considerable attention to small firms' organisations and should be influenced by their attitudes, and I hear what my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East says about some organisations changing their views. I had the impression from an IOD document that I read this morning that some had changed their minds because of the alterations that my hon. Friend had made in the Bill—alterations about which my hon. Friends the Members for Stockport (Mr. Favell) and for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman), among others, expressed concern.

I suggest that the onus is on the Bill's sponsor to make an overwhelming case for putting it on the statute book. No one would deny for a moment that late payment of bills is a problem for many small businesses; the question is whether my hon. Friend's Bill would alleviate that problem. The Government are not convinced that it is the right way forward and our doubts are shared by many small firms' organisations. I therefore cannot commend it to the House.

12.51 pm

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): I join other hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) on his success in the ballot, and on having aired an important subject. I have been in the House for some 13 years, but have never come higher than 50th in the ballot. Let me use this opportunity to ask the Clerks to shuffle the applications about a bit in the next ballot, so that Mr. Speaker can make a sensible and logical choice from the top of the pile.

I am attracted to the idea of the Bill, but any law that is introduced must be practical. If it does not work, the subsequent chaos and confusion will make matters very much worse than they are now—and we have already heard about the problems facing the courts at present.

I feel rather like the wishbone on the traditional Christmas turkey. One half of me is being pulled towards the Bill because its spirit is right, while the other half is pulled in the opposite direction because of the practical difficulties that it involves. My hon. Friend the Minister —who spoke for over an hour, and generously answered interventions—said the same. He approves of the spirit of the measure, as he wants people to honour their debts, but he sees practical problems in the way, and I agree that those objections must be overcome before we can proceed further.

I would hate hon. Members to go away with the idea that my hon. Friend the Minister is against small businesses. The right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown)—who was here for the first few minutes of the debate, but has now vanished into thin air—was entirely wrong to say that the Government must now back up their rhetoric on small businesses by supporting the Bill. The list of the Government's achievements for small businesses is exceedingly long, and the right hon. Gentleman should not try to extrapolate an objection to small businesses from the Government's objection to the Bill.

I have a substantial list of what the Government have done for small businesses, but in view of the time I shall not read it out. We can oppose the Bill without saying that the Government are abandoning small businesses. I am almost a founder member of the small band of pilgrims that has done everything possible to help small businesses. We have seen a shrunken small business sector grow rapidly. The fact that there are now 1,500 net registrations every month shows how fast that sector is expanding.

In the past we have examined the problem, but we have failed to crack it. I hope we can crack it this time, but I do not think that the Bill will improve the present position. Unless there are some significant changes, I do not believe that it will gain the support of the House.

I recall what my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside said when he was Under-Secretary of State—I understand that he has now been given an extra job of recycling fridges—in reply to a temporarily estranged colleague, Mr. Richard Ottaway when referring to the debt code on payment on time. I was shattered and shocked at what my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East said about the cynical attitude adopted by certain large British companies that are signatories to that code. The condemnations have been savage, particularly of GEC. Such an attitude is not in keeping with the approach and management that one expects from a flagship company of Great Britain. Quite bluntly, those condemnations should not be ignored. They should be answered. Either they should be challenged and denied or rebutted, or, if they are true, there should be a response and a change. If there is silence and the condemnations are ignored, the House will draw its own conclusions about the truth.

My hon. Friend the Minister has taken most of my points from under me, as one would expect. Before I turn to the workable parts of the Bill, I shall touch on an important fringe matter. There is no reason whatsoever why small businesses should be exempt from any measure of debt repayment. Where should we draw the line? We all know the problems of trying to define a small business —whether it should be 50 employees, 100 employees or a certain turnover. Why should we deal with only public companies? Why should private companies be exempt? Private companies supply public companies and public companies supply private companies, so why should there be any difference? We have worked quite hard and we have yet to succeed in getting a set-aside in Government purchases so that Government Departments purchase from small businesses. I do not see why there should be any such exemptions.

All I need to say about the interest rate is that it must be relatively penal. I shall not go into the legal aspect of when a penal interest rate becomes extortionate, but it has to be penal to make it work. It would be very unfair to leave it at a break-even figure. The invoice that a small company sends to a large company contains more than the payment and the interest—it contains an element of profit. A small company needs that profit element because it represents its growth factor for the future. It needs that money to expand and develop, otherwise it will simply mark time.

I have some experience in the business sector and have heard most of the variants on the "cheque is in the post" syndrome. Unless we are careful, the Bill will create a shoal of new reasons for delay. I can foresee all the examples for setting aside the statutory payment period. My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), in his characteristically robust way, made the views of the Coventry chamber of commerce fairly clear and showed how such problems can develop. A series of standard letters will be written complaining that the quality, delivery or paperwork was not up to scratch in order to extend the time for payment. It will become a lawyer's paradise.

Mr. Timothy Wood (Stevenage): I should like to pursue that point, because in many instances of delayed payment there has usually been a dispute about the quality of the goods or service provided. In reality the Bill may generate a raft of correspondence to justify delays in payment, thereby leading to additional costs that are being avoided at present.

Mr. Page: With such a raft of artificial reasons, the real reasons for the delay will become muddled, and confusion will be added to the existing problems.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East said that enforcement will be voluntary. He therefore plunged the argument back to where we are today, whereby a big company can be taken to court. As my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) said, it can brutally be taken to court, especially if a small business does not want to do business with it again. But small businesses do not do that because they do not want to lose future business. Will small businesses slap an interest charge on large companies, or for the purpose of good relations will they say, "Let us hold back and let it go"?

Mr. Gill: Is my hon. Friend seriously suggesting that every time responsible public companies are faced with paying interest on debts that they have not paid on time they will take court action? That is not the object of the Bill. Its object is to make it clear, beyond peradventure, that it is no longer acceptable to spin out payment of debt by offering all the excuses of which the House is well aware.

Mr. Page: I am saying that a small company will not take a large company to court. It will say, "We will waive the interest rate because we do not want to upset the big company and lose its business."

Mr. Mates: What does my hon. Friend say about the Rolls-Royce director who said to me, "Of course, we would not pay late; there would be no point in us doing so." He would pay on time.

Mr. Page: I appreciate that, but what about the example of the purchasing manager of a large company persuading smaller companies to be more tolerant?

I fear that if the Bill is enacted companies will write terms of contracts covering any possible extension or delay in payment. A cheque may genuinely be in the post, but be delayed because of a problem with the post; there may be a delay because the computer has genuinely broken down; and there may be a delay because of holidays. However, we will find that contracts, instead of offering the normal contract period, will offer a "comfort" period. That will become the norm, rather than the standards that we should like to be achieved.

I finish as I began. I am with the Bill in spirit, but I am doubtful about it in practice. I should like to see the problems overcome. Despite my doubts, I echo the sentiments expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for

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Chichester (Mr. Nelson), when he said that the House should make a decision and not use a device to halt that process.

1.5 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): It will come as no surprise to the House to hear that I shall support the Bill. My remarks will be brief because the House has been so tolerant of my interventions. There will be considerable relief in Wolverhampton today because I am here harassing my hon. Friend the Minister about this problem rather than harassing my credit controllers in my medium-sized business.

I compliment my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) on his initiative in introducing the Bill and on the excellent and comprehensive way in which he put the case. I entirely agreed with every word that he said, but I find myself in a position that I would rather not be in. As an ardent supporter of a free and deregulated market and as one who believes that the best thing that the Government can do is to keep out of the business arena, I am arguing for a measure of regulation.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East made clear, the voluntary code—the appeal to people to take a responsible attitude in this important matter—has failed. Payment on time has been torpedoed, principally by the big battalions of Government, local government and big business. Often, the enterprises that have positive cash flow and are cash-rich have operated to the grave disadvantage of their small and medium-sized suppliers.

I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) is not here to hear me refer to farming, which he broached. It provides a classic example. Until recently, it was the practice in the livestock industry for auctioneers to pay livestock producers on the day that they sold their produce in the markets. Sadly, that no longer happens. The wholesaler does not pay the livestock auctioneer because he is not paid by the retailer.

Five major retailers account for 75 per cent. of all packaged groceries sold, so they have enormous power and, more to the point, are cash-rich. A serious chain reaction has been set in motion by the very people whom the Bill is designed to bring to order, because they are the people who could release a torrent of cash to small and medium-sized businesses. Thirty years ago, there was not a problem but, as many hon. Members have said, there is now an enormous one. My hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) referred to the morality that should apply, but there is no morality today. In the past, a supplier would expect and get prompt payment from his customer, but that morality no longer exists.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gill: I shall not give way because I am anxious to give other hon. Members an opportunity to speak.

Other Conservative Members have mentioned factors. Thirty years ago, there was no such thing as a "factor" because there was no need for it. It is a phenomenon of our age. These things have sprung up out of this totally unacceptable phenomenon. The worst offenders are indisputably the big companies. They exploit their power ruthlessly in the market not only by dictating the specifications and the prices of the goods and services that they buy—which is perfectly legitimate—but by setting terms that they themselves break. I have no doubt that extended credit and the effect that that has on the cash flows of smaller businesses can be catastrophic.

At present, that predicament is exacerbated by higher interest rates and we see small and medium businesses caught in a vicious circle of paying more to their bankers to borrow more and to finance the debts of their cash-rich customers who, at the same time, are themselves profiting by investing the money that rightly belongs to their suppliers on the money market to earn additional profit. When we talk in terms of morality, there is a big question mark about whether that is acceptable. My hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) has said that there is big money in paying late and I am sure that he is right.

The Bill is vital for the future well-being of a highly important sector of the British economy which now finds itself caught between the hammer of high interest rates and the anvil of extended credit.

1.11 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) will be relieved to hear that I do not intend to speak at length not least, if it is not too poor a pun, because my hon. Friend is a good mate of mine. As I have listened to the argument this morning, I have realised that a consensus has developed. As my hon. Friends will know, I am very much a consensus politician, but I do not know whether it will be possible for us to achieve that consensus by 2.30 pm. I wish that it were.

I want to outline what I see as some of the problems with the Bill. I shall summarise the main arguments in favour of the Bill. It is said that it would be a deterrent to late payment, which is said to be an increasing problem because of the current high level of interest rates. It is said that this is a moral issue and that companies awaiting payment of sizeable debts by larger companies should have some automatic legal redress. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East put forward the argument that that is a common practice in the European Community. Another argument is that a major small business organisation, the Forum of Private Business—and I pay tribute to its work, because it also operates in my constituency—supports the Bill. A point that has not yet been made is that the Government have already acted on payment of VAT receipts, so in that sense they have set a precedent. How do those arguments measure up to reality?

The problem has undoubtedly been recognised for some time. Lord Denning, in characteristically effective language in Harbutt's "Plasticine" Ltd. *v.* the Wayne Tank and Pump Co. Ltd. in 1970, said:

> "It seems to me that the basis of an award of interest is that the defendant has kept the plaintiff out of his money; and the defendant has had the use of it himself. So he ought to compensate the plaintiff accordingly."

The principle has been recognised equally by Lord Roskill who, in President of India *v.* La Pintada, said:

> "My Lords, it would be idle to affect ignorance of the fact that the present state of the law in relation to this case places the small creditor at a grave disadvantage vis-à-vis his substantial and influential debtor. The former may fear to offend the latter by instituting legal proceedings either swiftly or indeed at all and it is notorious that some substantial and influential debtors are not slow to take advantage of this tactical strength, especially in time of financial stringency. It

has taken two pieces of legislation, one some 50 years after 1893 and the other almost another half-century later, to remedy the injustices"

of the case.

Some of our most eminent legal minds have addressed themselves to the problem, which my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East was undoubtedly right to raise. We must ask ourselves not whether there is a problem—that is accepted—but whether the Bill would provide an efffective deterrent, a question on which I have my doubts. The efectiveness of the Bill will depend critically on whether creditors would enforce their rights under it, and I am not convinced that my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East, in his fairly long speech, has made a convincing case that they would. Legal redress for small companies facing late payment is already provided in the Administration of Justice Act 1982 and the County Court Act 1984. As my hon. Friend the Minister said, the real problem—and it is more a question of commonsense than anything else—is that small firms have been reluctant to use existing legislation, which makes it unlikely that they would use the Bill. As my hon. Friend the Minister also said, there is a fundamental imbalance in negotiating strength between small and large businesses and legislation alone will not solve that.

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend may remember that in an intervention my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) explained that the main purpose of the Bill was to provide for interest to be chargeable between the date of contract and the date on which the writ was issued. My hon. Friend has just referred to the Administration of Justice Act 1982 which extended the payment of interest backwards, whether or not there was a judgment under the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1934. Does my hon. Friend agree that simply to extend interest back to the date of the contract is not a great improvement on the present position?

Mr. Leigh: I agree with my hon. Friend. Those who share my opinion of the Bill believe that the fundamental problem is not interest payments. It goes much deeper than that, and I am not sure that the Bill would go to the root of the problem.

The second argument advanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East in favour of the Bill is that the problem is becoming increasingly severe, that it now needs to be addressed and that the Bill would address it. I am not sure that that is entirely right. There can be many other reasons for delay in payment, such as bureaucratic inertia, a cumbersome payments system, or disputes over contract performance. I think that the European precedent argument was dealt with adequately by my hon. Friend the Minister, and I am not sure in any case that the Bill would make any difference.

The next question is whether small firms support the proposals. There was one part of the speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East which I did not think was fair. He doubted the credibility of the Association of British Chambers of Commerce. I ought to remind the House of what the association's head office said. My hon. Friend's suggestion that the association—a body that is intimately interested in the Bill—has not read the Bill and is not aware of its contents is unsustainable and ludicrous. The association made its position clear when it said:

"It is the Association's general view that every effort must be made to reduce, and not to increase, the extent to which legislation interferes in the commercial relationship between businesses. Beyond this point of principle, we have further concerns about the practical effect of the Bill. The key question is whether or not the Bill will lead to major changes in the payment practices of larger businesses. It is possible that it would, but serious doubts remain. More likely, we fear, is that larger businesses will adopt much longer payment terms, ensuring that they do not become liable for interest on amounts outstanding."

That is a point that my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East and his supporters have not adequately addressed. It is a point that the Association of British Chambers of Commerce made clearly and explicitly in its letter. If the Bill were given a Second Reading today and ultimately passed, not only might it not be an effective deterrent to late payment, it might also have a deleterious effect on small businesses.

Mr. Hind: I am the vice-president of the Merseyside chamber of commerce which, as my hon. Friend well knows, supports the Bill. Does he agree that if we are to introduce into our enterprise culture a difficult concept, such as interest, we should follow the view of the Law Commission and accept that if the provision is to be workable it should go right the way through business, from the smallest company to the biggest, so that it then becomes an accepted part of our culture? The problem with the Bill is that it selects two sectors of the market, large companies and Government, and ignores the rest. In time I suspect that we would be forced to return to the House to include the other sectors in the legislation.

Mr. Leigh: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I hope that he will forgive me if I do not deal with his point at any length. I believe that I made it clear earlier in the debate when I read the letter from the Coventry chamber of commerce. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East suggested that the Coventry chamber of commerce did not understand the Bill. To say that this is a problem of big business alone is to simplify a far more complex problem. Late payment is just as much a problem of small businesses dealing with other small businesses as it is of big businesses trying to throtle small businesses. The problem is far more complex and we do not take the debate much further forward by suggesting that.

I promised to make a short speech to allow other hon. Members to contribute. My last point, therefore, relates to Government example. There is no doubt that the Government have taken considerable steps in this regard and I pay tribute to my hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench for what they have done. However, I do not understand the reaction of my hon. Friend the Minister to a question that I have now put to him no fewer than four times this morning. If the Government have been so successful in tackling the problem and have given so much advice to businesses about how they should address it—and we accept that Government have so done—why have they not admitted so far that if the Bill applied solely to Government, they would support it? That seems an entirely logical point of view. I do not want to put words into my hon. Friend's mouth, but I suspect that had my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East introduced a Bill that applied only to Government, the Government might have accepted it. Had that been the case, it would have sent out a powerful message, which would have been far more powerful than any of the leaflets—good though they are.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): My hon. Friend is a member of a most distinguished

[Mr. David Ashby]

profession in relation to which the Government can provide an example. In setting an example, would it not be a good idea for the Government to pay members of the Bar within a month of the completion of a case, instead of barristers having to wait for four, five, six or seven years for payment by the Government for work that they have done? Should not the Government set an example and pay interest on those outstanding fees?

Mr. Leigh: I fear, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you might pull me up if I were to wander too far down that path which, I must admit, is of great interest to me. I had been a Member of the House for six years when I received the payment of £15 for a case in which I was involved as a pupil 10 years earlier. It was not much use to me.

Mr. John Marshall: No doubt my hon. Friend will have read the report of the Top Salaries Review Body, which points out that half the barristers in the land earn over £120,000 per year. Does he accept that there is little sympathy for the Bar in this House or across the country?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): I am sure that the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) can show that sympathy or lack of it by referring to the Bill.

Mr. Leigh: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker. I did not want to be taken up the highways and byways of the legal profession.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Does my hon. Friend suggest that the Bill should make the Government a unique debtor and that they alone should bear some form of statutory interest burden that no other business or individual bears? If so, what does he have against the Government?

Mr. Leigh: I have nothing against the Government apart from the fact that I am a member of it. The Government are in a unique position. My objection to the Bill and that of some of my hon. Friends is that if it were passed, big business might simply extend credit periods. We would not accuse the Government of doing that. If the Bill applied merely to Government, it could not be argued that it would have a harmful effect on small businesses. The Government claim that they have instituted such practices already. If so, why do they refuse legislation that would apply to them?

Mr. Hind: My hon. Friend raises an interesting point. If his proposal were accepted, only the Government would be liable for interest. Let us take the Ministry of Defence as an example. It has an £8 billion or £9 billion procurement budget. It would pay its suppliers on time but the large companies with which it predominantly does business would not have to pass on the money that they receive to smaller businesses from which they have bought goods and services. If the Bill applied only to the Government, it would not help the small businesses that it seeks to assist. Perhaps my hon. Friend will reconsider if he looks at the matter in that way.

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend's argument is not logical. He takes us back to the roots of the argument about the Bill. The trouble is that one cannot trust big business not to get around the Bill by extending the periods of payment. However, one can trust Government. What I suggest is not an ideal solution, but a halfway house. It is a practical suggestion of a way forward. The Government could set an example which would be a good example to everyone else.

I urge the sponsors of the Bill and the Government to see whether it is possible in the next hour or the next five minutes to get their heads together. It would be a great pity if the Bill were to sink into the sand and an example were not set. Clearly, an example needs to be given.

1.26 pm

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): There is an enormous amount of sympathy throughout the House for the Bill. Everyone recognises that late payment is a serious problem which particularly affects small companies, which are least able to bear the increased burden of debt that it forces on them. The difficulty with the Bill as drafted is that it is not certain that it would work. It must be judged precisely on whether it will change the attitude of large companies towards their responsibilities to the small companies who supply them.

The relationship between large and small firms is by no means a simple one. It varies enormously, depending on the type of industry and small firm. Broadly speaking, small firms can be split into two major categories. One is the regular supplier to a company. We have already had the example of Marks and Spencer, which looks after its small suppliers extremely well. The great characteristic of Marks and Spencer is that frequently it is not simply the major customer but the only customer of a supplier. It also imposes tight quality controls and financial regulations on its suppliers and looks after them as unconnected subsidiaries, if such a concept is possible in an informal industrial framework.

Many large companies probably have a similar relationship with their suppliers. In those cases, difficulties do not usually occur and certainly they are not caused deliberately. Difficulties arise when a company is an infrequent or irregular supplier to a large firm. That may be because many small companies are competing to supply one large firm. A typical example is the automotive industry, where small companies undertake component work for manufacturers of large assemblies. Those small suppliers are always competing with others who are equally capable of doing that work, and competition can be extremely tough.

Why do big companies not look after small suppliers and pay their bills promptly? There are a number of reasons. We have heard today examples of deliberately bloody-minded policy on the part of big companies, possibly because they want to enhance their cash flow by borrowing money. There may be companies that deliberately withhold payment to suppliers for that purpose and use their suppliers as an alternative means of borrowing. However, I suspect that that practice is much less common than is usually supposed—principally because the individual debts owed to small suppliers are in themselves quite small and also because the majority of large companies are cash-rich and do not need an alternative form of additional borrowing. The individual credit control officer or purchasing manager may use such a tactic to enhance his individual performance, but it is unlikely to be part of deliberate company policy laid down by the directors. I suspect that that is the case with GEC.

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend refers only to big suppliers making late payments, but the Association of British Chambers of Commerce may be right when it says: "it must be remembered also that small firms are amongst the worst offenders for late payment."

Mr. Carrington: I entirely agree, but I shall confine my remarks to the problems addressed by the Bill. I agree also that the Bill should perhaps be broadened, but I was addressing the particular problem of late payments by large firms to small suppliers.

I suspect that frequently the reason why large purchasers tend not to pay small companies is sheer incompetence in their own payment systems—which is, I suspect, more common than many of them care to admit. I believe that there are often real doubts about the completion of contracts. Although such doubts may sometimes be used as an excuse for non-payment, in many cases that is not so and genuine doubts are raised about the quality of supplies and whether payment for them should be made.

I suspect that the real reason for late payment is that large companies do not really care about their suppliers and that it is irrelevant to them whether their small suppliers suffer. It probably does not matter to the large company whether it pays its bills on time, as that is not a high priority among all the other considerations that it must take into account when trying to run its business.

The small company can do very little. It can go to court now, and could do so on a different basis if the Bill became law and was enforceable. However, the reality is that small companies do not take big companies to court because the moment they do so, they cease to be suppliers to the big companies. One of the arguments in favour of the Bill is that it would alleviate the necessity for a small company to go to court because it would be so obvious that summary judgment would be made in its favour.

Mrs. Currie: My hon. Friend knows that I am not a lawyer, but it seems to me that there is a little bit of sophistry flying around. If small businesses will not use existing legislation that gives them the right to go to court and claim damages and interest, why in heaven's name will they be inclined to use any additional legislation for the same purpose?

Mr. Carrington: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The reality is that whatever happens a small supplier that wishes to continue doing business with a large purchaser will never use the courts, except as a final resort. As I understand it, my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East said that the Bill was designed to alleviate the necessity of going to court. Hon. Members can make their own judgment about whether that is likely.

The relationship that has to exist between a big company and a small company must be based on the concept of mutual need and self-interest. Big companies receive a considerable service from small companies and a big company that does not recognise that is not running its business efficiently. If it does not recognise the benefits that a small company provides in terms of convenience and flexibility in purchasing, the cheapness of its supply and control on costs, the big company should seriously consider providing in-house the services that it was buying in from by the small company. A small company should ensure that when it supplies a big company it clearly understands the advantage to the big company of having it as a supplier.

As has been rightly said, large companies always have the whip hand. I can give a related example from my own experience when I used to be a banker. Banks, as a matter of course, always write into their loan agreements a clause saying that if payment is late under the loan agreement, penalty interest will be charged. That is a similar effect to the one that the Bill would have—if payment is not received on the due date, penalty interest will accrue from that date. There is a good body of law to support that and it is easily enforceable.

As a banker, I would always enforce the law against a small company, but if I had a big customer I would never enforce the penalty clause because that would damage the relationship. Large companies have always had, and will almost certainly always have, the whip hand. It is unrealistic to think that legislation will change that.

If legislation will not solve the problem how can we tackle it? How can we make a change in the business environment in this country to benefit small businesses? As has been said, one of the major changes would be for the Government to ensure that, as a matter of principle, they start to pay their bills promptly and without contest on the due date. That does not require primary legislation; it merely needs a directive to go to the relevant Civil Service Departments stating that that should happen. From the Civil Service it should go to governmentally controlled bodies. If such good business practice was established in governmental purchasing and worked its way down so that governmental purchasers made it clear that they expected their suppliers, in turn, to pay their suppliers on time, that would do more good than any amount of legislation.

On the issue of the extended contract period, it has been said that, at present, payment terms will go up from 30 to 90 days as a matter of course, and that is so. I suspect that that is less a reflection of incompetence in business than a reflection of the dramatic rise in interest rates. A fundamental solution to the problem would be to reduce interest rates and the cost of money. People would then pay their bills on time because the commercial disadvantages of not paying their bills on time would be vastly greater than the financial benefits.

1.38 pm

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): I am very much in favour of this modest measure and would be happy if the House gave it a Second Reading. I am certainly in favour of it in spirit because to block it or vote against it would be like voting against fairness and good practice and Conservatives should not be seen to be doing that.

I am with it in spirit due to many years of practical experience. For my sins, I spent 31 years in manufacturing before coming to this place. For a large number of those 31 years I experienced the joy and sorrow of trying to find a balance between the debtors and creditors of the company of which I was chief executive. So I know about the commercial world that many of my hon. Friends have discussed so sensibly this morning.

It is perfectly true that in business we have to make difficult commercial judgments. If we deal with an old and valued account, we compromise. We pick up the phone

[Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo]

and try to find out what the problem is. We try to discover exactly how long we shall be kept waiting for our money. With old and valued accounts we get by without falling out, because that is the way of the world.

With a new account, however, it is a different ball game. This Bill would provide a little more strength for the new supplier who has tried out a new customer and does not like what he sees. A new supplier cannot pick the phone and say, "George, we have done business for years—what is going wrong?" He is dealing with a stranger, but this piece of legislation would help him if he felt that the new customer was bound by it.

A new supplier does not have to ask himself whether to take his new customer to court for his money. It is often a sensible decision to decide to do without an account—there are accounts that every business can do without. At least the new supplier will know that between taking the decision to recover his money and the time when he receives it he will not be at a financial disadvantage; he will receive interest on the debt, and rightly so.

The Minister was right: it is not for Government to put themselves between the supplier and the supplied. However, the Government are in the business of encouraging a good commercial climate in which business can flourish. It is up to Government to establish a reasonable and unoppressive framework within which business men can get on with the job of running their businesses, with minimum regulation and interference.

The objectives behind this Bill do not amount to interference or oppressive regulation, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) called it. The word "regulation" does not apply. The legislation merely provides a statutory right to interest when a debt is unpaid.

The Government should only be in the business of maintaining the right climate. We have been told at Question Time and in press releases in recent months of our success with start-up businesses. Twelve years ago, under a different Administration, closures exceeded start-ups by a frightening proportion. The last published figures, for 1988-89, show that recent comparative figures for closures and start-ups exceed our wildest dreams of only a few years ago. Conservatives would be doing ourselves less than justice if we were not realistic when trumpeting these figures. For very good reasons the Government seek to take the economy off the boil. I hope that the Chancellor has good anti-skid brakes.

The figures for the past few months certainly show a reduction in the exciting figures published for 1988-89. However, we should be cautious about trumpeting the figures of 12 months ago. The Chancellor has rightly put a damper on the economy but we must accept that that policy has some adverse effects. Although I cannot present firm evidence to the House, I know that some small businesses are suffering a great deal of pain. I hope that we do not have to apply the brakes too hard for too long.

When we talk about small business we are also talking about the self-employed. We took great pride in announcing that finally the number of registered self-employed has exceeded 3 million. That figure is beyond our wildest dreams of a few years ago. Italy's economy was once far behind ours, but I think I am right in saying that it now has about 6 million self-employed people. We have a long way to go before we match some of our continental partners in providing the seed corn of a strong economy. The population of Italy is much the same as ours yet it has 6 million people working for themselves. Those businesses are small but they will become the medium and large businesses of the future.

I entirely agree with my hon. Friends and the Minister who spoke about how much we have done to help small businesses. That is not in dispute. We have reduced the level of taxation and have kept a tight lid on inflation, and those things are good for all businesses, small and large. We have reformed the employment laws and that has helped small businesses. However, we are now dealing with basic economics, the money side of running a small business, at a time when we are also damping down the economy.

The Government and the public sector are certainly leaning on the business community, and especially on our small businesses. As a manufacturer controlling a company's cash flow I did not pay VAT, PAYE or national insurance until I had to. No firm in the country pays its dues before it needs to do so. Every small business man will confirm that the Government insist on the payment on the nail of PAYE, national insurance and VAT. That is right because it is public money and the Government charge interest if they do not receive it on time. What is sauce for the goose should be sauce for the gander.

Unfortunately when it comes to the payment of VAT and PAYE, the small business man cannot change his customer because he does not have a choice. In these difficult times we should at least try to do something for the small business. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) has not suggested that the Bill is a complete answer to the problems. He and my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow talked about trying to create a climate or culture in which businesses in their relationships with each other take it as read that they will play the game. If the contractual terms refer to payment within 30 days, payment should be made in 30 days. The Bill aims to improve the general attitude.

Several hon. Members have said that they like the Bill in principle, but want to change some details. The time to do that will be in Committee. If the Bill becomes law and encourages good practice, today's debate will have been very worthwhile.

1.50 pm

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): This is the second Friday running on which I have participated in a debate on a private Member's Bill. Such debates are rather like the late-lamented fourth leader in *The Times*—both entertaining and instructive, but without much practical effect if the Government are opposed to what is being suggested.

I am very pleased that my hon. Friend and near neighbour the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) has presented the Bill. I am also pleased about the dramatic effect of the Bill that he did not present. Often more can be done behind the scenes than can be achieved in an entire Friday morning's debate that will have little practical effect.

I have many years' experience of family business and some earlier experience of legal matters, so I know the problems from various angles. My business experience convinces me that the Bill will be a useful addition to the

armoury of those who are cursed with the problem of bad debts. All business men use ruses—they know that they can delay payment for goods or services by complaining about them. It is also wise to avoid involving lawyers. Anyone who has to pay the bills even for solicitors' letters is extremely foolish if he thinks that they should be part of the unofficial board of any company, private or public. Speaking as a lawyer, I feel that lawyers should be kept as far away as possible from business.

Mr. Hanley: But not accountants.

Mr. Martin: My brother happens to be an accountant and I have views about them as well, but in deference to my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) I shall not go into them.

One of my most impressive methods of pressing for the payment of debts was borrowed from the legal process: sending a letter closely resembling a writ. I remember receiving one and then imitating it. It is possible to get away with making letters look very much like writs, and it is amazing how quickly payment arrives as a result.

As we have heard, the Crown is very adept at obtaining money from us, and obtaining interest on that money. Anyone who is away from home for a long time—during the first summer recess after my election, I was away from my London home for a considerable period—soon discovers the speed with which the gas, electricity and telephone bodies embark on their pursuit. The bills turn from black to red; then come the writs and the details of the costs. I challenge anyone to try to delay payment of the former nationalised industries; the attitude of such large concerns is very different from that of the small businesses with which I was involved. As several hon. Members have mentioned that already, however, I shall not go into further details.

With my practical experience, I understand the worries of small businesses. In the south, and particularly in my constituency, the introduction of the uniform business rate and the reform of domestic rates has led me to remember Macaulay's typically wise dictum:

"For unjust and absurd taxation to which men are accustomed is often borne far more willingly than the most reasonable impost which is new."

That has come to mind on many occasions during this debate and others on the system which my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East proposed to replace the unjust and absurd system with which many businesses are unhappy. It gives rise to reasonable worries, but because of the conservative nature of British people—in both senses of the word—when the new system is in operation I predict that it will be defended tooth and nail if someone tries to change it in future. Those who pushed railway lines through the country in the last century, sometimes faced great opposition, but when attempts are made to shut them down or to remove the viaducts that once were considered to besmirch the countryside, it is an entirely different matter. People have got used to the railway lines and the viaducts and it is difficult to accept a change.

I believe that what Macaulay said about taxation will apply to any new arrangements that we put in place, but we need time and we must ensure that the policies that apply to small businesses are understood.

In the past 10 years the Government have done much to help small businesses, not least through changes in the tax structure and reductions in taxation. People sometimes say that they would do better under a Labour Government, but businesses do not do better under Labour. I was in business under the last Labour Government and I also have experience of running a business under the present Government. In the days of the Labour Government it was difficult to build up any capital from the money that one made, whether from one's personal income or one's business. The amount of investment that one was able to plough into a family business fell dramatically after the war compared with when my late father began our family business in 1930.

The Government have created the conditions to help family businesses. In the short term, there will always be problems for business with high interest rates and cycles that go against businesses. Businesses cannot complain that they are getting into difficulty simply because people owe them money and are not paying their bills. Nor can they complain about high interest rates getting them into difficulties.

My late father started our family business in 1930 during the depression and always remembered the lessons from those days. There are bad times as well as good times. Anyone with any sense or wisdom should make sure that they do not take risky decisions. They should realise that there will be bad times as well as good times. Many estate agents should have heeded that advice. Setting up a business requires patience, persistence and hard work. One cannot build up a business without any one of those factors. I remember reading the advice given by his grandfather to Lord Keeper Guildford about building up a law practice. He said:

"If you will be contented to be a great while getting a little, you will be a little while getting a great deal."

There are some who roar around in their Porsches after only a short time in business only to discover that interest rates go against them, that uniform business rates change the system and that their bad debts build up. They complain that a certain factor is the reason why they are in difficulty or have gone bust. Such people should look at the way in which they have built up their businesses and managed them. They should consider the wisdom of those who founded businesses that have been established for more than one generation.

I would have said a great deal more had it not been for the many wise comments that have already been made. The Government have taken many initiatives and will do more in the 1990s. Without many difficulties and without going against the principle that the Government should not legislate unnecessarily—when the Unfair Contract Terms Bill was introduced in the 1970s the chambers of commerce did not think much of it and many who object to today's Bill would have objected to it very strongly—there are instances when the Government can help through legislation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East has produced a proposal that is reasonable and measured. It should be added to the many things that the Government have done for small businesses, and I recommend it to the Government.

1.59 pm

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): I recall with some guilt that before the debate began I posted two envelopes from my small company—one to the PAYE office and the other to the VAT office. Although they have been signed, I did not post the cheques to the various creditors of that company.

[Mr. Ian Taylor]

In a sense, that is one strong argument in favour of the Bill before us this evening. *[Interruption.]* Sorry this afternoon; having sat here since 9.30 am, I have lost all sense of time.

I wonder whether we do not fall into confusion about the relationship between the individual—whether it be a corporate individual or a person—and the state and the much less regulated and complex relationship between one company and another in the commercial world. I do not necessarily think that the Government providing penalties and charging interest on VAT and PAYE is a good guide for what should be done within business.

Earlier, my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) forcefully said that if this Bill does not succeed it will severely damage the interests of the Conservative party because it will give the impression that it is not looking after small businesses. I take issue with my hon. Friend on that. Over the past 10 years, the Government have offered remarkable assistance to self-employed people and small businesses. This background to the debate is important, and we must consider those developments before considering the specific problem of debt.

There are now 2·5 million businesses in the United Kingdom, 96 per cent. of which employ 20 or fewer people. They account for 36 per cent. of non-Government employment, compared with 27 per cent. in 1979. That underlines not only the Government's contribution in encouraging small businesses but the importance of the contribution that small businesses make to the economy.

The growth in enterprise spirit has been remarkable, and much of it has been created by deregulating and removing shackles on business, thereby allowing it to devise its own trading rules.

I have long experience as a corporate finance adviser, principally to small and medium-sized companies. For three years I lived in France, where in the 1970s an active group, Petites et Moyennes Entreprises, better represented small and medium-sized businesses than any comparable group in this country. Indeed, it developed many techniques to ensure that its members were not subject to the greater power of large companies. I earlier mentioned the use of factoring. The discount banks in France regularly discounted notes between companies so that there was regularity of cash flow. Of course it was costly, but many companies wanted certainty above all and were prepared to make an estimate of what that certainty was worth in terms of a possibly reduced profit margin.

In this country, because of the recent growth in entrepreneurial spirit, the small and medium-sized sector is much bigger, and there is therefore a greater diversity of problems.

We should welcome that growth in entrepreneurial spirit; the Soviet Union would welcome even a small part of it. I cannot resist telling the House one of my favourite stories, which I once told at a meeting attended by a Russian professor. It is about the difference between a Hungarian peasant and a Soviet peasant. If a Hungarian peasant sees his neighbouring farmer with two cows, he works day and night until he gets a second cow. If the Soviet peasant sees his neighbour with two cows, he goes next door and shoots the second cow. At the end of the meeting, the Russian professor said to me, "You have got your story wrong. In the Soviet Union, the peasant would go next door and shoot both cows and the farmer."

Fortunately, that is not the entrepreneurial spirit that exists in this country. This country has benefited massively during the past 10 years because of the contributions by the small and medium-sized business man, helped by the sometimes maligned people in the City. The growth of the venture capital market over the past 10 years have been amazing. Let us remember that the unlisted securities market did not exist in 1979-80. Many people thought that it was crazy to have a market for companies that had short-term trading records and were small in terms of market capitalisation. Some of the larger City investment houses would perhaps blush at the memory that they were anxious that that market did not come into existence.

The Government have assisted specifically, as many of my colleagues have said, by simplifying the tax system, by reducing tax levels and particularly by giving benefits to smaller companies through lower corporation tax levels. They have increased the VAT threshold, which has removed many bureaucratic obstacles. They have encouraged schemes such as the business enterprise scheme, which has benefited more than 3,000 companies and resulted in 80,000 investors coming forward. The loan guarantee scheme, which is not often talked about, has led to about £750 million being made available to nearly 23,000 businesses. That scheme means that the Government guarantee up to 70 per cent. of loans up to a maximum of £100,000. The Government have given advice to companies through the small firms service and various training schemes. I note the recent announcement by my hon. Friend the Minister on the targets that he has set his Department this year to improve progress.

Why do I stress the importance of such Government help over the past 10 years? It is because the difficulties of small firms often stem from a variety of problems, not just late payment of debt. Although my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) has done a great service in introducing the Bill so that the House can debate the issue, the Bill is in a sense misleading. In my experience as a corporate finance adviser, I have often found that the late payment of debt was not among the most important problems faced by my client companies. Inefficient management systems in small and medium-sized companies are at the heart of many of their problems, as is slow invoicing, which would not be helped by the Bill. If a company cannot get its work in progress under control and invoice it at the right time, it will be critically injured as a company in a cash-flow sense, regardless of whether the legislation exists. Sales costing is another major problem in small companies. Some of them do not understand what they should take into account when pricing their final invoices, especially in certain manufacturing areas.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Does my hon. Friend recall, because he, too, has been here throughout the debate, that my hon. Friend the Minister referred to improved and cheaper computer systems for improving debt control? Does my hon. Friend therefore think that the problem of bad debts and slow payments should be lessened as the improvements in computers increase?

Mr. Taylor: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. He is very knowledgeable about these matters. I am

afraid that I have not quite caught up with modern technology. My 12-year-old son also tries to give me lessons. I know that computers can assist to a great extent, although I still have slight doubts about the impact, because I know that computers can provide excuses for non-payment. Nevertheless, let us face the fact that modern technology can help processing. Often, because it is not labour-intensive, it is of great assistance in increasing the efficiency of small companies. I am therefore glad that that point has been raised.

A small company can get itself into difficulties because of insufficient rapport with the client. It may not know how the client works, yet may hope to get further contracts. It may not be sure of its status with the client, so sometimes it holds back from interim invoicing and so on in the hope of pleasing the client. It may have a weak market position and we should never fail to take that into account. Many small companies come into the market with no degree of dominance, which can weaken their position and cause them serious problems, whether they are paid on time or not.

Inadequate cash flow facilities from banks are a major problem. It is not that the banks will not lend money and it is not a result of interest costs. The companies themselves have often never prepared a spreadsheet in sufficient detail to know what they require, so at the moment when they are most in need, they are caught out. I see the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn), who is a former banker, nodding in agreement. Many times, on behalf of clients, I have gone to the bank. The bank manager has asked why the client has approached the bank in a crisis; the bank cannot help easily now, but could have done if there had been more time. That is not a question of late payment, but of inadequate preparation to judge what the cash flow is likely to require.

One of the major problems, which would be a problem whether the Bill came into force or not, and one of the reasons why I have major doubts about the Bill is that, by and large, British companies are undercapitalised. If a company is attempting to move into a highly competitive industry and faces other companies that are far better capitalised, it will constantly face the problem of cash flow difficulties and will be at the mercy of setbacks that may involve the late payment of bills. The undercapitalisation of British companies is a problem and until it is resolved, it will continue to hold back the small and medium-sized business sector. It is not as grave a problem as it was 10 years ago because, as I mentioned earlier, there has been the development of the business expansion scheme and the venture capital industry, but it is still a major problem and the Bill would not contribute to tackling it. Another frequent problem for small companies is inadequate stock control and problems with stock turnover, which, in my experience, soak up far more business money than the problems of late payment.

No hon. Member has suggested today that late payment is not a problem; of course it is. I have taken the opportunity to talk to some of my constituents about it. There is no doubt that for certain companies, there are major difficulties as a result of some of the larger companies not paying them. One firm has been waiting no fewer than 120 days for a major foreign car manufacturer to settle an account of £1,700. It finds that problem not atypical. Another problem relates to the discount offered for prompt payment. That point has not been raised today, but interestingly, an electrical engineering firm in my constituency that works exclusively as a sub-contractor for large building companies is obliged, under the guidelines laid down by the industry's professional body, to offer contractually a 2·5 per cent. discount for prompt payment —that is, payment within 14 days. Unfortunately, it has yet to be paid within the 14 days and the average time is 60 days. The companies with which it deals still take advantage of the discount which is written into the price. That small firm has the option to pursue the matter through the courts to claim back the money that is owed, but estimates that the legal costs involved would not make it worth while to do so. Consequently, it is resigned to forgoing 2·5 per cent. of its rightful income. I have listened carefully to the debate today. I am not certain that that problem would be solved because the main contractors would find some other way of taking advantage of others in the industry.

The key phrase that is applicable to many of my constituency companies was used by one of them. The chairman said:

"Better to be paid later than never at all."

He said that he understood the motive of the Bill and appreciated that this was an issue on which, superficially, it seemed that some form of legal action would be an improvement. However, he said that his firm was in the market place and wanted the market place to resolve the problem. I do not think that any form of legislation will remove that aspect of the complexity of the commercial world. No form of legal intervention will help.

I understand the problem; I understand the difficulty for small companies, which is precisely that a large company can go to a bank and get a loan at a cheaper rate —at a smaller margin over the inter-bank rate—than a smaller company. In that sense, small companies are penalised twice. That may be true, but it seems to me that the Bill does not provide the answer.

If small companies want certainty, there are other means available to them. The Minister has pointed out that, even under the Bill, a large company could force a smaller company to extend the agreed period of credit in the contract and thus postpone the date at which the statutory requirements would come into effect. That is a crucial weakness. The worry that has prompted the Bill is that small companies are in a weak negotiating position. But the Bill does not help that position, it does not strengthen the hand of small suppliers that may be in difficulty because it still enables large companies to dictate the period. The Bill says that the period, if not specified, is 28 days and is otherwise as specified in the agreement. The Bill does not, therefore, specify what the period should be. It does not specify the maximum. Unfortunately for small companies, large companies may well realise that very quickly.

A friend of mine who is a director of a large company made a pertinent remark when he said that he thought that the Bill was a "short and curlies" proposal. I shall not go into that in detail, except to say that I think that my friend meant that the Bill would give him much more power to dictate his terms to smaller companies and that it might prompt him to do so. The Bill would therefore cause smaller companies more difficulties than had previously been imagined.

I shall draw my remarks to a close. For many in my constituency and many of the businesses that I have advised over the years, late payment of debt is not the principal problem. If I could wave a wand and give

[Mr. Taylor]

businesses in my constituency a choice, they would ask for skilled labour, the shortage and price of which they regard as one of their biggest problems—a much more damaging general problem than late payment.

Even if one accepted that the Bill has merit, one would still want to ask why it does not apply to everyone. If one asks a small company whence its difficulties come, it says that it is not just from large companies, although for obvious and logical reasons, it may be with larger companies that the bigger percentage of its debt is at any given time. Difficulties also come from other small companies because those are the companies that they cannot rely on to pay. They are most at risk from other small companies getting into difficulties and going into liquidation because those are the companies that find it most difficult to get bank assistance when they are in trouble.

I admire my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East. He has pursued this case with great conviction. He has put his arguments before the House clearly. He has failed, I am afraid, to convince me, but I should certainly not wish to stand in the way of his conducting the argument further. I merely urge him to improve his case because at the moment his proposal is flawed.

2.18 pm

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): A few minutes remain for us to discuss this important issue. Some of the speeches againt the Bill have been examples of the exercise of a power somewhat similar to that which big businesses have over small businesses. Some hon. Members should have been charged interest on the length of their speeches over and above 10 minutes.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) said, we all recognise that late payment of debt is a real problem for companies, both large and small. Although it may not be the most crucial problem affecting companies, it usually affects those on the margins of survival. Therefore, to say that skilled labour is the most important problem—I accept that it might be for industry as a whole—is not to understand the point, for a small business that has been waiting for a good many months for payment from a large customer, because whether that one payment comes in or not is often a matter of survival for the small company.

Many of my hon. Friends would say, "Let them sue." That is obviously the advice of a House that contains nearly 140 lawyers. However, suing is not a real possibility for the smaller company. For a start, it may mean the High Court. At least if the Bill is enacted, interest can be severed from the principal of the debt and a simple action through the country court could then ensue. Lawyers might not become involved in the transaction at all—an attractive possibility, indeed.

It is because of the Government's campaign on prompt payment that the whole House knows that late payment of debt is a problem. The booklet that they have produced and updated is excellent in itself, but it is a voluntary code. I remind the House, as I reminded my hon. Friend the Minister of State earlier, that in the debate on 24 July 1986, it was said that if the voluntary code did not work, legislation would be considered. While the voluntary code may be having an effect—but who knows what effect?—it is certainly not working or we would not be having this debate and the Bill would not have been presented so excellently by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates).

The Government's booklet "Prompt Payment Please!" is sponsored not only by the Department of Employment, but by four leading bodies—the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, the Institute of Directors, the Institute of Purchasing and Supply and the Confederation of British Industry. I remind the House that when the booklet was issued, the Institute of Directors was in favour of the voluntary code and against compulsion. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East has said, the institute has changed its mind. In other words, the problem is getting worse, not better, as a result of the voluntary procedures.

I repeat the extract from the letter from the Institute of Directors that was sent to my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East earlier today. It states:

> "Thanks to these changes your proposal is better targeted, more likely to be effective and more compatible with freedom of contract".

That is a pretty tough statement from the Institute of Directors and shows its change of mind. The letter then states:

> "On balance, therefore, we feel it may now be better than not to have your proposal on interest on late paid debts on the statute-book. Your approach is certainly a more sensible and appropriate response to the problem of late payment than previous proposals."

In other words, the Institute of Directors now believes that the Bill is the right way forward.

Other hon. Members have said that the Government should take a lead, and the Government have said that they should lead by voluntary procedures. The 1988 changes on VAT and interest have been mentioned, but I remind the House that it is not only in that respect that the Government have hit late payers. They do so on taxation, with high rates of tax penalties, and in almost every other area. The whole country is used to interest on debts, such as those on credit cards, and on mortgages. It seems that it is only in the business community that interest is taboo. Even in executorship, if an executor does not pay out to an estate within 12 months, which is regarded as a reasonable period within which he or she can carry out the work, that is regarded as unreasonable. In other words, the principle of late payment beyond a reasonable time is already accepted in many branches of the law.

The actions recommended in the Bill are wholly sensible. My hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) has said that a private Member's Bill is not appropriate to this subject and that Members should introduce matters merely of their own interest. I cannot think of anything more important at the moment for the survival of small businesses than giving this strong message to companies that do not pay. It is right for Members to introduce legislation to redress a wrong and there is a wrong here.

Of course, the Bill is not a palliative for all evil. It cannot be said that it is the only measure that will help small businesses to survive, but it would offer them compensation against the money and the interest that they lose because of the late payments of their customers.

Will the Bill introduce a change of attitudes? I believe that it will give a kick to those who do not pay. It will show

that the House approves of early payment, in a way in which the voluntary code has so far been unsuccessful in doing. Therefore, I welcome the Bill wholeheartedly.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call Mr. James Arbuthnot.

Mr. Mates *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 52, Noes 0.

Division No. 65] **[2.24 pm**

AYES

Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Bendall, Vivian
Body, Sir Richard
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Cartwright, John
Colvin, Michael
Corbyn, Jeremy
Crowther, Stan
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fraser, John
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Gill, Christopher
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hind, Kenneth
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Latham, Michael
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Maclennan, Robert
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Nelson, Anthony
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Rathbone, Tim
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Ruddock, Joan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Summerson, Hugo
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Tracey, Richard
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Widdecombe, Ann
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Martin Brandon-Bravo and
Mr. Jacques Arnold.

NOES

Nil

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. James Arbuthnot and
Mr. John Marshall.

Whereupon, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *declared that the Question was not decided in the affirmative, because it was not supported by the majority prescribed by Standing Order No. 36 (Majority for Closure).*

It being after half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 9 February.

ROAD TRAFFIC (TEMPORARY RESTRICTIONS) BILL

Read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

HORSES (PROTECTIVE HEADGEAR FOR YOUNG RIDERS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 9 February.

FOOTBALL SPECTATORS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 9 February.

LOCATION OF PORNOGRAPHIC MATERIALS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

TOXIC AND HAZARDOUS WASTE SUBSTANCES (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Bill has not yet been printed in this Session and I am unable to put the Question.

Second Reading what day? No day named.

REGISTRATION OF COMMERCIAL LOBBYING INTERESTS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 9 February.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 7th February,

(1) notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Newton relating to Social Security (in respect of the Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating) Order 1990 and the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 1990), Terms and Conditionss of Employment and Pensions may be proceeded with until Seven o'clock; and, if those proceedings have not previously been disposed of, Mr. Speaker shall at that hour put the Question already proposed from the Chair and shall then put forthwith successively the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the remaining Motions; and

(2) notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Orders Nos. 14 (Exempted business) and 15 (Prayers against statutory instruments, &c. (negative procedure)), the Motions in the names of Mr. Secretary Newton relating to Social Security (in respect of the Social Security (Industrial Injuries) (Regular Employment) Regulations 1990 and the Social Security (Recoupment) Regulations 1990) and of Mr. Neil Kinnock relating to Social Security may be proceeded with until ten o'clock; and, if those proceedings have not previously been disposed of, Mr. Speaker shall at that hour put the Question already proposed from the Chair and shall then put forthwith the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on the remaining Motion in the name of Mr. Secretary Newton, and no further such Motion shall then be made.—*[Mr. Garel-Jones.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Motion made,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 6th February, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), Mr. Speaker shall not later than Ten

[Hon. Members]

o'clock put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to Agriculture.—*[Mr. Garel-Jones.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

El Salvador

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Garel-Jones.]*

2.36 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): In recent months we have seen the remarkable struggles for change against state repression which have taken place in eastern Europe, which all Labour Members enthusiastically welcome. Unfortunately, repression and tyranny continue in other parts of the world, not least in a number of countries in central and Latin America. Today I shall deal with events in El Salvador. I want the Minister to state the Government's position so that we know precisely where they stand on these important issues involving human rights and lack of human rights.

Some people may ask, "Why El Salvador, because it is a long way from these shores?" I would not wish to claim otherwise. However, this House has a long and honourable tradition of concerning itself with oppression abroad, not only in parts of Europe. The Opposition approach has been consistent—we have been against all forms of repressive state rule.

When the Minister replies I should like him to deal with various events that I shall describe in this brief debate. He will hardly be surprised that I start with the brutal murders of six Jesuit priests, their cook and her young daughter on 16 November last year. I hope that I have the Minister's attention because he will know that the killings of these people horrified public opinion, not least in this country.

The week before the murders took place, the state radio in El Salvador broadcast messages calling for revenge against the Jesuits, who were denounced as Communists. Their killing was not the first among priests who have died in recent years as a result of death squad assassinations. The six priests who were killed had been accused of spreading anti-Government propaganda and of criticising the Government for their poor human rights record. To that latter charge, had they been allowed to live, the six priests would no doubt have readily admitted.

The death squads of the ultra Right have been operating in El Salvador for some years. They have been associated with the ARENA party and its notorious founder D'Aubuisson. The president of El Salvador has been a candidate of that party.

Like all who take a close interest in these events I am aware that one colonel, two lieutenants, a sub-lieutenant and five other members of the armed forces have been detained in connection with the murder of the six priests, their cook and her young daughter.

Immense pressure has been brought to bear on the authorities in El Salvador to show that the murderers were being brought to justice. There was a possibility that the United States Congress might decide to cut off aid to the authorities if no action was taken. But who ordered the killings? Can we really believe that those who have been charged decided on the spur of the moment that the six priests should be put to death? The killings were clearly organised and authorised by far more senior figures, probably high up in the armed forces.

It should not be forgotten—no doubt the Minister will reiterate that some people have been arrested for the murders—that in March 1980, nearly 10 years ago, the Catholic archbishop of El Salvador was shot dead while taking mass. No one has been arrested or charged for that

crime. There is no doubt in anyone's mind that the ghastly murder of the archbishop was carried out by death squads associated with the ultra Right. Like the six priests before him, before he was murdered the archbishop was denounced in the usual terms as a subversive who was friendly to Communism.

The death squads have committed countless murders. In the main their victims have not been prominent people; they have been ordinary people who have been tortured, mutilated and put to death, and they have included men, women and some children.

Despite the feeling of revulsion in so many countries at the murders of the six priests, in November there was another killing of a prominent person—Hector Oqueli. He was kidnapped on his way to Guatemala City and shot through the eyes. He was murdered in such a way that it was impossible to identify him from his face, or from what was left of it.

Hector Oqueli was the deputy leader of the MRM party, a social democratic organisation in the European sense. It is affiliated to the Socialist International. For some time before he had been working in London at the head office of the Socialist International. Oqueli, who met my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, was committed to a negotiated solution of the civil war in El Salvador. In 1979 he was briefly a deputy Foreign Minister.

Oqueli was a man of great courage who had often been threatened by the forces of the ultra Right. After the murder of the six priests he knew even more surely that it was likely that he would not live much longer. But he carried on his work of exposing all that needed to be exposed in El Salvador. He always argued that the civil war should end and that there should be a negotiated peace. Despite all threats against Mr. Oqueli he refused to give up.

It is easy in a democratic country such as ours to speak out against the Government of the day, but it takes great courage to do that in countries where there is a lack of the rule of law to such an extent as in El Salvador. We pay our respects to the memory of Mr. Oqueli. I understand from my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), who will make a brief speech if there is time, that there is to be a memorial meeting for Hector Oqueli in London next week.

El Salvador suffers from immense poverty and deprivation. Against that background, as in so many countries in Latin and central America where a small number of families have tremendous private wealth and privileges, and because of the lack of democratic opportunities, the repression, the death squads, mass poverty and illiteracy, it is not surprising that such a civil war came about.

It is not just a question of two sides in El Salvador, and in that context I should like to ask the Minister about the Government's attitude to the role of the United States. It has been and remains deeply involved in economic assistance to the regime and also provides all kinds of military and security advisers. I understand that the level of assistance from the United States to the authorities in El Salvador is about $1 million a day. That is quite apart from the security and military advisers who are operating in that country.

As I have said, Hector Oqueli was committed to a negotiated settlement but the ultra Right, the senior army figures and certainly the death squads are determined to ensure that there is no such settlement and that there are no substantial changes in the economic set-up in El Salvador. I hope that the Government will urge the United States seriously to reconsider its policy on El Salvador, the amount of assistance that it gives, and the role of the security and military advisers. I do not have much expectation that the Government will do that.

I know that the United States is sensitive to any comparison between what it is doing in El Salvador and what it did in the early stages—I emphasise the early stages—of the Vietnam conflict when it was more a question of the United States military advisers and security people operating before troops went in. Given the abysmal human rights record in El Salvador, the economic situation and the killings, it is understandable that there is much criticism of the role of the United States in El Salvador.

The British parliamentary human rights group recently went to El Salvador. Among its members were my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer), who is a former Solicitor-General, and the Conservative Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson). The group formed the impression that the human rights situation was poor. In its report it refers to raids on community and popular organisations by the security forces, the threats and beatings which occurred and the fact that, as I have emphasised, there is no tradition of democratic government. The report also refers to the extremes of wealth and poverty and the lack of adequate health care.

The group took the view that President Bush's priority for human rights was being severely discredited. The report says that the United States'

"military programme must begin to link support much more directly with the observance of human rights than has been the case so far,".

As one would expect, the group wants to see the creation of a climate for a negotiated settlement.

Sometimes the Minister and some of his colleagues in the Foreign Office tell us about the delights of capitalism all over the world and compare them with what used to happen in eastern Europe. In so far as El Salvador can be described as a capitalist country—and no one could describe it as a Socialist one—the rule of law is totally absent and there are no delights such as the ones that the Minister told us about earlier in the week in a foreign affairs debate. We must do all that we can. I urge the Minister to enjoin the authorities in El Salvador, and certainly the United States, to take a very different attitude to the whole question of human rights, and to all the terrible things that have undoubtedly happened in the past few years.

2.49 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) for raising this subject, and for giving me a few minutes of his time.

It has been my good fortune to visit El Salvador three times. I have seen at first hand the effects of the earthquake, the poverty in San Salvador and the horror and misery in the internal refugee camps—and, indeed, in the external refugee camps in Honduras. In a small country the size of Wales, one in five of the population is

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

a refugee of one kind or another. It is a land of terrible contrasts, with the most awful poverty and the most appalling sadness.

I knew Hector Oqueli: I spoke at meetings with him and met him a number of times, and I was devastated when I heard of his assassination. I also met some of the Jesuit priests who were murdered last year, and knew very well the leaders of Fenastros, whose headquarters were firebombed last year—a building that I had visited many times. That is the horror of life in El Salvador, where the death squads roam the streets and anyone who stands up for social justice, trade unions or human rights risks death.

I met trade unionists whose predecessors as branch secretary, shop steward or national president had been murdered. I met people who had lost their children through the activities of the death squads, who arrive at night, murder people in cold blood and drive off. There is no question in my mind about the link between the death squads and the ARENA party. There is no doubt that the death squads secured the assassination of Archbishop Romero, whose tomb is a shrine to all who believe in peace and liberty in El Salvador.

Remembering the dead and regretting their passing—as we obviously do—will not bring peace to El Salvador. I believe that peace can be achieved through the withdrawal of American military aid, a ceasefire and negotiation; all those things are possible and have been offered. A final peace, however, will come only when social justice is possible. There must be land distribution, decent housing, proper health provision, reasonable living conditions and good prospects for ordinary people.

The United States has a role to play, not only in withdrawing military aid but in recognising and supporting the Bill now before Congress: that will be a step in the right direction. The British Government also have a role to play, in supporting those who want peace and social justice in El Salvador and ceasing to associate themselves so closely with American policy in that sad and tragic country.

2.52 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Francis Maude): I am grateful for the opportunity that the debate has given the House to register its concern about what has amounted virtually to civil war —as hon. Members have said—costing some 60,000 lives in 10 years. The conflict raises fundamental issues of democracy, human rights and freedom.

For all the emotional charge that such issues inevitably contain—perhaps all the more for that—it is necessary to examine the facts coolly and calmly. Credit should be given for the changes that have occured in El Salvador since the early 1980s, when the death squads indeed operated with complete impunity. It is worth looking first at the democratic process. The question that must be answered is this: do the people of El Salvador have an opportunity to choose the Government that they want by peaceful means?

Clearly a guerrilla campaign does not provide the ideal conditions in which to hold elections, and no one would suggest that it does. Nevertheless, our official observer, Dr. David Browning—whose integrity has never been questioned—concluded that there was adequate preparation for the March 1989 election, that the conduct of the poll was satisfactory and that voters had a real choice. The administration and conduct of the election was, in his view, the best of any of the six elections since 1982, despite determined efforts by the FMLN to disrupt both the campaigns and the polling by

"major and indefensible intimidation of election officials and of voters through deliberate terror tactics".

Dr. Browning's view was that the relatively low voter turn-out was the direct result of those actions. He noted especially that the democratic Left, having formed an electoral alliance, participated fully in the 1989 election, and that in spite of organisational difficulties it was able to do so openly and freely. If its vote was small, that may in part reflect sabotage by its allies in the FMLN who called on voters to spoil their ballot papers, and who did everthing in their power to disrupt transport on election day. I do not accept the view of those who say that, in consequence, the election was invalid.

The fact that the governing Christian Democrats lost the election rebuts those who argue that the Government manipulated the election.

We would do well to look at the declaration of San Isidro signed by the five central American presidents following their summit on 12 December, in which the following words appeared:

"The Costa Rican, Guatemalan, Honduran and Nicaraguan Presidents expressed their solid support for Salvadorean President Aldredo Cristiani and for his Government as a faithful proof of their invariable policy of support for governments resulting from democratic, pluralist and participative processes."

We agree with those conclusions.

The suggestion that we should be "even-handed" between a democratically elected Government and an armed guerrilla force seeking to overthrow it by violence is absurd. It is like suggesting that we should be impartial between the fireman and the fire.

We also agree with the central American presidents that the urgent need now is for the FMLN to desist from its offensive, return to the negotiating table and agree terms for a ceasefire. It must accept the political path, and eschew the use of violence as a means to gain power.

As the House knows, we have made very plain our view of where responsibility for the present situation lies. Some have argued that the FMLN had to launch a military offensive when it did because the Government were not negotiating seriously, or because of the bombing of the Fenastras trade union headquarters to which the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) referred.

Those arguments simply do not hold water. The offensive had been carefully prepared over many months. It was launched in the middle of the negotiating process. Any incident could have been used as a pretext. Of course, the Fenastras bombing was an appalling atrocity, which President Cristiani was the first to denounce. Whoever was responsible, there can be no doubt that the FMLN, by its calculated policy of sabotage and assassination, had done much to raise the temperature, increase polarisation and create an atmosphere which encouraged the men of violence on both sides. Perhaps the guerrillas thought that time was not on their side. Certainly, the international situation had become increasingly unpromising for Marxist-Leninist revolutionary movements.

In any event, one effect of the FMLN's decision to launch an all-out offensive was—perhaps predictably—to

reinforce those on both sides in El Salvador who had always favoured a military solution. They knew perfectly well that their action would cause the death of many innocent people. Extremists on the Right also took the law into their own hands. There were terrible crimes, the most unspeakable being the murder of the six Jesuit priests. But I believe that the very great effort that President Cristiani has put into the investigation of this crime shows not only that he is determined to ensure that no one is above the law, but that he sees this as a crucial test of his authority.

Hon. Members have mentioned the team of Metropolitan police officers assisting the authorities in El Salvador with the investigation into the killing of the six Jesuits. That team has now returned. The House will understand that I cannot go into details on their findings, but I can say that I believe their contribution was worthwhile.

It was suggested that I refer to the fact that eight men have now been detained. That is the first stage in the Salvadorian judicial procedure. It will be followed by further investigation under the auspices of the trial judge. The Metropolitan police team has been asked to prepare for him a report of its findings and suggestions on further lines of inquiry.

That brings me to the central question of human rights. Of course it is right to be concerned about the incidence of human rights violations in El Salvador. I do not deny that much needs to be done, but it is inaccurate, unjustified, and profoundly unhelpful to attribute every crime to the Government, and to talk as if the Government, the armed forces and the death squads were all one and the same. They are not, which is confirmed in the United Nations special representative's report.

The special representative does not at any point suggest that the Government are implicated in activities of the death squads. By contrast, he notes continuing FMLN involvement in "alarming indiscriminate urban activities", and in "acts of justice" which, he says, are in effect summary executions. In this context, I think it fair to record the special representative's view:

"Respect for human rights and a dialogue for peace are key components of the policy of President Cristiani".

I acknowledge the concerns that have been expressed for the safety of aid agencies and workers. I know that many of them feel vulnerable in the wake of the FMLN offensive, and fear reprisals on any who support the poor.

We have repeatedly made clear to the authorities in El Salvador our concern for the safety of those workers. We shall do so again when a high-level delegation visits the United Kingdom later this month.

We have received the fullest co-operation from the Salvadorean authorities in our efforts to ensure the safety of those for whom we have consular responsibility in the recent fighting.

We frequently hear calls for the United States to end its military aid to El Salvador. That was mentioned by the hon. Members for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) and for Islington, North. It is not for us to defend United States aid policy, but I should like to make three points.

First, those who make such calls would carry more credibility if they also called on Cuba and Nicaragua to end their aid to the FMLN, without which there would be no need for United States military aid to the Government.

Secondly, any Government are surely justified in offering military aid to a democratic ally under attack from undemocratic insurrectionists supported by foreign funding.

Thirdly, we should acknowledge the importance of United States aid as a lever in pressing for improvements in respect of human rights and in supporting democracy in El Salvador.

It would not be right to end this short but worthwhile debate on a negative note, because there are some grounds for hope. First, the recent futile and tragic bloodletting may have shown the men of violence on both sides that they will not achieve their ends by those means. The ordinary people of El Salvador have demonstrated pretty clearly that they want only to be allowed to get on with their lives in peace.

Secondly, the increasing involvement of the United Nations in the wider central American peace process should help to provide a framework for a negotiated end to the fighting.

Thirdly, the President of El Salvador has demonstrated his determination to uphold legality despite the appalling difficulties he faces.

I know that these matters arouse considerable emotions, and no doubt they will continue to prompt debate. It is perfectly proper for the House to express its concern, but prejudices should be put aside. Prejudices against America motivates some Labour Members. They tend to assume that all evil flows from Washington, whereas a cool assessment of the position shows that improvements have been made in El Salvador and that there is room for hope. There are foundations on which further progress can be built. We should try to build on the positive elements and encourage the reasonable men on both sides in El Salvador, who simply want peace and respect for human rights.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 5 February 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensioners

1. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what additional support he is proposing to give pensioners in Britain.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): The Government attach a high priority to the needs of elderly people. The success of our policies resulted in a 23 per cent. real terms increase in average pensioners' total net income between 1979 and 1986.

Mr. Vaz: Nothing that the Minister has said will give any comfort to the millions of pensioners throughout the country who are struggling hard in difficult economic circumstances. What words of comfort has the Minister for a constituent of mine, Mrs. Houlton, a pensioner who has had to return to work as a part-time cleaner in order to pay for her television licence? Does the Minister agree that there is a strong case for her Department providing additional financial support to help pensioners pay for standing charges and television licences, which in many cases are essential for their entertainment?

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman will know that concessionary licences for pensioners are a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. I remind the hon. Gentleman that our policies are aimed at improving the total income of pensioners. However, our measures of October 1989 directed an extra £200 million towards older, poorer and disabled pensioners. That resulted in help for some 2·6 million people, 100,000 of whom were given help for the first time through income support and housing benefit.

Miss Emma Nicholson: I welcome the Minister's statement on the rise in pensioners' incomes, but may I ask her to take particular care in considering pensioners who have worked and saved hard all their lives and who are living in their own homes and not receiving social security benefit? Many of them are living on less money than pensioners next door, who have not followed that course of action and are living on social security.

Mrs. Shephard: I recognise my hon. Friend's concern, but the Government consider that £8,000 as the capital limit for housing benefit and £6,000 as the capital limit for income support strike about the right balance between protecting less well-off people and the taxpayer.

Mrs. Mahon: Will the Minister consider giving support to pensioners who wear contact lenses because they have had cataract operations and who have to pay between £3 and £4 for lotions? Some of them need three or four lotions. Those lotions are not cosmetic but necessary aids. A pensioner who visited me last week was experiencing great difficulty. She had free prescriptions until 12 months ago but can no longer get them. It appears that they are discretionary and that discretion is not being exercised as it should.

Mrs. Shephard: As the hon. Lady knows, it is difficult for me to comment on an individual case. In certain circumstances help is available for prescriptions for people on low pay. I should be glad to look at the individual case if that would help the hon. Lady.

Pensioners (Income)

2. **Mr. Shersby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security by how much pensioners' incomes from savings changed over the period *(a)* 1974 to 1979 and *(b)* 1979 to date.

18. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security by how much pensioners' incomes from savings changed over the period *(a)* 1974 to 1979 and *(b)* 1979 to date.

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): Between 1974 and 1979, pensioners' income from savings fell by 16 per cent. in real terms. Between 1979 and 1986, the latest year for which figures are available, it rose by 64 per cent. in real terms.

Mr. Shersby: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those figures demonstrate a massive increase in pensioners' income during the decade that the Conservatives have been in office, compared with when Labour was in office? Does he further agree that the unique benefit that accrues to British women, whereby they get a pension on their husband's contribution, and other related benefits, means that the British pension is one of the best in the European Community?

Mr. Newton: I endorse my hon. Friend's comments on both counts. The improvement in the income that pensioners derive from their savings has been an important ingredient in the overall increase in the total average net income of pensioners, to which my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State referred in her earlier reply. That has been accompanied by our measures to help those who do not have the advantage of income from savings—*[Interruption.]* As to European comparisons, I see that hon. Members on the Opposition Front Bench are in characteristically simplistic mood. As emerged from my exchanges with the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) in the debate last week, many European countries do not pay married women a pension on their husband's contribution. It is a major advantage of the British system that it does.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Although most pensioners have done quite well under the present Government, and certainly a great deal better than they did under the

previous Labour Government, is it not the case that one group has done much less well? I refer to those who must exist only on a state pension. Were not the Government absolutely right last year to introduce their package for poorer pensioners, which was specifically targeted at that group?

Mr. Newton: Yes. Our policy specifically acknowledges that not all pensioners have the advantage of increased occupational pensions and of the improved income from savings to which I referred. We deliberately sought to direct extra help to those most in need.

Mr. Frank Field: Although the Secretary of State clearly has no difficulty in confusing some of his supporters about what has really happened to pensioners' living standards, does not the right hon. Gentleman agree that most pensioners know that under the previous Labour Government, those among them dependent on state benefits enjoyed a real increase in their pension of 20 per cent., compared with only 2 per cent. under the present Government?

Mr. Newton: In recent weeks, the hon. Gentleman and I have had several exchanges about that. As I have adverted to on more than one occasion, the hon. Gentleman himself recently wrote an interesting press article in which he acknowledged precisely the type of points that I made in my previous answer, and suggested that his own party's policies did not focus sufficiently on the needs of pensioners whose only income was a state pension.

Mr. Meacher: The right hon. Gentleman constantly makes great play of the increase in pensioners' real overall incomes over the past decade. Will he confirm that the poorest one fifth of pensioners have received no real increase over the past decade? As to the remainder, will he further confirm that the two biggest factors in increasing their incomes have been high interest rates—which increase the return on investments, but at the expense of mortgage misery for millions—and, above all, the maturing of the state earnings-related pension scheme, which was a Labour Government scheme that the right hon. Gentleman's predecessor tried to destroy?

Mr. Newton: I cannot confirm the latter. The two most striking features have been the growth in income from occupational pensions and the growth in savings income, which compares with a decline in savings income under the previous Labour Government. As to the hon. Gentleman's first point, it has been emphasised frequently in recent debates that far fewer pensioners are now in the bottom one fifth of income distribution. That figure has fallen from 38 per cent. in 1979 to 24 per cent. now.

Long-term Disablement

3. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a further statement on the measures he is introducing to help long-term sick and disabled people who are disabled from birth or early in life.

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Nicholas Scott): On 10 January, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security announced major improvements in social security help for people disabled from birth or in early life. Our proposals include increasing severe disablement allowance for nearly 25,000 disabled people later this year; a new disability allowance for people of working age and below, to improve help with the extra costs of being disabled; and a new disability employment credit to make it easier for disabled people to take up jobs.

Mr. Boswell: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the cost of providing those benefits to the long-term sick and disabled, at more than £8 billion, is now twice what it was in real terms 10 years ago? Will he further confirm that the measures taken last October and in January were targeted at those vulnerable groups? Will he give an assurance that he will continue working with our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and our hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to ensure that improvements are achieved for those vulnerable groups and that progress is made towards an effective disablement income for those unable to earn for themselves?

Mr. Scott: I confirm that my hon. Friend is correct to suggest that there has been a real terms increase of virtually 100 per cent. in expenditure on the long-term sick and disabled, which is projected to rise to some £12 billion by the end of the century. I believe that those proposals are well targeted and, as I said in my answer, they will be of particular help to those who are disabled earlier in life, and who do not have an opportunity to build up a contributions record, an occupational pension or savings. We shall continue to monitor the system, to see what improvements may be made in the future.

Mr. Alfred Morris: What are the Government's plans for very severely disabled people with high care costs, and for the more than 4 million pensioners who are disabled? Can the Minister assure the House that existing benefit levels will be protected for attendance allowance and mobility allowance claimants? Is he aware that all the main national organisations have now combined to condemn as disgraceful Ministers' response to the poverty uncovered by the Government's own surveys of disability?

Mr. Scott: There has been a real increase in the level and extent of benefits since the Government came to office. I acknowledge that the role of carers—those who care for the disabled—will come under increasing scrutiny as time goes by, but through increasing earnings disregard, invalid care allowance and the introduction of the carer's premium, we have recognised that. Of course, we shall continue to uprate the higher level components for both care and mobility in the disabled allowance, and that will extend its coverage further down the scale of disability.

Pensioners

4. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has as to the number of pensioners who are benefiting as a result of the abolition of the pensioners' earnings rule.

Mr. Newton: We estimate that when the earnings rule was abolished, up to 400,000 stood to benefit immediately. In addition, all future pensioners will benefit from the freedom to choose to continue in work and receive their state pensions.

Mr. Evans: I welcome my right hon. Friend's good news, which shows the Conservatives' commitment to pensioners. Notwithstanding what the Opposition say,

pensioners incomes have increased by 25 per cent. Now that pensioners have the choice to carry on working, will my right hon. Friend ensure that all pensioners everywhere know of the change so that they can carry on working if they wish?

Mr. Newton: We mounted a substantial exercise last year to tell those whom we thought might be affected. Information about the abolition of the earnings rule is part of the standard pack that we send to new and prospective pensioners.

Mr. Madden: May I ask the Secretary of State a simple question on behalf of a widow pensioner constituent? Could he live on £46·20 per week? That is the amount that she is expected to live on. She asked the Prime Minister the same question on 8 November last year and has not so far received a reply.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will realise that I need more details. In particular, I need to know whether the figure that he quotes includes housing benefit, because in many cases, the figures used to describe people's social security incomes totally ignore the help that they get with housing costs.

Mr. Hind: The abolition of the earnings rule for pensioners will be a relief, but the introduction of the community charge will cause a great deal of hardship to some pensioners, particularly those who receive a small pension. Will my right hon. Friend study the situation in relation to housing benefit and see whether he can assist? In Lancashire we are faced with a 16 per cent. increase in expenditure by the Labour-controlled Lancashire county council, which will mean an extra £300 on the community charge. The Government's calculated level of £264 means that there will be no relief on the extra £300 that many households will have to pay.

Mr. Newton: I cannot undertake completely to offset the effects of irresponsible expenditure policies by Labour local authorities. Community charge benefit, which is now replacing rate rebates, is more generous because it has a lower taper rate, and I hope that that will help some of my hon. Friend's constituents.

Social Fund

5. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of low and medium-priority claimants to social fund offices he expects to receive social fund grants in the final quarter of the current financial year; and what guidance has been issued by his Department to local offices.

Mr. Scott: Applications for social fund loans and grants are decided by social fund officers exercising their discretion having regard to the individual circumstances of the particular application. It is not therefore possible to estimate the proportion of low and medium-priority applications that will be met during the remainder of this financial year. Guidance to social fund officers is contained in the social fund manual, a copy of which is in the Library.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I welcome the news that 100 social fund offices have been extra money to deal with some of the claims. Is it not a fact, however, that some offices are instructing officers to consider only higher-priority groups? Is not some flexibility required, especially in view of the recent adverse weather conditions?

Mr. Scott: Some offices are in that position, but others are still able to pay claimants at all levels of priority. We shall be monitoring the position very carefully, and we have shown that we are already doing that by increasing the number of officers to 106, at an extra cost of some £3 million.

Mr. Flynn: The Minister mentioned a responsible spending policy, but he need not look beyond the social fund to see what everyone else has recognised—that it is a fraudulent fiasco. Those in the greatest need are excluded altogether because of the loans demand, and many others may not receive any grant at all: it is a question of luck and of where they live, because it depends on how much is left in the local budget. Many offices have had to exclude whole categories of claimants from the scheme because their budgets are too low. In the face of soaring demands, inconsistencies, chaos and injustices, how can the Minister plan to cut next year's social fund in real terms?

Mr. Scott: We shall announce the allocations for next year in due course. I am confident that the social fund is a considerable improvement on the single payments system that preceded it; it contains some flexibility, perhaps best illustrated by the fact that, of the loans that have been refused this year, no fewer than 25,000 have been met by an award of community care grant.

Departmental Service

6. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of recent improvements in the speed of service provided by his Department; and to what he attributes such improvements.

20. **Sir John Hunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of recent improvements in the speed of service provided by his Department; and to what he attributes such improvements.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to answer question 6 together with question 20.

Ms. Short: No. That is outrageous.

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is a matter for the Minister; questions are sometimes linked in this way, although it is unusual.

Mrs. Shephard: Since the Government reforms were introduced in 1988, the social security system has become simpler for claimants to understand and easier for staff to operate. As a result, there have been very real all-round improvements in standards of service to the public. In 1989-90, the average time taken to clear income support claims, and the average time that income support callers spend in our offices, have both improved by 24 per cent. compared with average processing and waiting times before the reforms.

Mr. Burns: My hon. Friend's answer will be warmly welcomed throughout the country. May I, however, draw to her attention a problem of which I have been informed

by the Chelmsford Children's Society? A Catch-22 has developed. The problem of homelessness has been accentuated because of the time that elapses between the submission of an application for housing benefit and the receipt of the benefit, because it takes so long to process an application. Can my hon. Friend's Department do anything to speed up the process and eliminate the problem?

Mrs. Shephard: I think that my hon. Friend will know that the administration of housing benefit is the responsibility of local housing authorities, which are expected to clear housing benefit claims within 14 days. The undue delay that my hon. Friend mentions should not take place. It is unacceptable that housing authorities should prevent vulnerable groups from receiving money made available to them by the Government.

Sir John Hunt: To what extent is the welcome improvement in clearance times due to the operation of the Freeline service that is being increasingly used, particularly by those who find it difficult to put their problems into writing? Has not that been a helpful innovation?

Mrs. Shephard: I agree with my hon. Friend. The Freeline service now receives 1 million calls a year. That includes a service in a number of ethnic languages.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Does not the Minister realise the humiliation that her Department is heaping upon claimants for both mobility allowance and attendance allowance? The position of many of them will not improve. However, renewal of their benefit seems automatically to be refused. They have to wait months for their appeal to be heard and sometimes they have to go much further than that before their just demands are met. There is no point in saying that the time taken has improved. Their humiliation now is much greater.

Mrs. Shephard: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the fact that there has been a considerable improvement in waiting times for administering those benefits. I shall give him the details of those improvements if he cares to write to me.

Mr. Pike: Is not the Minister concerned about the great poverty and difficulty that many people suffer due to the time that it takes to hear appeals? That may not be the responsibility of her Department, but will she exert every pressure to ensure that appeals relating to all forms of benefit are dealt with as speedily as possible?

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman is right when he says that the time taken before appeals can be heard and settled causes great distress to claimants. We shall continue to review any improvements that it might be possible to make.

Children (Benefits)

7. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the percentage of take-up of means-tested benefits for children; and what is the percentage take-up of child benefit.

Mr. Newton: We estimate that, overall, around 90 per cent., by value, of income-related benefits are claimed, and that nearly four out of five families with children eligible for income-related benefits make a claim. Take-up of child benefit is virtually 100 per cent.

Mr. Knox: As the take-up of child benefit is higher than the take-up of means-tested benefit, does not my right hon. Friend agree that many poorer families with children are suffering because of the failure to uprate child benefit?

Mr. Newton: No, I do not think that I would. It would be impracticable, at least in my judgment, to raise child benefit to a level that would give the same amount of help to low-income working families as is given by family credit. To that extent, whatever the level of child benefit, we should need a benefit such as family credit. We are determined to make it as effective as possible.

Ms. Short: Surely the question is whether the Government wish to help children and to encourage mothers who wish to work to do so. If that were the Government's intention, they would increase child benefit. Instead, they have cut it and given away the money in tax cuts to the rich. That is forcing large numbers of people, women in particular, to live on benefits when they would like to work. That is the result of the cut in child benefit and it is the Government's deliberate policy.

Mr. Newton: As the hon. Lady knows, I simply do not agree with her. The fact is that family credit encourages a large number of families, both the mothers and the fathers, to work when circumstances might otherwise discourage them from doing so. Help is being given to 50 per cent. more people at very nearly twice the cost of the previous benefit.

Long-term Disablement

8. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security by what proportion spending on benefits for long-term sick and disabled people has increased over the last decade; and how he anticipates recent announcements will affect such expenditure over the next three years.

Mr. Scott: We have increased spending on benefits for people who are long-term sick or disabled by almost 100 per cent. over the past decade. The improvements in help for disabled people that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security announced on 10 January will increase spending by an extra £88 million net in 1990-91, £141 million net in 1991-92 and £214 million net in 1992-93.

Mr. Hague: Does my right hon. Friend agree that his answer demonstrates a powerful commitment over the past 10 years to give more help to those to whom the taxpayer is most anxious that help should be given? Will he take this opportunity to emphasise the Government's continuing desire to give more help and to improve the benefits for sick and disabled people, which can happen only in a successful, free enterprise economy?

Mr. Scott: We have clearly demonstrated our commitment by increasing expenditure in real terms every year by £370 million during our period in office, as against £220 million under the Labour Government, using the same basis for those figures. We are not resting on our laurels. Additional money will be spent every year on the long-term sick and disabled for the rest of this century.

Mr. Meacher: Will the Minister confirm that the extra expenditure on disabled people which arises from the Secretary of State's recent announcement will peak in three years' time at £300 million a year but will fall steadily

over the rest of the decade to nil? Will he further confirm that Government figures show that his recent announcement will massively cut benefits to disabled people by £9 billion each year over the next 25 years? Is not this yet another notorious example of the Government cutting the incomes of the most vulnerable sections of society to fund tax cuts for the rich?

Mr. Scott: To reiterate what the hon. Gentleman does not seem to have grasped, there will be extra money each year for the rest of the decade——

Mr Meacher: And after that?

Mr. Scott: That is a long time ahead. We have altered the balance and structure of benefits especially to help those who are disabled early in life or from birth and we have acquired some freedom for manoeuvre in the long term. The country will judge our record of improving benefits for disabled people against that of the previous Labour Government.

Sir Anthony Grant: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the good work that he has done while he has held his present responsibilities, but will he give an assurance that in future expenditure the needs of sufferers from multiple sclerosis and motor neurone disease, which are the concern of dedicated societies in Cambridge, will be given the consideration that they deserve?

Mr. Scott: Those who suffer from motor neurone disease will be one of the principal groups who will benefit from clause 1 of the Social Security Bill, which is currently making slow progress through the House. Both the groups that my hon. Friend mentioned are likely to benefit from the age-related additions to severe disability allowance and from the disability allowance that we shall introduce in due course.

Nursing Homes

11. **Mr. Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received concerning the cost of providing care in voluntary and private residential nursing homes in the south-east of England.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We have received a considerable number of representations from a variety of interested organisations and individuals, including hon. Members.

Mr. Bowden: Does my hon. Friend agree that prices in the south-east are inevitably higher than in many parts of the country, and that as a result of the level of maximum payments set by the DSS some people who are unable to afford those prices are being forced out of residential homes and back into hospital? That cannot be good for the National Health Service or for the individuals concerned.

Mrs. Shephard: I remind my hon. Friend that the help provided over the past 10 years through income support has helped many thousands of people to make their own choices about the residential care that they want. It has never been the intention of the Government, nor could it be of any Government, to meet all residential care costs, no matter how high. We have provided an additional £100 million for 1990, thereby increasing the help available for about 200,000 people. Obviously, the system is not perfect, which is why the proposals in the National Health Service and Community Care Bill deserve my hon. Friend's careful consideration.

Mr. Eastham: Has the Minister had a chance to read correspondence that I sent to the Department on behalf of the citizens advice bureau operating in the Manchester area? It pointed out that the money given by the Government is inadequate to support old people in residential homes, to the extent that their pocket money is being used to make up the deficit. When will the Government introduce a realistic figure and realise that the northern areas suffer as much as the southern counties?

Mrs. Shephard: I must repeat that, with effect from April, the Government will make available an additional £100 million. That will mean a £10 increase for all claimants in residential homes, except for the mentally ill. But, because the system is not perfect, changes are on the way.

Pensioners (Income)

12. **Sir George Young:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security by how much pensioners' incomes from occupational pensions have risen since 1979.

16. **Sir Trevor Skeet:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security by how much pensioners' incomes from occupational pensions have risen since 1979.

Mr. Newton: With permission, Mr. Speaker, and I hope without the previous opposition, I will answer question 12 together with question 16.

Between 1979 and 1986 pensioners received a 56 per cent. real increase in income from their occupational pensions.

Sir George Young: Is not it increasingly irrelevant to use the level of the state retirement pension as a barometer for the living standards of pensioners? Will my right hon. Friend consider publishing regularly, alongside average industrial earnings, the average incomes of pensioners?

Mr. Newton: I shall certainly consider my hon. Friend's suggestion, because the first part of his supplementary question is absolutely right. It is increasingly important to consider what is happening to pensioners' incomes as a whole. On average, the increase has been substantial.

Sir Trevor Skeet: The important consideration is the real percentage increase in the total earnings of pensioners, as Ministers have said, and although the number of occupational pensions has increased greatly over the years —thanks to the Conservatives—will my right hon. Friend bear in mind the fact that a small section of the public still depend on state pensions only and that they are being crushed under their burdens?

Mr. Newton: We have very much borne that in mind. As one of my hon. Friends said, it is precisely for that reason that about £200 million of additional state money was steered through the income support and housing benefit system to those least well-off pensioners as recently as last October.

Mr. Kirkwood: Does the Secretary of State recognise that those pensioners are struggling? Does he agree that it would be wrong to accept the suggestion of the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) that the average

incomes of people on occupational pensions should be used to determine Government policy? As has been said before, the people who are suffering are those who have to live on the state pension and nothing else.

Mr. Newton: That was not what my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton suggested, and it was certainly not what I agreed with. The income of pensioners is an important and relevant fact in judging the balance of public policy. It is one of the things that led us to believe that it was right to make special increases for the least well-off pensioners, using the state's resources.

Mr. Winnick: How does the Minister explain the position of pensioners who have written to me, some of whom have a total income of no more than £54 a week, out of which they pay £10 or £12 a week in council rents? Councils have told me that they have no alternative but to charge such rents because of the Government's policy on housing benefit. Why should constituents on small incomes, such as those to whom my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) and I have referred, have to live lives of poverty and deprivation largely because of the Government's policy on pensions and housing benefits?

Mr. Newton: The pensioners to whom the hon. Gentleman referred are precisely those who benefited principally from the Government's measures last October in respect of income support and housing benefit. That was the right thing to do.

Mr. Favell: If one talks about a pensioner living on the basic pension alone, it sounds as though he is poor. Is it not a fact, however, that a person on the basic pension who has no occupational pension and no savings is entitled as of right to income support and to housing benefit if he needs help towards the costs of his accommodation?

Mr. Newton: Yes. A pensioner who had only the basic state retirement pension would certainly, unless he were living in someone else's household, be helped by income support and housing benefit.

Social Fund

13. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the social fund payments by *(a)* grants and *(b)* loans for the current year in London and the comparative expenditure for the last full year of single payments.

Mr. Scott: Information on social fund grants and loans expenditure by local office and on single payment expenditure for 1987-88 is in the Library.

Mr. Corbyn: It is good of the Minister to tell us that the information is in the Library. Will he kindly explain it to those people who could formerly have received direct payments for furniture and cooking facilities in their new flats and now either cannot get them or can get only loans, which they must repay out of their benefit? Will the right hon. Gentleman take this opportunity to confirm that, through this change in the system, he has cut the money available for very poor people on moving into new flats? Will he announce proposals to end the iniquitous loan system, convert the loans into grants and return to the system of statutory grants payable to all people, rather than leaving payments to the discretion of local social security offices?

Mr. Scott: No. I believe that the social fund is working well, flexibly and fairly, and providing help in a number of ways that were not possible under the old single payments scheme. About 1·6 million interest-free loans and more than 318,000 community care grants have been made since the scheme began. The system was judged by the Social Services Select Committee to be good and, indeed, imaginative.

Mr. Dykes: As there are still too many stories of hard-pressed officials in offices all over the place acting oppressively, rather as they used to in the 1920s and 1930s, is the Minister satisfied that the new system is being operated properly and humanely to the benefit of claimants?

Mr. Scott: I certainly believe that it is. The staff in our social security offices have welcomed the discretion available to them in operating the social fund rather than being trapped by the precise nature of regulations under the old single payments scheme.

17. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he last reviewed the working of the social fund loan scheme.

Mr. Scott: We continually monitor the working of the social fund. Since the scheme began, more than 1·5 million loans and more than 300,000 non-repayable grants have been awarded at a total cost of over £300 million to the end of December 1989.

The pattern of demands has varied between offices and some have experienced greater pressure on their budgets. We recently made available a further £3 million for the current financial year for offices facing the heaviest pressure, and 106 offices have received additional allocations.

Mrs. Ewing: Does the Minister accept that there is still concern that the social fund is operating according to financial criteria rather than the needs of the individuals concerned? In view of the comments today, will he review the need for single payments for those with the most severe financial problems and in any case review the six-month time bar for reapplication?

Mr. Scott: The provision of the extra £3 million shows that we are monitoring the position carefully. We have also commissioned the social policy research unit at York university to monitor the workings of the social fund to see whether it is achieving its aims. We look forward to receiving that unit's report in due course.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Ordination Candidates

76. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will make a statement about the impact on the commissioners' income of the trend in the number of candidates for ordination.

Mr. Michael Alison (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners):

There is no clear trend in ordinations sufficient to suggest any significant change in the balance of the commissioners' expenditure in future years. The 1988 figure for male ordinations was the highest since 1971, while the relatively low figure expected for 1990 is likly to be partly balanced by the increased number of women entering the ministry.

Mr. Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the number of people seeking ordination is less than the number of people about to retire? Does he agree that as the balancing factor is the number of women entering the ministry, it is high time that they were able to become fully frocked priests or priestesses?

Mr. Alison: My hon. Friend seeks to draw me on a matter which is still, so to speak, sub judice in the General Synod of the Church of England—whether women should be fully ordained into the priesthood. That has not yet been determined. I therefore take note of my hon. Friend's point without comment.

Mr. Frank Field: Would the Church Commissioner allow me to comment——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I know that the hon. Gentleman is a member of the—what is it?

Mr. Winnick: The Church of England.

Mr. Speaker: —but he must ask a question.

Mr. Field: The hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) asked a question welcoming the advent of women priests. Given that on most occasions Opposition Members do not agree with the hon. Gentleman, may we register cross-party agreement on this point?

Mr. Alison: I take note of the hon. Gentleman's point —perhaps I should call him my honourable brother, to vary the theme—about the cross-party support for the ordination of women. Nevertheless, the matter remains to be decided in the General Synod and the final vote must await the next General Synod elections. The next General Synod will have the final and definitive say on this matter.

Mr. Couchman: When is the Clergy Ordination Measure, which will allow the ordination of those who have been divorced or whose spouses have been divorced, likely to come back to the House?

Mr. Alison: I hope very much that, subject to the approval of my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House, the Clergy Ordination Measure will return to Parliament probably in the week beginning 12 February.

Bolsover Parish Church

77. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, whether he will make a further statement on the subject of the subsidence payments for Bolsover parish church; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alison: I understand that the terms on which the British Coal corporation will make an ex-gratia payment have now been settled and the way is clear for the corporation to pay over that money to the parish. The fact that British Coal decided to make an ex-gratia payment technically ruled out the Church Commissioners having any jurisdiction in the matter, but British Coal still wanted an undertaking that the Church Commissioners would not make a claim against British Coal under the Coal-Mining (Subsidence) Act 1957, and we have willingly given that undertaking.

Mr. Skinner: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that when I first took up the case in the House, I did so on behalf of Bolsover parish church because it was without a vicar? British Coal refused to acknowledge the subsidence under any circumstances. As we have had limited success, will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that British Coal, which is sometimes laggardly in making such payments, gets on with the job so that the new vicar can receive the money?

Mr. Alison: I shall happily send a dual message from the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and from myself, as I represent Selby, to British Coal telling it to get cracking on the payment. I have no doubt that the new incumbent at the parish church of St. Mary and St. Laurence, Bolsover will wish to contemplate adding the name St. Dennis to the church's title.

Mr. Leigh: As the Church Commissioners are to be relieved of the burden of dealing with subsidence to Bolsover parish church, may I urge on my right hon. Friend that consideration should be given to helping the members of the Russian Orthodox Church who have been——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not aware that they have a church in Bolsover.

Mr. Leigh: It is very significant and in tune with what we are discussing——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am afraid that I do not believe that that has anything to do with Bolsover or with coal subsidence.

Mr. Haynes: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the Church Commissioners have caved in? They should have fought for what the parish church in Bolsover deserved. I have been past that beautiful little parish church many times. The way in which the Church Commissioners have caved in will not help our constituents whose domestic property has been destroyed by the coal industry. The people are not getting a fair deal and the Church Commissioners should be ashamed of themselves.

Mr. Alison: Having listened to the hon. Gentleman's comments about Bolsover parish church and his admission that he has been past it several times, I am not sure whether his regular passing by has not been the cause of the subsidence.

Archbishop of Canterbury (Office)

78. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what contribution the Church Commissioners have made to the work of the Archbishop of Canterbury's office; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alison: The commissioners' contribution is a financial one. They pay for the archbishop's supporting staff and their equipment.

Mr. Greenway: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the latest report from the Archbishop of Canterbury's

advisory group on urban areas—"Living Faith in the City"—is a great deal more constructive and less hysterical than Opposition Members and the previous report entitled "Faith in the City"? The new report states that the Government are trying to target aid to those who need it most and are succeeding. Will my right hon. Friend commend those who produced the report, but ask them to go a little further and make some of the Church Commissioners' assets of £2·3 billion available to those who suffer from poverty?

Mr. Alison: Like my hon. Friend, I welcome the new version of "Faith in the City", called "Living Faith in the City". I am very glad that it pays proper credit to the Government's considerable work in improving conditions in inner cities. The weakness in the report is its failure to make sufficient comment on the modest level of giving by parish churchgoers and church members in the Church of England. Barely £2 a week on average comes from church folk in the Church of England—scarcely more than they spend on their weekly newspapers. Until the Church of England gives a lead to its own members, it must be circumspect in urging too much expenditure on the Government.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that those of us who are authors of the report also said that the tale of the inner city is still a tale of two cities and that there must be a fundamental transfer of resources by the Government as well as by the Church from the rich to the poor? Will the right hon. Gentleman communicate that message to the Church Commissioners and ensure that they communicate it to the Government?

Mr. Alison: It is precisely because of the reference to the transfer of resources—I speak as a churchman who puts money in the parish plate every week—that it seems to lie ill on the Church of England to be too vigorous in its request for expenditure by the Government on the inner cities. The contribution from church members to the Church's own resources is extremely modest—£2 a week on average, which is probably less than 2 per cent. of personal disposable income—and nothing vigorous is said about that in the report.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Edward Leigh, and try to keep it in order this time.

Mr. Leigh: I wonder whether my right hon. Friend will consider asking the Church Commissioners to make representations to the office of the Archbishop of Canterbury to help the community of the Russian cathedral in exile, who have been evicted from the parish church that they have occupied for 30 years? Their church has been turned into offices. Is there no way in which, somewhere in the Anglican community, a church can be found for those people? It is not good enough that Archdeacon Derek Hayward, the secretary of the diocese, says that the Church has no duty to find an alternative. Is that a Christian attitude?

Mr. Alison: I have great sympathy with the campaign that my hon. Friend is waging on behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church in London. As he knows, responsibility for the redundancy of the church from which they have been evicted is not directly for the Church Commissioners. If the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church would like to write either to myself or the Church Commissioners seeking help in securing further premises elsewhere in the Church of England, we shall certainly do what we can to help, but it must be without commitment until we have seen full details of their needs.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Terrace (Refreshment Facilities)

79. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what was the cost of taking down the refreshment facilities on the terrace of the House; on what date this work was undertaken; when those facilities will be re-erected; and if he will make a statement.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Geoffrey Howe): The marquee was dismantled earlier this year and will be re-erected during the Easter recess. The total cost of that work, including storage charges, will be about £13,500.

Mr. Greenway: Has my right hon. and learned Friend heard of the grand old Duke of York, who marched his men to the top of the hill and marched them down again? Why are the authorities spending £13,000 on taking down the refreshment tent on the terrace and then putting it up again, when that money could be well used for many other purposes in the House? Perhaps the money could be spent on improving cooking facilities for the staff who produce food for the cafeterias, and improving the food in the Members' cafeteria itself, which is pretty awful.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I do not accept the rather sweeping judgment in my hon. Friend's last half-sentence, although I agree that there are always better potential uses for money if we did not need to use it for something else first. If the marquee were to remain permanently, we would need planning approval from the city council and approval from the Royal Fine Art Commission. The Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee has frequently thought about that. There is no leave to have the marquee there at present. The Services Committee has asked the House authorities to investigate the feasibility of keeping the marquee up from Christmas this year until Easter 1991, when the new parliamentary building will be available. However, that will still require appropriate permission from other authorities.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Why was not permission requested? Is it not appalling that £13,000 is being wasted when we all know that the staff in the Members' Dining Room are grossly underpaid, many of them taking home little more than £100 a week? Is it not true that hon. Members would be perfectly prepared to pay more for their lunches and dinners if they knew that the staff in the Members' Dining Room would be paid properly? Should not something be done about it?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Again, the hon. Gentleman presents one aspect of the question with characteristic enthusiasm. Of course, there are legitimate questions to be asked about the organisation and terms of employment and rewards of those working in the Refreshment Department. The marquee must be maintained and refurbished in any event. It might well have cost more to do that on site than to dismantle it and have it done properly elsewhere. It might have been subjected to greater wear and tear. This work is costing £13,000, which is a

modest proportion of the total cost of the marquee, and had to be done anyway. The hon. Gentleman's questions certainly deserve and should be receiving continual consideration by the Catering Sub-Committee and others.

Mr. Rathbone: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the improvement in the standards of catering in the House have not been matched exactly by an improvement in the facilities on the terrace? When the marquee is re-erected, could we avoid a return to the pink monstrosity that has existed for the past year, and have instead a straightforward marquee which is simpler, nicer and less expensive to take down and re-erect?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot undertake to achieve that transformation at the speed that my hon. Friend has requested. It must be accepted that the current design, although widely admired by some, is not universally popular—but it is likely to return in the year ahead.

Visitors (Access)

80. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what further plans he has to improve visitor access to the Palace of Westminster.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: There is little that I can add to the reply that I gave the hon. Gentleman during business questions on 25 January, when he raised this issue in the context of early-day motion 379.

Mr. Corbyn: Will the Leader of the House examine seriously the question of visitors' access to the building? Is he aware that much of the building is given over to corporate entertainment, while members of the public who want to meet hon. Members or listen to debates have to queue outside in the rain and are denied access to refreshment facilities unless accompanied by an hon. Member? For those with disabilities, it is a nightmare just trying to enter the building, never mind getting around it.

Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman introduce changes to ensure that public access for the disabled, which is required in public buildings throughout the country, applies to this building and to ensure that the public are no longer subject to the humiliation of queuing in the rain to meet hon. Members or to listen to debates? Will he make this a genuinely public open building, so that people can see what goes on in their names and what they are paying for?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: There is no lack of good will in respect of those legitimate points. Regarding access to the line of route, the hon. Gentleman will know that proposals have been agreed to provide shelter for those awaiting admittance at the Norman Porch and. to double the screening facilities to speed up access there. He will know also that consideration has been given to the improvement of access for the disabled, but there are very real limitations on what can be done in a building of this size.

There is a strong case for improving the catering facilities available to visitors, as well as to hon. Members. However, it is unlikely that any significant change can be made until the extra catering accommodation becomes available in phase 1 of the new buildings.

Mr. Andrew McKay: Does my right hon. and learned Friend recall that month after month hon. Members from both sides of the House have expressed concern about members of the public who come to look round the Palace of Westminster? They start the line of route at the Norman Porch entrance and have to wait outside in the wind and rain. We have been continually fobbed off by the House of Lords authorities as to why an awning cannot be provided. There should be a permanent awning. Will my right hon. and learned Friend give an undertaking that our constituents will not have to wait outside in the wind and rain, as that seems quite unreasonable?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have already told the House what is happening. Proposals have finally been agreed for the provision of shelter for those awaiting admission at the Norman Porch and to speed up the means of access there. However, the completion of those facilities cannot be undertaken immediately, although it is hoped that they will be ready by late spring.

Dr. Cunningham: Is the Leader of the House aware that there is no better evidence of this building's inadequacy to fulfil the needs of a modern legislature than the long queues of constituents waiting to gain access? Often, as my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) said, these people have to wait in appalling conditions. Almost daily, people who may have travelled for many hours have to queue, without access to toilet facilities or even to a cup of tea. Is it not time we had a thorough review of the use of all the facilities in this building? If such a review is not taking place already, will the Leader of the House consider putting one on the agenda for the next meeting of the House of Commons Commission?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am delighted to have such widely expressed support for this insight into the inadequacy of the conditions in this building. Having acknowledged that fact, however, one must say that the most overwhelming inadequacy is the sheer limitation of the size of the site in the centre of a very crowded capital city. Work is taking place on the new buildings on the other side of the road, but phase 1 of that contract is not due for completion for some time yet. I am ready to join hon. Members on both sides of the House in support of as wide-ranging a review as would make sense, granted the limitations of time and space.

Question Time

81. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Lord President of the Council whether he will bring forward proposals to improve accountability of Ministers at oral questions.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman appreciates as well as anyone that Ministers are fully accountable to Parliament. I shall consider with interest any recommendations arising from the Procedure Committee's forthcoming inquiry into questions for oral and written answer which would make Question Time more effective.

Mr. Allen: The Lord President had 14 days in which to think of that scintillating and witty reply. Would he care to examine whether the period of 14 days could be reduced, or completely abolished, so that Members might be able to ask questions of the day on the day? If that is too radical a suggestion, will he look at the length of notice that Members have to give and perhaps reduce it to two

days so that those Ministers who at present cannot brief themselves might be briefed and so that Members on both sides might ask questions that are topical and relevant?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot comment on the relevance of the questions asked by the hon. Gentleman, or even on their topicality. However, I can say that, as he knows very well, the problem arises largely from the number of questions being tabled in a range of different ways. The problem of managing that would make it very difficult to take on board the particular new ideas that the hon. Gentleman has in mind. Happily, the whole topic is being considered by the Procedure Committee, which will now derive the benefit of the wisdom and input of the hon. Member himself.

Points of Order

3.32 pm

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is a matter of which I have given you notice, and concerns the possibility of your having had any request for a statement from the Ministry of Defence on a wider inquiry into the Colin Wallace affair. Over the weekend, a number of individuals have indicated their willingness to testify before any such inquiry on a wide range of matters relating to this case—far wider than the scope of the inquiries, both internal and external, that were announced by the Secretary of State. Mr. Michael Taylor and Mr. Peter Broderick in particular have spoken out in defence of their former colleague. They have expressed their willingness to come forward and testify on his behalf. Quite clearly, the publication of a book on this matter by Mr. Anthony Cavendish is imminent.

Public anxiety will now be fed by a series of unconnected reports. Would not it be preferable for the House to be told that a proper and wide-ranging inquiry was to be established so that we might clear away the rumour and innuendo that surround this sad business?

Mr. Speaker: I have had no request for a statement on this matter today. We had a long run on it last Thursday.

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. You have informed the House that you have not received any information from the Government that they want to make a statement, but the Leader of the House, who is responsible to the House on such matters, is here. Following what my hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) said, I have a quotation from Michael Taylor, a former Army information officer, who said this weekend:

"I can support everything Colin Wallace says and can confirm that the Clockwork Orange operation did include the smearing of British politicians . . . I remember the Clockwork Orange files well as I regularly had to check their location and access control."

Further evidence was given by Peter Broderick, former head of Army information, Northern Ireland, who suggested that the smear campaign was aimed at Ministers in both the Heath and Wilson Administrations.

Those are two leading officers who were then in Army intelligence and have now come forward with further information. The Leader of the House should respond to those accusations and meet the demand for a full inquiry. This matter will not go away; the House will continue to press it. We should have a statement, even if it is a short one, from the Leader of the House today.

Mr. Speaker: None of these are matters on which I can make a pronouncement. They are not matters of order in the House or for me, but for the Government.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. During Question Time today we had 75 questions to the Department of Social Security; there are sometimes 200, 300 or 400 questions, if they are directed to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. We operate a system under which a Minister can say that he will answer a question together with another. Today, 12 and 16 were taken together, which seems reasonable, but some of the questions are planted anyway and today a Minister said that he would take together questions 6 and 20. Bearing in mind that even allowing for some Members not being here today, we got only to question 17, how are we to arrive at a fair system of Members putting down questions and having them answered in sequence? Ministers are able, as they so often want to do, to cover themselves—I would do the same if I were a Minister, which is hugely unlikely—but why should we allow questions to be taken together and keep out other Members who have been lucky enough to come up in the ballot?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member should make his comments to the Select Committee on Procedure, because it is considering that very matter. The hon. Gentleman is right: those matters should be looked into. The House may have noticed that I have endeavoured to speed up questions so that we can get further down the Order Paper. I regret that this inevitably means that fewer supplemetary questions are called but it is fairer to those with questions on the Order Paper. I hope that hon. Members who feel that they should have been called but have not been will not write to me about it, because I now receive about a dozen letters a day.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am concerned, as I am sure you are, about the manipulation of Question Time by the linking of questions. Every time a Minister seeks to link answers, he or she does so "with permission". Will you, Mr. Speaker, refuse that permission in future, so that Question Time is not manipulated to suit the Minister, often by the use of planted questions way down the Order Paper beyond the point that we would normally reach?

Mr. Speaker: The form of words "with permission" is a courtesy of long standing. It does not mean that my permission has been granted. The hon. Gentleman should make his points to the Select Committee on Procedure. I do not disagree with them.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Surely the important consideration is that excessive linkage too far ahead is not justified if there is another question slot starting at 3.10 pm or 3.20 pm.

Mr. Speaker: Again, the hon. Gentleman should make his point to the Select Committee, not me.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You heard earlier about the question of Colin Wallace. Perhaps you will also have noticed that on Friday the Secretary of State for Defence sent a letter to me and to my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) on the sequence of events arising out of answers to questions put to him the previous day, when you were present. You will recall that the Prime Minister said that she brought the matter to the House immediately and that the Secretary of State for Defence said that he had brought the matter to the House straight away. Yet in answer to my question, he said that the document was first discovered early last year. The letter that he has now sent to me and to my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East contradicts that. It says that a document was found in early 1989 and another was found in July.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I know, and the hon. Gentleman can put those questions to a Minister or to the Prime Minister tomorrow, if he is fortunate enough to catch my

[Mr. Speaker]

eye. I cannot be responsible for letters sent to hon. Members, although, as a courtesy, I have received a copy of the one to which he refers.

Mr. Skinner: What I want you, Mr. Speaker, and the House to understand is that we were given misleading answers last Thursday by both the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Defence. It is not proper to try to cover up the tracks by sending a couple of letters to a couple of Back-Bench Members of Parliament. The Government have a duty to tell the House why and when they misled the House. It is a contempt of the House of Commons.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. A few moments ago, you said that we had a long run on this subject on Thursday. That is correct. You know as well as the rest of us that since then further information has come to light. We are entitled to press the Government for a statement. If they do not make one, may I make an unusual request? I hope that you will not reply too quickly on the matter of privilege to those who raised it. More may yet emerge. Will you confirm that, if the matter is referred to the Select Committee of Privileges, it would be in order to put a resolution before the House to change the membership of that Committee so that the Members who are involved in the affair can give evidence?

Mr. Speaker: That would be in order, but it is hypothetical. I consider all matters, but particularly matters of privilege, with great care. I have yet to carry out further investigations.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Whatever our general view about the matter, I hope that every Member accepts that it is clearly unsatisfactory for us to continue in this way. The only opportunity for hon. Members to raise these issues seems to be in points of order to you. You cannot produce the responses. I am pleased that the Leader of the House has listened to the points of order today. I hope that he will ensure that we have another statement, ideally from the Prime Minister, on this subject and that he will provide in Government time a debate on these matters so that we can fully and properly explore all the issues by questions and answers with the Ministers involved, rather than simply pursue the matter in points of order to you, Mr. Speaker, each day after questions.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I was going to agree wholly with what the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) said. Is it something different that I might be able to answer?

Mr. Aitken: Yes. Through you, I should like to place on record the fact that the unease about the good name of the House of Commons is not confined to Opposition Members. As the Government have nothing to fear from making a full statement on the matter and as it is clear that several matters have come to light since last Thursday, or Friday, could we, through you, urge the Government to reconsider the position?

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that the hon. Member will have been heard. There is nothing more to be said on that matter. We should move on to the important debate on the Royal Navy.

Royal Navy

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

3.34 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to make an application under Standing Order No. 20, of which I gave you notice.

Mr. Speaker: I should be surprised if the hon. Member had not received a message from me telling him that I could not hear his application under Standing Order No. 20, because it did not meet the criteria of the Standing Order.

Mr. Madden: Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that there was some recent controversy about your acceptance of Standing Order No. 20 applications. I submit that a debate in the Standing Committee on the Environmental Protection Bill is no substitute for an opportunity for all hon. Members to express their views on a matter of national importance. I ask you to allow me the opportunity to make my application.

Mr. Speaker: As the hon Gentleman well knows, I cannot give my reasons in the House. The very matter that the hon. Gentleman wishes to raise under Standing Order No. 20—that I should grant a debate taking precedence over the business of today or tomorrow—is already being discussed in a Standing Committee. It would not be possible for me to grant such a debate that would, as it were, pre-empt that.

3.36 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Michael Neubert): I am pleased to have the opportunity to open our annual debate on the Royal Navy. Before talking about the Navy itself, however, I should first like to say a few words about the developments in East-West relations which form the backcloth against which the Navy continues to discharge its duties in the defence of the United Kingdom and our NATO allies.

During recent months, we have witnessed an astonishing series of revolutions in eastern Europe. Most have been peaceful, but that in Romania tragically cost many lives. Those revolutions are unfinished business—the old order has largely been swept away but a stable, structured new order has yet to emerge. In the Soviet Union we are also seeing great changes where, at least in part, the Government there provided the initial impetus and are now having to deal with the forces that have been unleashed. When 300,000 people march to the walls of the Kremlin, the whole world sits up and takes note.

These developments have elements in common. Throughout eastern Europe, the people themselves have been the motive power of change. Theirs was a reaction against massive failings in their societies, but, not surprisingly, there is still no clear vision of the ways in which the political structures of those countries, their economies and their societies are to be rebuilt. The same is true of President Gorbachev's policy of perestroika. The ultimate outcome of recent events is thus still unclear and, while we welcome the resurgence of democratic values in the East and are helping the eastern countries with economic aid and encouraging trade with them, the uncertainties that we face mean that our optimism about reducing tension between East and West must be tempered with caution.

We have made immense strides towards greater security in recent years—progress which would have been unimaginable only a few years ago. Senior military officers from both East and West, for example, have just finished a seminar in Vienna where they exchanged information about the strategies and plans of their own countries and the alliances to which they belong. Much of the credit for the improvement in relations between East and West is due to the resolution of NATO, whose determination to maintain adequate defences while offering dialogue with the East has been so clearly vindicated. Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, please note.

The Royal Navy has played its part in this improvement. Last year, for example, saw the reopening of Royal Navy contacts with the Soviet Union. In May, HMS Bristol paid an official visit to Leningrad as part of the Dartmouth training squadron's deployment to the Baltic, and received a warm welcome.

In July, the United Kingdom was host to the Soviet Minister of Defence, General Dmitri Yasov, an event without precedent. During his visit, General Yasov was taken by helicopter to see HMS Invincible at sea, a memorable experience that I had a month earlier. During his time on board, the general saw Invincible's aircraft put through their paces and met members of the ship's company, thus seeing for himself how life aboard a major Royal Navy ship was lived. He was clearly impressed, not least by the morale and professionalism of our sailors.

The Royal Navy has also renewed contacts with eastern European navies. In June, after leaving Leningrad, HMS Bristol paid a visit to the Polish port of Gdynia, while at the same time HMS Achilles visited Rostock in East Germany. Two months before, in April, the Polish warship Warsawa had paid a visit to London. Ship visits have a very useful role to play in lessening tensions between East and West, and they will, we hope, continue.

I turn to the ever-active field of arms control. In nuclear arms control, good progress continues to be made in the Start talks between the United States and the Soviet Union. While recent bilateral discussions on chemical weapons between the United States and the Soviet Union, and the agreement that followed, represent an important step towards ridding the world of those weapons.

A further major element in arms control will be agreement to limit conventional forces, and encouraging progress has been made in the talks currently taking place in Vienna. The imbalance in those forces in Europe is the most important security problem facing us. We want to see the Soviet Union dismantle for good its massive capability to mount a surprise attack against the NATO countries in Europe. The Soviet Union, for its part, has accepted that its conventional superiority should be removed. It accepted the figures proposed by the West in March last year for tanks and armoured troop carriers, and last July for helicopters. On artillery, the differences may now be more technical than substantive. However, much work still must be done in Vienna to translate a wide measure of agreement into a clear, firm, binding treaty.

There have been suggestions from some quarters that NATO should take the initiative in maritime arms control. That is not the view of Her Majesty's Government. Calls from the East for maritime arms control ignore NATO's

[Mr. Michael Neubert]

continuing dependence on reinforcement and resupply shipping from the United States in the event of war. The Warsaw pact, on the other hand, is a land-based alliance with overland lines of communication. It does not depend on the sea and does not have the same logistic considerations as NATO.

Nor should we forget that the United Kingdom, as an island nation, depends more than most on the sea for its economic well-being and security. Some 94 per cent. by weight of our trade around the world is carried in ships, and on any one day, 300 ships are working in British ports, with the Dover straits probably the world's busiest seaway. We also have an important fishing industry. There are more than 50 oil and gas fields in the North sea, accounting for 3 per cent. of our gross national product and 12 per cent. of our industrial investment.

What, then, would be the Navy's role in the event of a conflict involving NATO forces? Many of the forces needed could be moved by air, but reinforcements are of limited use without fuel and equipment—the bulk of which would have to be moved by sea. In peacetime, western Europe needs up to 1,000 shiploads of food and raw materials a month to sustain it. In war, it would need 800 shiploads to meet military needs alone. So NATO's defence strategy continues to depend, among other things, on its ability to keep open those sea lines of communication.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): Have the figures that the Under-Secretary of State gave been updated in the light of the length of a war that is now anticipated? One is no longer talking in terms of a surprise attack, so would not the figures be different over a longer period of hostilities?

Mr. Neubert: The figures that I gave have no relevance to the length of notice of a war or of the conflict itself. They refer to the needs of this country and of NATO in the event of a land-based conflict. It is to that vital task that a large share of the Royal Navy's resources, along with those of other NATO nations, is committed. We should not forget that the Soviet Union continues to invest heavily in modernising its maritime forces and that the production rates of some classes of Soviet vessels have risen over the past two years.

The Royal Navy has—and will have for the foreseeable future—a vital part to play in NATO's ability to counteract the potential threat that those forces represent. The Royal Navy contributes continuously to NATO's standing naval forces in the Atlantic and in the Channel, and it provides a destroyer or frigate for the on-call force in the Mediterranean, which this year celebrates the 20th anniversary of its first activation. We also make a major contribution each year to NATO's naval exercises. Last September, 34 British warships and Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels took part in the major NATO maritime exercise, Sharp Spear, in the shallow seas. The Royal Marines also took part in a number of important exercises, including their annual Arctic warfare training in Norway and Exercise Dragon Hammer—a NATO amphibious exercise in the Mediterranean.

In the event of war—which is less likely now, but we still have to plan for it—the Royal Navy would contribute some 70 per cent. of NATO's ready maritime forces in the eastern Atlantic and Channel areas, and would play a vital part in NATO's strategy of forward defence. It would be involved in the interception and containment of Soviet naval forces well to the north, in the early deployment and protection of the joint United Kingdom-Netherlands amphibious force to reinforce NATO's northern flank—to which we contribute 3 Commando brigade Royal Marines, special amphibious shipping and helicopters—in the provision of anti-submarine defence of NATO's striking fleet Atlantic, and in the defence of reinforcement, resupply and economic shipping in both the Atlantic and European waters.

The Royal Navy will also continue to have a special role, by virtue of the Polaris squadron, soon to be replaced by Trident, in deploying and protecting the United Kingdom's strategic deterrent. This commitment makes it the only European navy to assign forces to all three legs of the NATO triad—strategic nuclear, sub-strategic and conventional.

The Royal Navy's primary NATO role is anti-submarine warfare, which is crucial both to deterrence in peace and maritime operations in war. The nature of submarine operations gives the aggressor the advantage. Such operations will always be difficult to monitor, so the Navy must remain able to conduct anti-submarine warfare surveillance, throughout our areas of interest, in support of the deterrent in peace and, in periods of rising tension, to alert our forces to the likely whereabouts of enemy submarines before war breaks out.

The primary potential threat remains that posed by the Soviet submarine force. Not only is that numerically strong, but the Soviet submarine is also becoming ever more capable. The most important aspect of this improvement lies in noise reduction techniques. We can also expect Soviet submarines to have effective towed array sonars, and modern cruise missiles will be more widely fitted; and as submarine performance improves, we can expect decoy and counter-measures techniques to do so as well. Submarine-launched missiles and torpedoes are likely to grow in range and complexity, so we will need more capable air defence and torpedo counter-measures systems.

Submarines operated by nations outside the Warsaw pact are also becoming more numerous and more capable. Sophisticated conventional and nuclear-powered submarines deploying an arsenal of torpedoes and missiles of various ranges could pose a potent threat in almost any area of the globe.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I am happy to hear the Minister talk about the Soviets' improved capability, particularly in the area of sonar, because, presumably, that will make submarines such as Trident, which are of course much bigger than existing submarines, easier to track. Does that therefore not make Trident pretty useless?

Mr. Neubert: We do not come to that conclusion. We have been trying to picture a scenario in which development involves measures and counter-measures, and we are determined to keep ahead of the threat and in technology. That is what I am describing.

We put the highest priority on maintaining an effective ASW capability. Without that, the Royal Navy could not provide adequate defence for the NATO forces it would protect or offer a reasonable prospect of keeping sea lanes open.

Mr. Keith Speed (Ashford): A key component of the anti-submarine offensive in the decade ahead will be the Merlin anti-submarine helicopter. Could my hon. Friend give a firm assurance that that is going ahead on track, and will enter Royal Navy service?

Mr. Neubert: My hon. Friend has unquestioned authority on this subject. This debate takes place against the background of a report which the Defence Select Committee brought forward on Friday. Will he allow me to answer his question later in my speech?

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): Before my hon. Friend leaves the subject of the Soviet submarine threat, will he confirm that there has been no reduction in the Soviet Union's submarine building programme?

Mr. Neubert: I made that point earlier. We are seeing the development of the most modern equipment, and we have to take account of that in our plans for the future.

A high-quality ASW capability is also a prerequisite for the security of our strategic nuclear deterrent. An effective ASW capability can best be achieved by a combination of maritime assets. Royal Navy frigates, conventional and nuclear submarines, helicopters and Royal Air Force maritime patrol aircraft all work in unison as an integrated ASW force.

If we are to provide the best possible ASW defence, to counter the sustained massive investment by the Soviet Union in its submarine force—mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed)—and to keep pace with the growing capability of other maritime nations, improvements to our ASW platforms, sensors and weapons must continue to maintain our effectiveness, and I can assure the house that that is our firm intention.

The Royal Navy and Royal Navy Reserve also make an important contribution to the direct defence of the United Kingdom by protecting our coastal waters from the threat of mines, while the Royal Navy Auxiliary Service, the Royal Marines and their reserve help to defend our ports and anchorages and key points. Within home waters, the Royal Navy and Royal Marines also help to safeguard our offshore installations, while the Royal Navy search and rescue service saves the lives of many members of the public each year.

The Royal Navy also supports the Royal Ulster Constabulary by patrolling the Province's coastline, and Royal Marines Commando units have regular roulement tours in the Province. While considering the Navy's commitment to the defence of the United Kingdom, we must not forget last year's tragedy at the Royal Marine school of music at Deal, when, on 22 September, 11 Royal Marine bandsmen were killed and another seven injured when a bomb planted by terrorists exploded. I am sure that the whole House will join me in expressing continuing outrage at that callous act of murder, and deep sympathy for those who have been bereaved.

We cannot afford to overlook the threat to British or western interests that could arise worldwide outside the NATO area. The Royal Navy continues to maintain a presence in the Gulf, the Caribbean, the south Atlantic and Hong Kong. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces will, I hope, be able to expand on the Navy's duties and achievements in those areas later. The House will remember, for instance, the magnificent assistance given by HMS Alacrity and RFA Brambleleaf to Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis in the aftermath of hurricane Hugo.

To meet that wide range of challenging tasks, the Royal Navy has as fleet of some 200 vessels and a highly capable force of fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters, which we are continuing to modernise and update as necessary. The Government have ordered some 67 major vessels since 1979, at a total cost of over £7·5 billion. That very large procurement programme is clear and irrefutable evidence that we remain committed to a strong and balanced maritime capability, and to retaining the appropriate mix of forces to achieve that: the strategic nuclear deterrent; a surface fleet of three carriers and about 50 escorts; retention of an amphibious capability; the proper combination of nuclear and conventional submarines; the modern aircraft, weapons and sensors that the platforms need to fulfil their roles; and, not least, men and women of the high quality and motivation that make the Royal Navy such an outstanding service.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Can my hon. Friend confirm that, however events unfold in eastern Europe—even if the unthinkable happened and the British Army withdrew from the Rhine—nothing could affect this country's traditional reliance on maritime defence, and that, indeed, those events might reinforce it?

Mr. Neubert: That is undoubtedly true, and has, I hope, been the consistent theme of my speech. We shall need a naval capability as much in the years ahead as ever before.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the great advantages from which we have benefited in all that we have done with the Royal Navy in recent years is the excellence of our technology? We have often gained a march even on the Americans by spending less money. One particular advantage had been the sea systems controllerate, which has been especially useful for underwater defence; it has worked closely with both the Navy at Portland and the Admiralty research establishment.

For the past two years, the staff of the controllerate have been anxious about whether they will be staying in Portland or, in the case of those working with surface vessels, in Portsmouth. Is it not about time that we rewarded those people for doing such an excellent job by telling them that their jobs will remain where they believe that they can do them best—in Portland and Portsmouth?

Mr. Neubert: My hon. Friend is a doughty fighter for his constituency interests and for his constituents who work for the sea systems controllerate. I hope that we shall be able to respond before too long with firm plans for the future of the three controllerates, because their work is vital to us.

The new classes of vessels joining the fleet and on order are more sophisticated, capable craft than those that they replace. Our escort fleet is much younger, on average, than those of our allies or Warsaw pact countries. Our ships now spend less time in refit so that operational availability is improved. We are doing much more than merely allowing things to tick over.

The programme to replace Polaris with Trident in the mid-1990s continues to schedule and to cost. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced to the House last week the revised estimate for Trident.

[Mr. Neubert]

For the fourth year running, this showed a fall in the real cost. At £9,380 million, the current estimate is, in real terms, over £1·5 billion less than the original 1982 estimate. This fall does not include the large savings arising from our decision to process United Kingdom missiles at Kings Bay, Georgia. The proportion of Trident spending estimated to fall in the United Kingdom now stands at 69 per cent., the highest recorded so far.

Two Vanguard-class submarines have already been ordered from Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Limited, where their construction is well advanced. We hope to order the third in the spring and to issue the tender for the fourth submarine later this year.

The United States missile programme is also going well. The programme of ground-launched mssile test firings was completed last year. Six successful flights of missiles fired from a submerged submarine have now taken place, showing that the causes of the two early unsuccessful flights have been remedied. The United States Navy is on schedule to deploy the Trident II D5 system for the first time in March.

The vast bulk of the procurement budget goes on the conventional equipment programme. At its peak, the Trident programme is due to absorb less than 11 per cent. of the equipment budget and should on average take up less than 3 per cent. of the total defence budget across the procurement period. It remains outstanding value for money. As the programme progresses, some £4·7 billion has been committed so far, of which about £2·7 billion has been spent.

Trident remains by far and away the most effective means of providing a credible deterrent. No other use of the resources to be spent on Trident would provide a level of deterrence approaching it. Finally, it is worth noting that maintaining a British nuclear deterrent sustains many thousands of jobs in the United Kingdom which depends on it.

As the House will recall, in December I announced the order for three more type 23 frigates, bringing to 10 the number of this class ordered. HMS Norfolk, the first of class, was accepted from Yarrôw Shipbuilders in November, and is one of two new first-of-class ships delivered to the Royal Navy in 1989.

HMS Norfolk is undergoing an extensive series of first-of-class trials to prove her many new systems and equipments. For her primary role of anti-submarine warfare she is fitted with both towed array and bow sonar. Her anti-submarine weapon is the ship or air-launched Stingray torpedo. Her surface armament includes Harpoon missiles and, for naval gunfire support, a 4·5 in gun. For self defence, she has the first fit of the new vertical-launch Sea Wolf missile system. She has an extensive range of the latest sensors and communications equipment, and a new computer-aided command system is being developed. Another new feature is the combined gas and electric propulsion system. Rolls-Royce Spey gas turbines are used for medium and high speeds, while the GEC diesel-electric drive minimises underwater noise during ASW operations and gives high endurance at cruising speeds. Also noteworthy is the fact that the type 23's complement of about 170 is about 50 fewer than a Leander and 100 less that a type 22.

The type 23 is designed to operate the ASW variant of the EH101 helicopter and can also operated Lynx or Sea Kings. The Defence Committee published on Friday its report into the EH101 helicopter. I thank the Committee for its report and welcome it. I agree with the Committee's assessment of the importance of this helicopter for the Royal Navy. The programme is now proceeding well despite some earlier slippages and technical difficulties.

We are naturally keen to get the EH101 into service as early as possible, but I welcome the committee's recognition in its report that it would be wrong for the Ministry of Defence to commit itself to production until it is fully satisfied about the performance of the helicopter and its cost. We share the Committee's concern about the original contractual arrangements, which we intend to improve by negotiating a maximum price with Westland for its share of developing the airframe and by appointing a prime contractor next year to be responsible for the overall performance of the helicopter, including all its mission system equipment. Our proposed new arrangements will ensure that, when it enters service with the Navy, the EH101 will be the most advanced and capable anti-submarine warfare helicopter in the world.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): As the Select Committee report pointed out, the programme is a year behind and will cost perhaps £1 billion more than expected. Will my hon. Friend say a word about staff targets, which seem to change almost faster than traffic lights? Time after time they offer a windfall to defence contractors and are a licence to print money at public expense. Are there plans to change the way in which the Procurement Executive determines staff targets before development and research is undertaken?

Mr. Neubert: That was an extraordinarily sceptical view of the procurement process. Everything that has been said in the debate underlines the fast-moving technology involved in defence equipment. One must take into account the continuing changes in the threat and the need to counter it. We therefore seek to get the best possible value for money and the most effective operational response. That will always be a matter of judgment, and it cannot be fixed in time, because any major project will take several years to develop. It would be folly not to take account of changes that occur in the interim.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): The Minister completely dodged the conclusion of the Select Committee report that the Ministry of Defence's delay, and indecision and its changing of the targets substantially caused the overrun in cost and time. Does he realise with what sense of deja vu I must yet again say that the Government are doing serious damage to a national product—the Westland helicopter —through this delay and indecision? Will he give an undertaking that the decision to put out to tender the mission systems integration on Merlin will not cause one extra day of delay, given that the type 23 frigate is already four years late? Has he any idea what he is now placing in jeopardy? He is placing in jeopardy serious possibilities of transatlantic orders for the EH101 from the Canadians, Westland's capacity to manage the system effectively, making the best use of taxpayers' money and the defence of Britain's sea lanes, of which he spoke so eloquently a few moments ago.

Mr. Neubert: If I were one of the right hon. Gentleman's constituents working for Westland, I am not sure that I would find that helpful. Such comments at this stage can only damage the company. That is not the Ministry's view of the position. I am sure that the House will understand that when a Select Committee publishes a report it is normal procedure for due time to be given to consider it. Out of courtesy to the House, and as the report is said to be relevant to the debate, I have today given our first response; a more formal considered response will be given in due course. I suggest that the right hon. Gentleman waits for that.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): The Minister must come clean. Is it not true that when this plane was first proposed its specifications were not tight enough to put a maximum cost on it? I understand that discussions are being held on its final cost, but is it not true that, as the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) said, yet again the goal posts have been moved? The companies involved do not know what the final specifications are. How can a maximum cost be placed on the plane when the Ministry of Defence has not given a final specification?

Mr. Neubert: As I said, these are matters for current negotiation. There is no question of reaching a conclusion across the Floor of the House this afternoon on a matter for negotiation between the Ministry of Defence and the company concerned. I think that it would be in everyone's best interests if we left it at that.

Our force of destroyers and frigates stands at 48 vessels, of which 44 are available for operations immediately or within a short period. We remain committed to a force of about 50 and we plan to order sufficient ships to meet that commitment. We have ordered three more vessels in each of the last two years, and we hope to invite tenders for a further batch of ships later this year.

The other first-of-class ship accepted in 1989 was HMS Sandown, the first of five single-role minehunters ordered for the Royal Navy. We hope to invite tenders for a further batch in the near future. We are confident that this vessel has the best capability of any minehunter in the world. Her sophisticated variable depth sonar is ahead of any elsewhere in the world. She can operate throughout continental shelf waters and can manoeuvre and maintain station close to a mine in those exposed waters using its vectored thrust propulsors. She has an automatic ship positioning system which is essential to deal with mines under all weather conditions and her computerised command system, Nautis, provides the means of planning the many activities needed to co-ordinate the operation of sonar, ship and weapon systems. Having been on board her only last Thursday, I am very pleased, and not at all surprised, at the interest that has been shown in this vessel by other navies, seeking minehunting capabilities.

The Royal Navy can be proud of these two new classes of ship. Three other new classes have also been ordered by the Government—the Vanguard and Upholder classes of submarine, and the auxiliary oiler replenishment vessel. These five new classes account for 23 of the 67 major vessels that we have ordered since 1979 and further orders of all five classes are planned. I should also mention that two vessels of the Trafalgar class hunter-killer nuclear submarine are being built at VSEL in Barrow and HMS Chatham, the last of a class of 14 type 22 frigates, was accepted from her builders in November.

We are also now considering tenders for a new aviation support ship. This vessel will provide dedicated helicopter lift in support of the United Kingdom-Netherlands amphibious force. We hope to be able to make an announcement later this year. Equally important to the amphibious capability are the assault ships, HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid. As the House knows, we have been considering the results of studies into how best to maintain this element of the amphibious force, either by ship life extension or new build. We shall be able to reach a final decision on this important question only after full and detailed examination of the complex issues involved.

Following our decision to withdraw from the NFR90 project, it remains our plan to procure an anti-air warfare escort ship to come into service at the turn of the century to replace the type 42 destroyers, and we are now considering how best to meet this requirement.

Mr. Ian Stewart (Hertfordshire, North): My hon. Friend has recently reviewed the major naval procurement programme of the 1980s. Will he reflect on the fact that the two major operational commitments during that period were the battle in the south Atlantic and, more recently, the Armilla patrol's participation in the affairs of the Gulf war? When considering the procurement of these further ships, especially frigates, in the 1990s, will my hon. Friend take into account the great importance of assessing in advance possible out-of-area roles so that this dimension is given due weight, as well as the traditional NATO tasks?

Mr. Neubert: My right hon. Friend brings valuable ministerial experience to this matter. We shall certainly take full account of his point. We shall consider all options. Collaboration has not been ruled out, should suitable opportunities emerge. The House will recall that, in December, I announced that, subject to the satisfactory conclusion of negotiations with the other participating nations, we will be joining the project definition phase of the local area missile system variant of the family of anti-air missile systems, linked to our plans to procure a new generation AAW escort.

Further fleet nuclear-powered submarines are planned; feasibility studies into this future generation of submarines are drawing to a successful conclusion and planning for the next phase of the programme is under way.

We are updating our existing Sea Harrier aircraft, and plan to procure a number of the FRS2 version. Our sensor capability and weapons system will be modernised and improved as necessary and appropriate.

All this represents a continuing programme of major investment by the Government in the Royal Navy. Our policies will leave the Navy well equipped for the many and varied tasks that it has to face.

Despite the remarkable changes in the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, our overall maritime strategy will continue to be appropriate for the foreseable future. The Royal Navy is as necessary today to our peace and prosperity as it ever has been.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): The Minister acknowledged earlier that there have been great changes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and that a number of treaties that will reduce the nuclear capabilities of both sides are in the offing or have already been signed. Why does the Minister propose to maintain—or even expand—expenditure on naval forces, when he admits that there is no perceived enemy?

Mr. Neubert: I have not admitted anything of the sort. The hon. Member cannot have done me the courtesy of listening to what I have had to say, as my whole speech has been dedicated to emphasising the continuing role of the Royal Navy. Maritime forces continue to be needed to contribute to the security of our homeland—the hon. Gentleman's and ours—to provide, deploy and protect our strategic deterrent and, with our allies, to provide vital protection to our reinforcements and resupply in time of tension or conflict.

In short—let me spell it out for the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn)—Britain's economic well-being, security and worldwide interests depend on the freedom of the high seas which the Royal Navy is committed to maintaining. The Royal Navy's tasks remain as challenging as ever. Its role will be as crucial as before and its unique contribution to the defence of our freedom deserves the appreciation and support of the House.

4.22 pm

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): I echo the Minister's condemnation of those who perpetrated the horrendous bombing at Deal. The Opposition take this further opportunity to offer their sympathy to the parents, friends and other loved ones of those who were killed or injured.

I shall follow the Minister in prefacing my remarks with a few comments on the far-reaching changes in eastern Europe and the changing nature of the perceived threat in view of those changes. The talks between Presidents Bush and Gorbachev, while not producing any historic new agreements, nevertheless showed that relations between the two super-powers would continue to improve.

The changes in eastern Europe have been staggering. The breaking down of the Berlin wall inevitably led to the end of Communist rule in the DDR and raised a whole series of questions about the reunification of Germany. The important and complex question appears to be about the pace of change rather than the principle of change.

Change has happened where it was expected and where it was unexpected. During the past few years, Poland and Hungary have been changing. The efforts of Solidarity in Poland had had a profound effect and resulted in a non-Communist Prime Minister heading a Polish Government. There were also changes in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, but none were so dramatic as those in Romania. After decades of rule by the Ceausescu dynasty, the dictatorship fell in just a few days and Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife were shot. The uprising of the population was instrumental in achieving a change that hon. Members on both sides of the House hope will lead to a multi-party democracy.

Mr. Leigh: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Boyes: No. I want to make progress first.

This weekend we read in our newspapers of possible changes—I put it no higher than that—in the Soviet Union itself. Gorbachev faces mountainous economic and nationalist problems. A large demonstration was held in Moscow at the weekend. The BBC commentators to whom I listened as I travelled down to London this morning said that the demonstration in Moscow could not be compared with the ferocity of the demonstrations in Romania.

The changes and liberalisations have implications for the Warsaw pact, which no longer exists as a monolithic unit. At the moment we cannot know the nature of the relationship between the Soviet Union and other members of the Warsaw pact. However, we can predict that it is unlikely that the Poles, Hungarians and others would take part in a united invading force. That has implications for NATO.

If there is a major threat from the East, defence spending has some justification. However, if we agree that the threat no longer exists, the corollary is that defence spending can be cut. Cuts have been made in France, Germany and the United States. As the United Kingdom has welcomed the changes and the march to democracy in the Eastern bloc, the logical step should be cuts in the United Kingdom's defence budget. However, the Prime Minister is clearly sticking to her cold war tactics.

Mr. Leigh *rose*——

Mr. Boyes: We face increases in spending instead of decreases and that does not make sense.

Mr. Michael Mates (Hampshire, East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Boyes: If the Government have a genuine desire to keep President Gorbachev in power, it could be expressed by less provocative military activity. At the moment Gorbachev continues his balancing act, but we do not know how long he will be secure in his present position. Gorbachev has captured the imagination of many people as a result of his statements calling for a more stable and peaceful world. However, he could be replaced by the Yeltsin or the Ligachev wings of the party.

Over the weekend the press reported that the Communist party hopes to loosen its grip on the USSR. *The Sunday Times* said:

"The Soviet Union could take a first, momentous step towards free elections this week when Mikhail Gorbachev launches a radical programme to end the Communist party's monopoly of power."

Today's *Evening Standard* carries the headline

"Gorbachev: It's change or die."

However, there are comments from the two wings of the Communist party and it is obvious that President Gorbachev must perform a balancing act. The *Evening Standard* reports:

"Mr. Yeltsin told the throng that the party had 'one last chance' to change or it would be swept aside."

A number of people in the demonstration over the weekend held up banners which, the *Evening Standard* reports, showed that

"the people understood the need for more energetic reforms but expressed concern . . . that the enemies of perestroika had stepped up their efforts.

Many of the banners denounced conservative figures such as Yegor Ligachev."

Mr. Leigh *rose*——

Mr. Mates *rose*——

Mr. Boyes: I make it clear that I will give way only a few times.

Mr. Leigh: The hon. Gentleman is cantering round eastern Europe. We know all about that. Will he get back to the Royal Navy? I will put to the hon. Gentleman the same question as I put to my hon. Friend the Minister, and hope that I will get a similar response. No matter what

happens in eastern Europe, will the hon. Gentleman confirm that no review is being carried out in the Labour party of its stated commitment to maintaining current ship levels in the Royal Navy?

Mr. Boyes: The hon. Gentleman said that I was cantering round eastern Europe, but I said that I was going to say a few words—as the Minister did—about that to set my remarks into some context. If the hon. Gentleman waits, I will answer his questions.

Mr. Mates: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Boyes: No.

The situation in the Soviet Union is unpredictable, although I believe that the changes, with or without Mr. Gorbachev, are now irreversible. It is clear that the Warsaw pact will not be reconstructed quickly enough to allow it to attack the West.

I now refer to the important point of my speech and the first major disagreement with the Government.

Mr. Mates *rose*——

Mr. Boyes: Opposition Members welcome progress on chemical, nuclear and conventional forces, which were mentioned by the Minister. However, we diverge on NATO maritime arms reductions.

Mr. Mates *rose*——

Hon. Members: Give way to the Chairman of the Select Committee.

Mr. Boyes: It makes no difference what the hon. Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) is. I shall give him an opportunity to intervene later. I am making my speech in the manner and at the pace that I want.

I challenge the Government's wholly negative attitude to naval arms control. Whether their obstructionism is yet another example of the workings of the so-called special relationship, or whether it is simply the Prime Minister's prejudiced nationalism, one cannot tell. But Britain, which could have a central role in reducing the danger of war at sea and cutting forces on all sides, has a Government who are being as obstinate as usual.

When the Foreign Secretary went to Washington last September to see the United States Secretary of State, James Baker, he was supposedly to explain Britain's position on Soviet naval arms control proposals. He agreed with the United States' position, and the answer was a straight no. Part of the problem is that the Soviets have been insisting that naval arms control negotiations should take place within the forum of the conventional forces in Europe talks. That makes it easy for NATO to say no, as it is patently true that, by including naval forces, we would add enormous complexity to negotiations which, so far, are going rather well. Attempts to trade off Soviet ground force superiority against NATO naval superiority are unlikely to have a positive outcome.

The problem of an inappropriate forum is a convenient cover for the real reasons for British and United States opposition to naval arms control. They simply do not want to give up the power and status that come from having large, capable and influential neighbours. Hawkish naval analysts now say that we should simply wait for perestroika to do the work of cutting the Soviet navy rather than negotiate mutual cuts. That way, they argue, the West gets a reduced Soviet maritime threat while avoiding any cuts in its own forces. That view is short-sighted.

If we really want to help Gorbachev to succeed, and if we really want to reduce East-West tension and put an end to the obscene and obsessive levels of armaments on both sides, we must take some bold steps towards demilitarising international relations. If NATO truly believes that Soviet Union attack submarines are a serious threat, why not take up their offer of scrapping 100 of them in exchange for the United States scrapping five, six or seven of its aircraft carriers? At least the United States might then have a say in which attack submarines are scrapped or limited, whereas leaving it to the other side's budget decision can hardly be described as a rational approach to arms control.

The strategic arms reduction talks, which are once again showing promising signs of movement, must still deal conclusively with the problem of sea-launched cruise missiles. The United States says that limits on them are impracticable because it is not possible to verify which are nuclear-armed and which are conventionally armed. That is a predictable plea, as those weapons were deliberately built to obscure the difference between the two versions. The intention was to force the Soviets to track all SLCM-armed ships and submarines just in case they might be carrying the nuclear land attack version.

What of the verification problem? Last summer, scientists from the United States natural resources defence council and the Soviet academy of sciences conducted experiments on board the Soviet Slava cruiser to see whether nuclear warheads could be detected by gamma ray and neutron detectors. The tests, including some from a helicopter up to 70 m away, showed that it was possible to detect which weapons were nuclear and which were conventional.

Last November, three prominent United States physicists published in *Science* a paper which proposes yet another way around the verification problem. Their solution involved non-intrusive verification, thereby overcoming the United States navy's objection that it did not want Russians crawling over its ships.

It is notable that, as long ago as 1973, the United States observers could tell that Soviet ships entering the Mediterranean during the middle east war were not carrying nuclear weapons, whereas those leaving the Mediterranean were. If the capability existed then, why does the United States say that it does not exist now? Perhaps the answer is simple. The Americans have the technology and they know that the Soviets do not. As long as the United States continues its "neither conform nor deny" policy, that forces the Soviets to track every vessel. Why should the United States navy give up its enormous tactical advantage?

Those are not just super-power questions. An often forgotten part of Britain's maritime forces is the stock of nuclear depth bombs carried by Royal Navy helicopters and by Royal Air Force Nimrods. At the best of times, that capability was a questionable military ability. There are no conceivable circumstances in which British independent maritime tactical nuclear capability could be used to military effect. Dropping a nuclear depth bomb would make our own, as well as Soviet, anti-submarine warfare impossible for many miles around. Modern

[Mr. Boyes]

conventional torpedos are just as effective at destroying submarines. The use of nuclear depth bombs runs an enormous risk of further nuclear escalation.

Sir Anthony Buck (Colchester, North): Why does the hon. Gentleman think that the previous Labour Administration were right to update the nuclear deterrent by modernisation and the introduction of Chevaline without telling the House? Has he talked to his friends? Has Labour party policy completely altered? Does he now say that Britain should never have its own nuclear deterrent? Is the Opposition's policy now completely unilateralist? Has the hon. Gentleman reconciled that policy with his predecessors on the Labour Front Bench who updated our nuclear deterrent without telling the

Mr. Boyes: I shall answer the point on nuclear depth bombs, which arose among what seemed to be a series of accusations and questions. I am not responsible for what happened in the years before I entered the House. The disposal of these senseless weapons would be an eminently suitable course. Nor would it be a dangerous precedent. The United States navy unilaterally retired 1,100 of its naval tactical nuclear weapons last April, recognising that they no longer had any practical military purpose. The distinguished admiral, Sir James Eberle, said:

"I have never encountered circumstances where I would be tempted to seek approval for the use of these tactical naval nuclear weapons".

Vice-Admiral Henry C. Mustin, former deputy chief of naval operations in the United States, said:

"The concept of a nuclear war at sea is a concept whose time has passed."

Many people complain about the West losing the arms control public relations battle to Gorbachev. Scrapping our nuclear depth bombs could be a way of fighting back as they are militarily useless, morally abhorrent, obsolescent and costly to maintain. What better time to get rid of them? However, there may be a glimmer of light. At the Malta summit at the end of last year, Mr. Gorbachev called for a ban on tactical nuclear weapons on surface war ships. President Reagan's former chief arms control adviser—no faint-hearted liberal—described the proposal as "very positive and constructive".

Another prominent figure recently to emerge in favour of cuts in naval nuclear weapons is the former chairman of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral William Crowe. Before his retirement last October, he was a powerful advocate of increasing military spending, but now he states publicly that a ban on naval nuclear weapons can only be good. Most hearteningly, he admits that his view shifted after a series of talks with his Soviet counterpart, Marshal Akhromeyev, last year and after a series of extensive visits to Soviet military facilities, which showed him at first hand the reality of the changes in Soviet military posture and expenditure.

For those interested in how much personal experiences can shake the most solid institutional prejudices, I strongly recommend a reading of Admiral Crowe's revealing personal account of his visits to Soviet naval facilities on the Black sea. This was published in the "United States Naval Institute Proceedings" last October, just before the admiral retired.

I appeal to the Minister to follow Admiral Crowe's example and reconsider his so far entirely negative policy on naval arms control. The Secretary of State should heed the words of the commandant of the royal naval college at Greenwich, who said recently:

"Given imagination, vision and courage, there is potential for sensible consideration of maritime arms control regimes and advantages too."

That was published in the Council for Arms Control bulletin in August 1989. Many people would like to think that warships on the high seas are a breed apart, somehow immune to changes in land-based military postures. That position is now untenable. We should be working to ensure that we have a maritime policy that is appropriate to the international climate, is affordable, and enhances security.

On maritime strategy, I am again unable to go down the same route as the Minister. One of the principal features of current Royal Navy posture is the forward maritime strategy. As the House will know by now—although not by reading Government documents on the subject—the Royal Navy's principal task in wartime is to provide anti-submarine support to United States navy carrier battle groups that will steam into the Norwegian sea to mount offensive air operations against Soviet naval bases in the Kola peninsula. The offensive operations dictated by this strategy are extremely costly. They demand highly complex ships fitted with the most sophisticated electronics, hardened against nuclear and chemical attack, bristling with self-defence weaponry, loaded to the gunwales with ammunition to sustain high rates of fire, and surrounded by an armada of other vessels on, above and below the surface, all dedicated to the survival of the capital ship.

Because these offensive operations involve fighting possibly lengthy battles at sea many hundreds of miles from the United Kingdom, the logistics chain is also massive and highly costly—huge fuel and armaments depots, such as the new multi-million-pound depot at Crombie in Fife, and expensive new vessels for refuelling and re-arming combat ships in the most hostile conditions at sea. We have gold-plated navies that swallow up vast sums of taxpayers' money, line the pockets of the arms manufacturers, and use highly advanced technology which frequently does not work. The disaster of the shooting down of an Iranian airbus by the USS Vincennes was a classic example of technology gone mad: of billions of dollars spent on a system that encouraged the crew to believe in its infallibility—with tragic results.

The other consequence of our adherence to a forward maritime strategy is neglect of our own coastal defences. Not only are the ships not there, since they spend their time hanging on to the coat tails of the United States carrier battle groups flexing their muscles off the Kola peninsula, but even if the Royal Navy spent more time round our coasts the ships that we have now would be quite unsuitable. Nuclear-powered hunter-killer submarines are useless in shallow waters, and even the new Upholder class diesel submarine has been designed as a mini hunter-killer, making it unnecessarily complex for coastal tasks.

Fears have been expressed by a number of senior NATO military men that budget cuts in the United States will lead to the United States navy reducing its commitment to forward defence. The Dutch navy chief of staff recently used this argument as a platform to propose a greater European naval role in the north-east Atlantic to make up for United States withdrawals. Substituting

European forces for United States forces in this way sounds desirable, but we must be careful to understand just what such a proposal would mean. The Dutch navy —like our own—is shaped as much by its historical role in protecting a far-flung empire as by a realistic assessment of the present-day threat. As a result, the Dutch have a navy out of all proportion to the size and international political role of the Netherlands.

Understandably, Dutch naval chiefs want to keep it that way. The all-European force suggested by Admiral Van Foreest would be, in effect, nothing more than a reinforcement of the status quo. He argues so himself:

"This would fit well with United States forward maritime strategy . . . In the event of a crisis, our main task would be to keep the Norwegian sea clear for the United States strike fleet."

What we need is not a change in the nationality of the people carrying out the United States maritime strategy but a change in the strategy itself, in keeping with the changes in Soviet posture and with our own security interests and ability to pay.

The Labour party opposes a forward offensive maritime strategy for Britain and NATO in the eastern Atlantic. It was inappropriate and dangerous from the start, but we must now take account of the effects of massive political and military changes in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union on the maritime situation, just as everyone in NATO, except this Government, has been seriously reassessing strategy in relation to central Europe.

Mr. Ian Bruce: The hon. Gentleman makes it sound as though the Labour party is again becoming wedded to what happened when it was last in power—doing away with all the aircraft carriers. The hon. Gentleman seems to be suggesting that these capital ships cost too much to protect. We had to call them through-deck cruisers to get away from the Labour party's policy of doing away with aircraft carriers. Surely the hon. Gentleman accepts that, during the Falklands war and in all the other emergencies in which the Navy has been involved, the Harrier air force has been required. Can the hon. Gentleman tell the House whether it is now Labour party policy to do away with aircraft carriers and with our Harriers? The logic of his argument is that that is how the party wants to go.

Mr. Boyes: It would be interesting to know what the Government—the hon. Gentleman's party is in power and is making the decisions—are going to do about Fearless and Intrepid. The hon. Gentleman should have addressed his question to the Government if he was really interested —*[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State intervenes from a sedentary position. He knows full well that his Government have had many years to make a decision about these matters but have never done so.

Mr. Speed: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Boyes: No.

Some people now argue that the impending conclusion of a CFE agreement, combined with budget-led withdrawals of United States troops and the greater warning time now available to NATO of any Warsaw pact attack mobilisation—if we assume for the moment that such an organisation as the Warsaw pact will continue to exist—means that more stress should be placed on naval forces and the forward defence of sea line communications between north America and Europe. I wonder whether this is just a rearguard action being fought by fans of the big Navy strategy. In the event of a crisis, our main task would be to keep the Norwegian sea clear for the United States strike fleet. What we need is not a change in the nationality of the people carrying out the strategy, but a change in the strategy itself, in keeping with Soviet posture and with our security interests and ability to pay.

Mr. Cohen: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way—*[Interruption.]* He is very good at giving way for points that he knows will be relevant. My hon. Friend talked about the strategy in the Norwegian sea. Does he agree that that strategy can be summed up thus: the Royal Navy goes in, takes on the Russians and gets blown to pieces, and the United States Navy goes in afterwards and does the mopping up? Our fleet takes the brunt. Is not that the strategy that the Government have adopted?

Mr. Boyes: My hon. Friend, as usual employing superb language, describes exactly what might happen in the event of such an incident.

Let us consider this matter in the cold light of day, untrammelled by memories of empire or an overblown sense of the power of the red ensign. War between East and West is less likely than at any time in the post-war period. Every other week, the Pentagon issues or leaks a new assessment which shows what nonsense the idea of a Soviet-led attack on western Europe is—I am sticking to capabilities, not intentions, as that is what the hawks always tell us to do.

In those circumstances, if the Warsaw pact geared itself up to attack, its forces would be incapable of sustained combat. There would be a short war, not the long war assumed by the proponents of strong naval escort forces in the eastern Atlantic and a forward maritime strategy. There would be no point in bottling up the Soviet fleet in the Barents sea to stop it sinking convoys en route to Europe with war supplies because there would be no convoys; the war would be over before the cranes had finished loading them in the United States ports.

I have always believed that a substantial element in the forward maritime strategy, particularly in its United States embodiment in the period since 1980, was a desire by naval commanders to give their sailors more action in peacetime. A navy which never comes into contact with its supposed enemy is one that does not believe in itself enough, is not combat ready and, more importantly, is bored.

The forward maritime strategy has brought a great deal more excitement into many sailors' lives. There have been cat-and-mouse games between submarines under arctic ice, intelligence-gathering missions close to Soviet territorial waters and mock air attacks on Soviet strategic bases, turning away from Soviet air space only at the last moment. Much as I respect the Navy and its personnel, the time has come to behave more rationally and coolly on maritime issues, stop the threatening and provocative exercises and dangerous postures and address the possibilities of naval arms control in a serious and co-operative mood.

I shall now say a few words about Polaris. Over the years——

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Alan Clark): Is the hon. Gentleman going to read all that?

Mr. Boyes: No. The Minister speaks from a sedentary position. I respect the hon. Gentleman and do not expect such behaviour from him. I have not spoken for anywhere near as long as the Minister did.

Over the years Ministers and Ministry of Defence officials have issued a number of statements that no Polaris submarine has ever been detected or tracked on patrol. The impression has always been created that Polaris operates in an entirely independent and self-reliant manner, using stealth to avoid detection, rather than relying on other systems such as aircraft and hunter-killer submarines to provide anti-submarine cover.

In the 1988 "Statement on the Defence Estimates", a new role for the Royal Navy appeared: protecting the deployment of our strategic deterrent. In the 1988-89 defence estimates, that role was seemingly promoted to become the foremost of the Navy's three tasks, coming before containment of the Soviet northern fleet and the protection of reinforcement shipping. That was an amazing revelation because it showed that Polaris was not self-reliant but required a major effort by other Royal Navy and Air Force units to protect it. As that is now stated officially in the "Statement on the Defence Estimates", will the Minister come clean and say what level of resources are being expended on the protection of Polaris submarines on patrol? It has been the convention that the declared costs of Britain's strategic nuclear forces are limited to the capital and operating costs of the Trident and Polaris fleets. It now seems that we should add some of the costs of anti-submarine patrols by ships, aircraft, and other submarines, including part of the cost of building some of those vessels.

This is a fundamental question: will the Minister explain clearly to the House why the role of protecting the deployment of the strategic deterrent was never mentioned in the annual Statements on the Defence Estimates until 1988, and now stands as the first of three roles for the maritime forces? Has Soviet open-ocean anti-submarine warfare advanced dramatically, in complete contradiction of the United States intelligence evidence which I quoted earlier? Have the hundreds of millions of pounds spent on Polaris refits in recent years failed to produce a boat that can operate independently without fear of detection? As the Minister failed to answer those questions when I asked them in a previous debate, will he provide an answer either in this debate or by letter?

We now know that nine Royal Navy nuclear-powered submarines, including Polaris, probably—I can rely only on what the Minister can tell me—have cracks in their nuclear reactor cooling circuits. The Minister has never come clean on the present position. Information that has come to my notice suggests a seriousness greater than the Government are prepared or willing to admit. HMS Warspite may have a fault that is unrepairable. There are several dangers in relation to the generation of submarines built in the 1950s and 1960s.

I faxed a letter to the Secretary of State on 31 January 1990 in which I asked him seven questions, some of which related to assurances being given to the local population because of the possible danger if any major problem occurred while the boats were in dock. The Opposition believe that in view of the perceived seriousness of the problem, the prime importance must be the safety and security of crews working on the boats and the workers at the various dockyards who are carrying out the repairs.

In his book "Submarine versus Submarine" Commander Richard Compton Hall, MBE, RN said:

"A total coolant failure in any nuclear plant is disastrous and inevitably leads to the melt down of the core. Western submariners are absolutely certain that these safety devices and back-up systems will never allow this to happen. The Russians said the same until Chernobyl."

I do not know whether the Minister who is to sum up has been briefed about the questions that I asked the Secretary of State and whether we can expect an answer to each of the questions. A number of people need assurances about the condition of those submarines. My hon. Friends and I believe that some of the submarines—if they are in the state which I suspect them to be—should be taken out of commission and docked, along with HMS Dreadnought, until the Government at long last determine what to do with such boats.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archibald Hamilton): I answered the hon. Gentleman's letter this afternoon. That letter should be on the board, and was there at 3.30 pm, I believe. If he wishes, I shall certainly repeat the message in the letter when I sum up.

Mr. Boyes: One of my hon. Friends will get the letter for me, and I shall see what it has to say.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Does my hon. Friend accept that it is discourteous of the Minister to send the letter only today and say that he will refer to it in his wind-up speech? That means that the rest of the House is denied the information in the letter. It leaves us in a difficult position, because if we go on asking questions we shall be told that we shall be given the answers at the end of the debate. It would have been far better if the information had been available to the House so that we could have pursued relevant questions in the debate, rather than muck about in the dark.

Mr. Boyes: I now have one of the letters from the Minister of State for the Armed Forces. It is right to read it on to the record. It says:

"You wrote to Tom King on 31 January about nuclear powered submarines. I have been asked to reply.

As I am sure that you appreciate, detailed information relating to the design and operation of nuclear powered submarines is classified. I cannot, therefore, comment on the specific nature of the defect which was discovered in one of our boats except to say that it had potential safety implications; that the necessary action is being taken to deal with it; and that, as a prudent precaution, we are inspecting other nuclear powered submarines as they come alongside from their operational tasks.

Against that background I can give you the assurance you require about the safety of the personnel who are engaged in the inspection of those boats which are at present in harbour and of the population of the surrounding areas. I should emphasise that there has been no leak of radioactivity as a result of this defect; and that we have very high standards for our nuclear submarines both in port and at sea.

I can assure you that the decision to keep submarines at sea on operational tasks, pending inspection when they return to port has been taken in the light of independent safety advice. The Royal Navy's submarines operate within tried and tested safety margins and we regard the safety of submarine crews as of paramount importance.

You also asked about early decommissioning of Valiant and Resolution Class submarines. We see no reason for such action.

In conclusion, the inspections we are carrying out are a prudent precaution; there has been no radiation leak or injury to anyone; the Government attaches the highest importance to nuclear safety; and our action is part of that policy.

I hope this is helpful."

I thank the Minister for that reply. My only regret is that I received it in the middle of my speech. If it could be on the board at half past 3, it could just as easily have been available at a quarter past 3. I regret the way in which the Government treat the Opposition in replying to to a series of questions of which they were given considerable notice.

People are worried about this matter. The Minister's letter was fairly bland and did not give the assurance required by Opposition Members and, more particularly, by the population where the boats are docked.

We are equally concerned about submariners. Having read the Minister's letter, I am still of the opinion that some of the boats should be decommissioned and taken out of action. The evidence that I received over the weekend which is independent of the Government, suggests that the boats are not as safe and secure as the Government want us to believe. There are some serious faults in the submarines, people could be in danger and submariners could be at risk.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Tom King): That is insulting to the Royal Navy.

Mr. Sayeed: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Boyes: No.

I shall write a further letter to the Secretary of State asking for more detailed replies to some more detailed questions.

The Secretary of State made a remark from a sedentary position about Royal Navy personnel. But I am directing my remarks at Ministers. I have as much admiration and respect for naval personnel as any Conservative Member and any Minister. I am not happy with the reply that I have received, nor with the time at which I received it.

Mr. Sayeed: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Will my hon. Friend press the Minister of State, either now or when he replies, to give an assurance that the operational power and skill on the boats will not have to be reduced as a result of the faults? When faults were found in civil reactors, it was necessary to run them at substantially below the originally intended capacity. Surely an assurance should be given that, as a result of the fault, submarines will not have to operate at below the originally designed capacity.

Mr. Boyes: I agree with that. My hon. Friend asks an important question—*[Interruption.]* The behaviour of the hon. Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence, ill becomes someone in his position. We are discussing matters that are important to many people in the areas where the boats are docked. It was on behalf of those people that I asked the Secretary of State for assurances about the security and safety of submarines.

Mr. Sayeed: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Boyes: No.

These are important matters and this is the proper place for them to be aired and for Ministers to answer our questions. We must ensure that we have the full details. I shall write another letter to the Secretary of State. I hope that he will reply a little more quickly than he did to my previous letter.

Mr. Cohen: My hon. Friend is right to emphasise the safety implications of nuclear reactor faults. Will he take this opportunity to ask the Minister of State why, if there is no problem—as he stated in his bland reply to my hon. Friend—so many of the submarines have returned to port? There must be a reason. According to the Government's own standards, they are leaving the country defenceless. If that is not the case, the submarines were no use in the first place. Does he agree that we must be given a reason why so many vessels returned to port?

Mr. Boyes: Yes. I am sure that the Minister has noted my hon. Friend's point, and that he will answer it.

Mr. Sayeed: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Boyes: No, I want to conclude now. I understand from a Conservative Whip that many Conservative Members wish to speak in the debate. I shall take no more interventions from either Conservative or Opposition Members.

I wish to make several points about changes in the Soviet navy. I have outlined some of the reasons why there is a clear need for a change in maritime strategy. Perhaps it is most important to consider what has happened to Soviet naval forces. Again, last year's Statement on the Defence Estimates was no help. Of rather more value was last year's edition of "Soviet Military Power", the Pentagon's annual glossy booklet, usually designed to boost congressional support for a higher defence budget. I draw the attention of the House to some of the highlights of the booklet on Soviet maritime forces:

"20 major Soviet Navy surface combatants have been scrapped since 1987, and only a few of these have been replaced . . . Backfire bombers have finally been deployed with the Soviet Northern Fleet, more than ten years after the RAF was predicting their imminent appearance off the north of Scotland; Soviet naval activity outside home waters has declined 15 per cent. since 1985. Warsaw Pact methods for replenishment at sea are 'slow and primitive', such that major surface ships could not fight for prolonged periods; production rates for the latest surface ships and submarines have declined."

Before Conservative Members tell me that the Soviet navy is smaller and more capable and efficient as a result, I shall quote from page 111 of "Soviet Military Power";

"Trends for the last five years have favoured NATO's naval forces. The Pact navies have been growing smaller, as fewer but more capable ships replace older models. NATO naval forces, however, have maintained their size. They also have been upgraded significantly in antisubmarine warfare, antisurface warfare and air defence capability. . . . NATO navies also have engaged in integrated training exercises to improve their ability to conduct combined operations. The trend for the next five years will likely see NATO maintain its quantitative and qualitative edge in naval forces."

That is not just an American view. In the 1988 Statement on the Defence Estimates, it was grudgingly admitted that Soviet out-of-area deployments had declined over the past two years, but that was explained purely as a measure to make the Soviet Navy more operationally effective. In the small print, however—always worth reading in documents designed mainly for public relations—we find that Warsaw pact major surface warship production has been running at half the rate of NATO's, not counting France and Spain which have significant warship building programmes. The rate of production of attack submarines has been almost identical in East and West over the past 10 years, and production of the Soviet Union's newest nuclear-powered attack submarines was "below levels previously sustained". Those statistics are from the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1988, vol. 1, page 62.

[Mr. Boyes]

Certainly, the Soviet Union continues to pour money into new submarines and now has a third aircraft carrier under construction. Despite that investment, more than 60 per cent. of the Soviet submarine fleet is more than 20 years old, and 30 per cent. is more than 30 years old. The United States navy says that the Soviets have only 30 submarines which could be described as modern, first-line anti-submarine platforms—that is about the same number as the United States Los Angeles class fleet.

Two years ago the director of submarine warfare for the United States navy rejected claims that the Soviet Union's latest nuclear-powered submarine, the Akula class, was superior to the Los Angeles class. He told Congress:

"Today's United States submarine force is unquestionably the best in the world."

In terms of new carriers, Soviet officials have recently said that they expect heavy cuts in the navy's budget in the near future as perestroika starts to hit military spending. There is a large question mark over whether the third and largest Soviet aircraft carrier will ever be completed. The Pentagon itself rejects the idea that the other two will be used in any offensive role, but says rather that they will be used to improve the currently abysmal air defence cover of the Soviet Union's forward defences in the Norwegian sea.

I do not believe in complacency. If the Soviets are as sincere about naval arms control as they appear to be, they must be prepared to give up those aircraft carriers. If Mr. Gorbachev has ever seen any United States navy documents about the cost of running vessels of that size, he must be pressing for cancellation.

If the Soviet Union is sincere not just about reducing the size of its military force but about restructuring it in a defensive manner, what will be NATO's response? I sincerely hope that it will be different from the experience of Colonel Harry Summers, a former professor at the United States army war college. Last summer, he recounted how, in the late 1970s, he had listened to an admiral's briefing on the strategic rationale of the United States navy. Slide after slide depicted the Soviet naval threat and how it was being countered. At the end, the admiral asked an army general what he thought. "Very interesting", the general said, "but what you've just said is that if the Soviet navy sank tomorrow, we could do away with the United States navy." The admiral laughed. "You don't understand," he said. "If the Soviet navy sank tomorrow, I'd get me a new set of slides."

There is a legitimate role for our Navy and the decline in Soviet naval activity should enable us to reassess what that role should be. When we form the next Government we shall conduct a wide-ranging and thoroughgoing review.

I take this opportunity to praise all men and women of all ranks who serve this country on shore and at sea. The defence of our shores is essential, and we salute all the brave men and women in our forces.

5.13 pm

Mr. Michael Mates (Hampshire, East): I am sorry that the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) did not feel able to give way to me, because I wanted to ask a pertinent question. His attitude was in stark contrast to that of the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill), who is always very courteous in giving way in services debates. That characterises such debates. They may be robust but they are mostly to the point and we try to find things out. Some 52 minutes ago the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington spoke about what was happening in eastern Europe. I take no exception to that because we can only base debates on the future of our defence on what is happening on the other side.

Towards the end of his speech the hon. Gentleman said how out of tune the Government were and Mrs. Thatcher in particular—he named the Prime Minister—in not going the way of all the other countries in NATO. He said that we need defence cuts now. I tried to intervene because I wanted to ask him where we need defence cuts. Some 52 minutes later, we are no wiser. The hon. Gentleman wants defence cuts now but he is not prepared to tell us what should be cut, how that should be done and whether it will put any of our services, including the Royal Navy, at risk. We must take the hon. Gentleman's assertion, in the way that it was offered, as meaningless, because he was not prepared to be questioned on it. I understand that the hon. Gentleman has been on the armed forces parliamentary scheme, and I congratulate him on that.

Mr. Boyes *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Mates: I beg the hon. Gentleman's pardon. The need for the hon. Gentleman to increase his knowledge has been more than adequately shown, and I hope that the Secretary of State will note that.

In the past year, the Select Committee on Defence has continued to take an interest in the Royal Navy and last Session we published no fewer than four reports relating to it. We published a short report entitled "The Royal Navy's Surface Fleet: Current Issues", which monitored developments since we had compiled our major report on the future size and role of the Royal Navy in 1988. This time round we were able to report grounds for a little more optimism about the future of the destroyer frigate fleet than we had felt able to do in our earlier report, owing to the Government ordering three more type 23 frigates in 1988. Since that report, the Government have ordered three more from Swan Hunter and we warmly welcome that order.

Nevertheless there is still no room for complacency. Last year we said:

"There is still some way to go before a pattern of ship ordering is established which would guarantee that the escort fleet remains at 'around 50' ships".

The ordering of three Duke class frigates is important, but I hope that the Minister will agree that of greater importance is the date at which they will be laid down—when work on them will begin—because that dictates the eventual date of entry into service.

I have a slight fear that there is a growing gap between ordering and laying down. It is common ground that we need about 2·6 ships laid down each year. That is about one every five months and that is not happening. Of the three whose orders were announced in July 1988, the Iron Duke was laid down in December 1988 and the Monmouth in August 1989; I believe that Montrose has yet to be laid down but should be shortly. It would be helpful if, when announcing the placing of orders, as my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement did last December, the dates of laying down

were also announced. It would be useful to hear from the Minister the laying down dates for Westminster, Northumberland and Richmond.

We also published a report on the decommissioning of nuclear submarines. That is a very difficult subject and our report sought to set out the facts about decommissioning and the options open to the Ministry for disposing of old submarines. This problem will not go away. The Ministry's policy of wait and see has some merits, but decisions will soon be necessary as Dreadnought is joined by more and more of her sisters.

The London dumping convention met in November and agreed to a ban on decommissioned nuclear submarines being dumped at sea, apparently against the wishes of the United Kingdom. The Ministry's immediate response, as reported in the press, suggested that there was still some possibility of the Government using sea dumping. It would be helpful to have on record the Minister's views of the implications for nuclear submarine decommissioning of the recent decisions of the London dumping convention. I make that request full of sympathy for the problems that confront the Department in respect of that difficult matter.

Our 10th report last Session was on the procurement of the vertical launch Sea Wolf missile system and the type 23 frigate command system. Both demonstrate the difficulties of accurately estimating the costs and time involved in software-intensive projects. It is a matter for regret that the type 23s will go into service without a computer-assisted command system, which will inevitably reduce their operational effectiveness. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister of State can give a better indication of progress with the new project than could my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary.

Last Session, as in many previous years, we published a report on the progress of the Trident programme. During that inquiry, we visited Kings Bay in Georgia, where Royal Navy personnel are in training. We shall update our inquiry again this year. Last week, the Committee received the Secretary of State's annual report on Trident. We shall study it in detail, but we all welcome the continuing reduction in Trident's real cost and the fact that there is no slippage in the in-service date. That programme is one of which everyone concerned can be very proud.

Just before Christmas, we visited the Falklands, and aside from seeing the good heart that everyone was in, with Christmas just coming—life is not easy, serving down in the south Atlantic—we had an entertaining evening on board HMS Penelope—the oldest frigate in the fleet by some way, having been commissioned in October 1963, when many of its crew had not yet been born. Last June, the Defence Committee was told that HMS Penelope could run on for a further four years, but I gather that the end may be nearer than that for her. I should be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister would clarify the position in respect of that frigate and of the older batch 2A frigates —the Leander class frigates—in general, as they approach a quarter of a century of service. As last year's report points out, there are growing penalties in terms of cost, time and manpower in keeping those frigates running.

While we were in the Falklands, we visited HMS Leeds Castle, which is an offshore patrol vessel more or less permanently stationed in the Falklands. Hers is not an enviable task, and in my judgment life for the ship's company—all of whom are on short-term postings—is not made easier by what seems to be the Admiralty's policy of posting a very high proportion of officers and crew who have given notice of their intention to retire prematurely and who thus work out their time in the Falklands. That obviously presents problems of morale, and I hope that the Ministry of Defence will reconsider its policy. I hasten to add that we were all the more impressed by the way in which all those on HMS Penelope went about their tasks.

Last Friday, as was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, the Defence Committee published a report on the procurement of the EH101 helicopter and the light attack helicopter, so that it would be available to right hon. and hon. Members today. The part of the report dealing with the anti-submarine warfare variant of the EH101, or the Merlin, is relevant to today's debate. I shall not run through all the Committee's observations, because I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will read the report for themselves, but I shall highlight a few of the points that it makes.

The success of the project is, as yet, far from assured. The Ministry must be satisfied that the development programme has progressed far enough and well enough for the project's success to be likely before placing production orders. The Ministry plans to order only 50 aircraft initially despite its acceptance that the operational requirement for them remains at 74. It will be interesting to hear how the operational requirement has altered to justify the change in the number ordered—unless it is simply a budgetary matter, in which case it would be more honest if we were told that.

It should be emphasised that a larger order could lead to a considerably lower unit cost than our estimate of about £40 million each for the 50 aircraft. We trust that if all goes well, an order for a second batch will follow the first. Again, the EH101 demonstrates the management problems inherent in international collaboration. If the trend towards greater collaboration and procurement is to continue, we must ensure that projects are tightly controlled.

In case any misunderstanding should arise from the remarks of the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), who seemed more concerned about his constituency than with the Navy's requirements, our report specifically states that problems of delay within the MOD belong to the past. The report observes, in paragraph 50:

> "MOD have in the past contributed to their own difficulties, as a result of their inability to bring themselves to a position where their philosophy for mobility on the battlefield of the '90s and beyond could be stated, and thus a firm requirement determined."

That does not apply to the naval version of the EH101, but it does apply to the helicopter requirements of all our services over the next decade.

Mr. Cohen: Will the hon. Gentleman, who is of course Chairman of the Defence Select Committee, say how much money is known to have been wasted by the Ministry of Defence on the EH101 project so far? What is the projected overspend? How much money has been wasted by the Government?

Mr. Mates: I shall not follow the hon. Gentleman in his pejorative words. The project is over-cost and over-time, and the figures are set out in the report. That is a matter for regret, and I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister regrets it as much as we do. However, to say that the effort

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has been wasted is to use a somewhat ignorant phrase. In the development of new weapons systems, what is waste and what is research? What is possible and what is not possible? My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary acknowledges our concern, and his remarks reflected that. We are all concerned if a programme is late and running over cost —but it is not the first time that that has happened with new technology, and I fear that it will not be the last.

I conclude with a couple of observations that are mine alone and have nothing to do with the Defence Select Committee. The hon. Member for Houghton and Washington spoke of naval arms reductions, and although I agree with some of his remarks, he reached entirely the wrong conclusions. Unfortunately, the hon. Gentleman colours all his remarks with a fundamental anti-Americanism that does no justice to his arguments. To say that it is the Americans who are being bellicose is to ignore the fact that it is largely due to their efforts that CFE got going as well as it did. We should give the Americans considerable credit. A meaningful agreement on reducing troop numbers in Europe would not be possible without the co-operation of the Americans.

As to naval arms reductions, it was inevitably right not to include them in the first round of the CFE talks. That would have caused delay and unbelievable complications, given that so many other problems that have nothing to do with Europe arise when the United States and the Soviet Union discuss their naval forces. The United States Navy keeps very nearly as many of its assets in the Pacific as in the Atlantic. The Soviet Union keeps a greater number of its naval assets in the Pacific, and that has nothing to do with the threats between NATO and the Warsaw pact. Their deployment there is due to other areas of instability in the Pacific rim, in which both super-powers have a legitimate interest.

However, I do not believe that another round of arms reduction talks can be embarked upon without naval forces being mentioned. I hope that our Government will say that for talks to be credible over the next three, four or five years, talks must begin on how we can wind down those parts of the West and Warsaw pact navies that affect the East-West balance of power.

A way must be found of keeping separate the need for stability in the Pacific rim, where the position of the Soviet Union and the United States grow more common rather than more different. As the Soviet Union encounters problems in its own territories, that trend may begin to be evident on the European scene. That is an exciting prospect. When we come to talk about naval reductions, once again it will mainly concern the Soviet Union and the United States. Although we should be present, supporting and participating, we must remember that we have to take care of places that could be under threat, where we have a legitimate interest, when we decide the future size and strength of our Royal Navy.

If I had to try to predict where we shall be in 10 years' time—it will have to be general because it will probably be wrong—I would say that if present trends continue in Europe we are likely to have smaller ground forces and smaller air forces, but I doubt whether we will find any reason to have a much smaller Navy.

For the past 40 years we have had to focus on the threat on the ground between a massively powerful Warsaw pact and NATO. As that threat diminishes, the relative necessity to cope with threats out of area, on the fringes, will grow. I believe that the threat has almost gone from the central front, but we must now focus more sharply on the threat on the northern flank and, in particular, on the southern flank. For example, Turkey, which is a full member of NATO, borders the Soviet Union—and Armenia at that—Iran, Syria and Iraq. We have a common purpose to defend Turkish integrity and Turkey has a common purpose to defend the integrity of western Europe. We must not forget that a threat still exists there, and that there is uncertainty and unpredictability. When that threat comes from fundamentalist Muslims, we must over-insure rather than under-insure. We shall always have a task for the Royal Navy.

I hope that the Minister will have something to say about amphibious replacements. I beg him to realise that, given that there may be reductions elsewhere, we cannot go through the next decade, when we will need more flexible, smaller armed forces, with our amphibious capability confined to roll-on/roll-off ferries after our two excellent amphibious carriers have gone. That prospect is not one that I would wish to contemplate.

5.32 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): It is a pleasure for me to follow the hon. Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates). He is the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence, and I have been a member of that Committee for the past two years. During that time he has been a fair, objective and excellent Chairman. Perhaps that glowing reference will ensure that he will remain the chairman of that Back-Bench committee for many years to come.

The Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement opened the debate with a reference to East-West relations. I congratulate him on referring to the changes in those relations, but he gave no hint of the Government's stance other than saying that it would be more of the same.

The Financial Times, in its front page on Saturday, had an article headed "Bush and Thatcher lead a chorus of approval". The article was not talking about defence cuts, but about South Africa. The Prime Minister was quoted as saying:

> "When people are going your way in a bold and courageous style we should give them encouragement to make them go further and faster."

The encouragement that she gave to Nelson Mandela and to Mr. de Klerk was to invite them to 10 Downing street before the ink on any agreement was dry. However, that does not apply to her stance on defence, when she says, "Here and no further." That is a complete antithesis to her approach to South Africa, and it highlights the inconsistency of Government policy.

What happened at the weekend? The Prime Minister called in the Foreign Secretary, according to *The Observer*, to reprimand him on his speech to the Conservative political centre at Wroxton two weeks ago. It says:

> "Mr. Hurd looked forward to a time when large cuts in defence spending would make money available for improving the 'quality of life'."

But the article also said that the Prime Minister

> "does not believe that defence cuts are inevitable."

So the Foreign Secretary had to appear on "The World This Weekend" last Sunday and retract what he said. There is no hint of a peace dividend from the Government.

Contrast that situation with what is happening in America at the moment. There is a reduction of more than

2·6 per cent. in the United States defence budget this year. The Secretary of Defence, Dick Cheney, put his package to Congress and its response was that it was too timid. The United States has been reducing its budget since 1985. Contrast that with our stance. We have real growth in our defence budget of some £1 billion per year for the next three years. Compare that with the 13 per cent. reduction in the United States since 1985. We know that their five-year plan will continue on that downward path.

It is sad that the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement cannot refer to a change in the Government's style in relation to the changing situation in Europe. Few people would deny that the system of alliances on which European security has rested for the past three and half decades, rigid as it was during the cold war, has been extensively undermined, and is rapidly becoming obsolescent. That implies that it is necessary to have an alternative framework for security for the entire continent.

A major requirement for any progress is that the United States and its leading NATO allies, such as ourselves, depart from the silly belief that NATO's most urgent task is to frustrate an attack on western Europe by a militant Soviet Union and its equally militant Warsaw pact allies. In at least three eastern European countries their Parliaments would have to decide if their forces could be used. So much for the militant Warsaw pact. There is not a militant approach by the Warsaw pact.

I can appreciate that the Government are cautious, but surely they can come up with some intellectual thinking on defence issues during the next few years. The Government should say that we have a changing situation and that we support Gorbachev. If the Government support Gorbachev it is incumbent on them to consider and formulate a new defence posture. Sadly, we do not have that opportunity just now.

At the moment, institutional truth is evident. John Kenneth Galbraith mentioned institutional truth, which is different from simple truth. I am asking the Minister for simple truth, and not the institutional truth of the military industrial complex. Simple truth should make the Government face up to the changing realities in eastern Europe.

Consider our own Navy and nuclear depth bombs. Can I ask the Minister to respond to this in his summing up? The British nuclear free-fall depth bombs—the WE177B and 177C—which are on Royal Navy ships will become obsolete by the end of the decade. I believe that the decision to replace them will be taken in the next few months. There is widespread agreement that those weapons make no nuclear sense. My hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) referred to the arguments of the former Admiral Eberle on that subject. They are becoming increasingly redundant, and I would like the Minister to consider that.

My hon. Friend also mentioned Faslane and the nuclear reactors. That is in my constituency. The Select Committee on Defence has asked the Ministry of Defence for a note about the supposed faults in the nuclear reactor in HMS Warspite and others. To date, I have not been involved with the MOD on this issue, but I know that the Scottish papers had a lot to say about it at the weekend. A number of alarmist telephone calls have been made to different people, and they have told me that the language being used by the anonymous callers is very technical, and therefore gives the calls an element of credibility. I do not want to add to rumour-mongering, but the Government should consider the situation, and give us reasonable explanations of why there are so many boats in port at Faslane, Rosyth and Devonport.

I am informed that at Faslane, three Valiant class, two Resolution class, one Swiftsure and one diesel are in port at present. Why have those boats been recalled? We know that if there is a hairline fracture in the coolant systems which are manufactured by Roll-Royce in Derby, it could affect not just one boat by many. Certainly it is most unusual for all the Valiant class submarines to be in port at the same time, and it is possible that all the Valiant and Resolution class submarines have similar problems. The question is how serious the fault is in each submarine: if the Minister cannot give me an answer at the end of the debate, perhaps he will write to me setting out the views of the Ministry of Defence.

The hon. Member for Hampshire, East mentioned a number of investigations that the Select Committee is currently undertaking. One concerns the physical security of military installations. Mention has been made of the tragic accident at Deal in which 11 members of the Royal Marines were killed, and I join other hon. Members in expressing my sympathy. Like many other members of the Select Committee, I am worried about the use of private contractors—not just on that occasion, but in the future—and the evidence given to the Committee on Wednesday by MOD officials gave rise to more anxiety rather than less. It seems that, if a private contract is awarded for two or three years, it will be maintained regardless of lapses in security, rather than being cancelled immediately. There is widespread concern about that on both sides of the House, and I beg the Minister to take account of the problem for the sake of the security and safety of military personnel.

Last week I received a leaked internal memo which emanated from the divisional secretary of the ammunition division of Royal Ordnance. It reads:

"Unless we frighten the MOD into agreeing with our point of view, I see no prospect that we will achieve our objective."

The objective to which he refers is the right to demand the withdrawal of the MOD police and to replace them with Royal Ordnance guards—a right that Royal Ordnance intends to exercise. That is rather alarming language.

As I said to the newspapers that contacted me at the weekend, I am on the side of the MOD. I believe that it should not give in to coercive tactics, but should stand its ground and take heed of the notes of a meeting on the withdrawal of its police held in the MOD building on 6 June 1989. Five deputy chief constables were asked for their views, and all of them—representing Nottingham, Cheshire, Lancashire, Gwent, and Avon and Somerset—expressed deep concern. The issue of private contractors will not go away, and I hope that the Minister will give it his attention.

A few weeks ago, the *International Herald Tribune* featured an article by Albert Wohlstatter, a military strategist involved in the mutually assured destruction strategy of the mid-1960s and a conservative by any definition. According to him, the Americans want leaders to respond positively to the disintegration of Communist empires. Prudence requires a faster, not slower, response to the new problems caused by the break-up of the east European ice.

America's defence budget is currently being cut, because Gramm-Rudman is "meeting Gorbachev" where the United States of America is constrained by budget problems. I do not think it will be long before the Treasury

[Mr. John McFall]

in this country "meets Thatcher". Sadly, that possibility has not been addressed today, but I hope that by the time we debate the defence estimates in the summer the Government will have faced the reality of change, and will give us their proposals for United Kingdom defence in the 1990s.

5.45 pm

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): It was right for the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) to have a ramble through eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, because what has happened there will undoubtedly affect the decisions that the Ministry of Defence must make in the future. It is likely—indeed, I trust that it is the case—that those changes are irreversible, and I hope and expect that the negotiations on conventional armed forces in Europe will produce a positive outcome. As a consequence, I believe that we shall no longer require the single-scenario defences on which we have often based our spending, such as heavy tanks. I was interested to hear what my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) had to say, as he is an ex-tankie.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North East): Cavalry.

Mr. Sayeed: A cavalryman operating in tanks is normally known as a tankie.

It was notable that my right hon. Friend acknowledged that the likely outcome of successful CFE talks was a reduction in land forces and possibly in air forces, but no reduction in naval forces: in my view, the reduction in East-West tension may well result in the Navy's role being expanded, because the Navy is the most flexible of all the Services.

Despite the shrunken state of the Navy's manpower and units, my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces—I hope that he will not leave just yet—is much exercised by the question of recruitment, especially in view of the demographic trends of which we have been told. I understand from the newspapers that he recently visited the Dutch navy, and that his visits persuaded him that it might be a good idea to employ the Wrens in surface warships but not submarines. He might even announce a change of policy tonight, and hold a press conference tomorrow. I have no doubt about the ability of the Wrens: I believe that they are a considerable asset to the Royal Navy, and I know how proud and protective the Navy is of them.

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): My hon. Friend is going to say something sexist.

Mr. Sayeed: I admit that my hon. Friend is partially right.

I have been considering how my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces will try to persuade the House that a change of policy, as well as being necessary, can be fitted in with what the MOD has said before. He would have sought the help of an estimable but fictitious civil servant whom I shall call Carruthers. This civil servant, a fine protege of Sir Humphrey Appleby, would have responded to the Minister's point that the Royal Navy should employ Wrens at sea in warships—*[Interruption.]* It would help if my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East did not keep interrupting me; I cannot help laughing at his asides when he does.

When the Minister elicited Carruthers's aid to obtain ammunition to endorse the policy of employing Wrens at sea, he would say to Carruthers, "I have to convince my colleagues of the merits of my solution to the demographic trough. I have to persuade them that nothing that I am proposing will conflict with the idea that women should not serve in the front line. I require you to go away and square the circle."

Carruthers, fine fellow that he is and no mean student of Sir Humphrey, would retire and, when reporting back to the Minister, would say, "Minister, there is no problem. The definition of 'front line' is a matter of semantics. My solution is as follows: 'front line' means that you operate over enemy territory and that you engage in hand-to-hand combat. That being the case, there is no problem over having women at sea in warships. I have couched my recommendation and definition of 'front line' in those terms because we do not want this monstrous army of women to believe that they will have the opportunity to fly Tornado aircraft, or do any job that a man does and be paid for it in an infantry battalion."

"Furthermore," Carruthers would report to the Minister, "Wrens already serve at sea—in survey ships, in royal fleet auxiliaries. You can point out, Minister, that if you are sunk in HMS Hecate it is not very different from being sunk in HMS Hermione." The Minister would then say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant. You can collect your gong on the way out," to which Carruthers would reply, "Yes Minister."

If Wrens serve at sea in warships, there will have to be changes to the Queen's regulations for the Royal Navy. That does not matter all that much; it can be catered for. It will mean structural changes to warships, in which accommodation standards have improved so much that they are getting close to reducing the offensive and defensive capabilities of warships. However, that too could be allowed for.

There is the point that the Dutch have women serving in warships. Why cannot we? However, the Dutch navy is different from the Royal Navy. The Dutch navy has about 15 units of offshore patrol vessels or bigger—frigates, destroyers and so on. We have 63. Dutch naval personnel total about 17,000, ours total 57,000. But the main difference between the Dutch navy and the Royal Navy is that the Dutch navy mostly goes to sea only during the week.

Mr. David Martin: My hon. Friend knows that I raised this matter two years ago in my maiden speech. It is quite close to my heart. Does my hon. Friend believe that no advances can be made if women serve in warships throughout the coming decade? Women are allowed to train as pilots and to serve in the Royal Air Force. Why is that so different from combat roles in Royal Navy warships?

Mr. Sayeed: My hon. Friend has asked me questions that ought to have been answered by the Minister when he replied to my hon. Friend's maiden speech. If I remember rightly, the points that he made in his excellent speech on that occasion were not adequately answered. I am sure that my hon. Friend is well aware, however, that women do not serve in the Royal Air Force as front-line pilots.

The principal difference between the Royal Netherlands navy and our Royal Navy is that the Dutch navy does not usually go to sea at weekends. The ships are tied up alongside the quay at their home base. Men who serve in the Royal Navy, however, can spend months, even years, at sea and away from home.

As for the argument that women serve in survey ships and royal fleet auxiliaries, I remind the Minister, if he intends to announce a new policy, that most survey ships are used as hospital ships in times of conflict and that consequently they are protected by the terms of the Geneva convention. Although most royal fleet auxiliaries would serve in a combat area, for most of the time they would keep out of trouble. The difference between serving in a royal fleet auxiliary ship and a warship is that a warship's job is to seek out the enemy. It does not matter if one is the cook or the captain; the risk on board a warship is exactly the same for everyone.

As for operating within foreign territory, it is quite likely that at a time of conflict a warship would have to operate inside enemy-held waters—even, possibly, within enemy territorial waters. I cannot answer the argument that sailors do not engage in hand-to-hand combat at sea, except, possibly, with some of their mess mates now and again.e a However, one is just as dead whether one is killed by a shell or a bayonet.

The greatest of my objections to the suggestion that Wrens should serve at sea in warships is that in seeking to overcome one problem—recruitment—we shall exacerbate another—retention.

Dr. Mike Woodcock (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I have listened carefully to what my hon. Friend has said. Am I not right in thinking that it is not only the Dutch navy which permits women to serve at sea and that the Israelis, the New Zealanders, the Australians, the Americans and even the Norwegians permit it? Also, am I not right in thinking that this issue ought not to be settled by men and that the vast majority of Wrens wish to go to sea? We live in an age of equal opportunities. If Wrens want to go to sea, it is not for men to stand in their way.

Mr. Sayeed: My hon. Friend's points have considerable validity. However, the fact is that it is men who serve at sea. We must ensure that we can maintain sufficient numbers of them at sea, that they continue to wish to serve at sea and that their families remain keen for them to serve at sea. I accept that a large number of Wrens would like to go to sea. I do not disparage their abilities. However, most of the navies of the countries to which my hon. Friend has referred are shallow water and coastal navies. They are not deep water navies whose ships spend most of their time abroad.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): Does the hon. Gentleman have any evidence that men at sea, whom he seems to want to protect for some spurious reason, do not want women to serve alongside them?

Mr. Sayeed: I shall answer the hon. Gentleman's question in a few minutes. I hope that he will allow me to make my speech in my own way.

There is a vast difference between a shallow water, coastal water navy, and a deep water, foreign-going navy. I do not intend to dwell for much longer on the role of women in the Royal Navy. It will be the only point that I shall make this eveing because a number of hon. Members wish to speak in the debate.

The solution that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces is advocating to overcome the problem of recruitment would exacerbate the greater problem of retention. We already know that the main reason for premature voluntary retirement or for service men not re-enlisting is pressure from wives. I have received advice from families—this deals with the point made by the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood)—and from ships companies. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East and I went aboard HMS Penelope, where I found only one person who thought that it was a good idea for Wrens to serve on warships. I have spoken to many service families, but none of them think that that is a good idea. Men and women serving together in cramped conditions and away from home for long periods will increase the already considerable pressures on service men and therefore on their wives.

Anyone who has served at sea knows that many people being cooped up in a small vessel creates jealousies and tensions. Women serving on warships will add to that tension and will damage retention. My hon. Friend the Minister of State has asked the right question—how do we maintain recruitment?—but I believe that he has got the wrong answer.

I would presume that a submission has been made to the Minister by the second sea lord, who is the chief of naval personnel. He provides professional advice on recruitment and retention. Does the advice that he has given my hon. Friend the Minister of State endorse the policy of Wrens serving on warships with the Royal Navy, or is it so guarded in its response that it constitutes a rejection?

6.1 pm

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): Although I do not agree with a word of the speech made by the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed), I must confess to a certain amount of admiration for his bravery in advancing that line of argument, not least because of your distinguished presence in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, as a clear example of how discrimination against women should be banished completely from all public life.

These debates tend to divide between procurement and policy. I always thought that that was a rather artificial division, and I suspect that in a time of changing defence requirements it is all the more necessary for one to regard them both as part of the same argument. For example, the question of how may type 23 frigates are to be built must necessarily be related to the forward maritime strategy and to the need to protect the transport of materials for NATO across the north Atlantic in time of war. The number of Merlin helicopters that are necessary must be related to the role that the Navy is being invited to play. The number of nuclear submarines and nuclear warheads must be related to the extent and nature of the strategic nuclear deterrent that is thought to be required.

Most people agree that the prospect of engagement, whether it be nuclear or conventional, on land or on sea, between the forces of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the Warsaw pact has never been less. That seemed to be recognised in a speech made 10 days ago by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth

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Affairs. No one says that the possibility of such engagement has been completely eliminated—it would be foolish to make such a judgment—but the reduction of the possibility has been considerable.

That gives rise to consideration of the equipment that is necessary for the defence of our country and for our obligations to NATO. I hope that there will be no reduction in the requirement of about 50 frigates and destroyers. There is grave suspicion among all hon. Members that that figure—although Ministers speak about it with considerable enthusiasm and defend it with dogged determination—is probably not realistic. I have no doubt that any reduction would be unwise and misguided.

We know that in April 1989—I do not always agree with the hon. Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates), but I disagreed with little of what he said about this—the Government announced that they intended to place orders for four type 23 frigates, but eventually placed orders for only three. The justification that the Government gave for not placing orders for four frigates was that there would be no economic of financial advantage in so doing. That may have been true, but there undoubtedly would have been a military advantage because the Royal Navy would have been better equipped to perform the tasks imposed on it.

We should not allow the debate to pass without referring Ministers to the sixth report of Session 1988-89 of the Select Committee on Defence. In paragraph 22 of the report, the Committee concluded:

"a single year's orders is not the same thing as a consistent ordering pattern over a number of years, and the two should not be confused."

Paragraph 23 says:

"We hope that the Government will now adopt a consistent pattern for ordering ships, not least in order to give the hard-pressed warshipbuilding industry some firm basis for planning."

I welcome the fact that orders were placed at the end of last year, but the observations of the hon. Member for Hampshire, East on the laying down of keels were most apposite in this context. I hope that the Minister will offer a greater commitment about the future intentions of the Government for a consistent pattern of ordering of the type 23 frigate.

There is clearly some disagreement about at least part of the cause of the delay in the Merlin helicopter. It is time that that issue was put to one side, because, although my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) holds a legitimate interest in the fate or health of a substantial employer in his constituency, a much more significant issue in the context of this debate is that the type 23 frigate may be going to sea without an essential part of its capability. That is highly undesirable, especially when one considers that some type 23 frigates do not have the fullest command and control system that is thought to be necessary. That has an effect on the capacity of those extremely expensive vessels, which play an extremely important role.

Mr. Ashdown: My hon. and learned Friend puts the case extremely well. I sought to make the point to the Minister earlier and he tried to dodge it. Of course, as my hon. and learned Friend has said, what happens to Westland and its work force is of concern, but the chief concern is the nation's defence. As my hon. and learned Friend pointed out, because of the apparent delay which has been placed at the Government's door and the indecision which was noted in the Select Committee's report last Thursday, for four years—a quarter of its total keel life—the first type 23 frigate will be without the essential piece of equipment around which it is designed. Surely that cannot be a proper use of taxpayers' money. That indecision will result in a cost to the defence of this nation.

Mr. Campbell: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will forgive me if I return the compliment that he paid me at the beginning of his intervention. This is a serious issue. I hope that if the Government are not willing to give us their considered response to the Defence Committee's third report this Session, they will indicate their preliminary observations about this fairly serious attack on the handling of this matter by the Ministry of Defence.

I was greatly amused by the extent to which the Opposition's minds were exercised when it became clear that lasers had been used on certain ships for purely defence purposes. No doubt there were compelling reasons why the Opposition thought that that was so unacceptable, but I believe that the use of the most up-to-date technology for a purely defensive purpose is something of which we should be in favour, rather than critical.

I mentioned the strategic nuclear deterrent. I have no doubt that we should still plan for four boats to carry the strategic nuclear deterrent. As I understand it, the Labour party still clings to the notion that three would be sufficient. I have never found that a particularly compelling argument. I have frequently thought that the notion of having only three, instead of four, was perhaps not so much a rational analysis of the requirement as a sop to those who opposed having any boats at all.

Is there any justification in the deployment of Trident for having a vast increase in the number of nuclear warheads? Would it not be entirely reasonable in the deployment of the D5 Trident system for the Government to undertake to limit the number of warheads to the number presently deployed on Polaris? The number could be increased if necessary, but it would show that, in an area that would not prejudice the defence of the United Kingdom or of the western Alliance, the Government at least had in mind the prospect of an arms reduction. The argument is all the more compelling, given that Trident is much more accurate and can deliver so much more than Polaris.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Does the hon. and learned Gentleman agree that it would be sensible for the Government to make a virtue out of necessity, because all the evidence shows that they will not be able to produce the extra warheads anyway?

Mr. Campbell: I proceed on the basis of recent tests in the United States which have suggested that the system will be available as originally designed. The Government have shown that they are alive to the issue of the production of warheads by the changes that they have introduced at Aldermaston. If these are reasonable suppositions, my proposal to the Government seems at least worthy of consideration.

There has been some discussion about the possible risk attached to nuclear-powered submarines. I have not been privy to the exchange of correspondence that took place virtually across the Floor of the Chamber a little earlier today, but I hope that the Government accept that safety

must be at a premium for those who serve in such vessels, for our service men—who may come into contact with them in port—and, perhaps more significantly, for the confidence of the civilian population. I hope that the letter that was offered to the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington, (Mr. Boyes) will be made available more widely.

Reference has been made to the nuclear depth bomb. I should have thought that one was entitled to feel sceptical about whether it is necessary to deploy such a weapon. In the NF at sea conference in May 1989 Admiral Sir James Eberle and the former United States Secretary of the Navy, John Lehmen, expressed considerable scepticism about the prospect of fighting a nuclear war at sea. One is entitled to ask the Government whether they are satisfied, beyond reasonable doubt, that it is necessary for the defence of the United Kingdom and of the western Alliance to move towards a replacement for the existing weapon. As I understand it, in June last year, the Defence Committee expressed certain doubts about the value of doing so.

I remain sceptical about the apparent rush to negotiate a reduction in conventional naval forces. The conventional forces in Europe—CFE—talks in Vienna, under the stimulus of the substantial and imaginative initiatives of President Bush, appear to make substantial strides. I should have thought that it was good sense to wait until those talks have been completed and the envisaged cuts implemented before considering whether it is legitimate to embark on a reduction in conventional naval forces.

We should then take account of a number of elements. As the Minister made clear, Britain is an island nation. We rely for much of our trade on free passage over the seas. Our interests are such that we may well need to deploy naval forces away from the United Kingdom, for example, in the Gulf, the Caribbean or the Falklands—my view about the Falklands is not necessarily the Government's, but so long as that obligation exists in its present form, there is clearly a requirement to deploy naval forces in the south Atlantic. That cannot be ignored. If troops are withdrawn from mainland Europe, there will need to be a means of redeploying them there in an emergency. A naval capability for that purpose will undoubtedly continue to be important.

There is another point that I do not think the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement made in opening the debate but which I offer to the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, who is to wind up. If we move to a new order of security in Europe and there is greater political integration, there may be scope for greater specialisation among the European allies in their contributions to the defence of Europe. It may well make sense for the United Kingdom, which makes the largest contribution in western Europe to conventional naval forces to specialise in that area.

These are compelling arguments for not moving to early conventional arms reductions in the naval sphere and to ensure that we take account of these important factors. These questions will all fall to be answered. Clearly, they cannot all be answered today. Although no defence review may be taking place—those of us who have participated in these debates understand that—there is likely to be a review of defence expenditure. I imagine that the Treasury will be anxious to embark upon such an excercise, no doubt citing the recent decisions taken in the United States.

These are not matters about which the Government should be coy or secretive; they deserve wide public discussion, and I hope that the Government will be forthcoming about the elements of that discussion. It may not be possible to arrive at a non-partisan view of defence, but surely, in the changing circumstances to which other hon. Members have referred, we ought to be able to achieve more agreement about defence and security than we have in recent years.

This debate takes place in an atmosphere of hope that has not been possible on many previous occasions. Those of us who were present for the Defence Estimates debate in October will remember how the Secretary of State for Defence announced to a somewhat startled House that Mr. Honecker had resigned and been replaced by Mr. Krenz. If anybody had said, "By Christmas, the wall between East and West Berlin will be down," his remarks would have been received with considerable scepticism—rightly so, because nothing that had happened by then suggested that the pace of change would accelerate in such an extraordinary manner. The Soviet Union may even decide today that the Communist party should be removed from the place of primacy that it has hitherto occupied. The pace of change and the circumstances with which we are presented are dramatic and difficult, and it would be foolish to pretend otherwise.

Throughout our consideration of these matters, we should bear in mind the fact that there is no intrinsic merit in defence expenditure or in nuclear weapons. Expenditure on defence and the deployment of weapons of any kind —conventional or nuclear—can be justified only if it is shown to keep the peace and to deter aggression. I venture to believe that in these matters the Royal Navy will continue to play an important part in the life of the United Kingdom for a long time to come.

6.21 pm

Mr. Robert Boscawen (Somerton and Frome): I am grateful that I am to be allowed to take part in this debate on the Royal Navy—the very first time that I have been able to speak in the House on this subject. As I have a name that was once well known in the Navy, I believe, this may be rather surprising. Never, since that name was well known, has any member of my family served in the Royal Navy, so alarmed were they at the prospect of having to live up to a reputation. What is more, he was a person who was thanked on a substantive motion of the House, in the days when members of the armed forces could serve in the House. I assure hon. Members that that is not an attribute that is likely to be shared by any of his successors.

I see the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) in his place. Unsolicited by me, the largest Royal Navy aviation establishment, consisting of more than 3,000 service men and women and civilians, and the headquarters of the Fleet Air Arm were shifted sideways from his constituency to mine in 1963. I recall that 120 aircraft from that establishment were deployed on active service in the south Atlantic. They included three front-line Harrier squadrons and four helicopter squadrons. The House will understand how much I value that connection and the opportunity to speak today.

Since that time, my contacts with RNAS Yeovilton have been frequent and fascinating. I pay tribute to all those on that station who serve the nation's cause and, more locally to those who do their best to try to limit the

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intrusion of their very noisy aircraft. It is not always easy for them, but they try not to annoy my constituents as much as they certainly would if they did not take so much trouble. Those people also maintain a good relationship with all our local organisations, which is helpful to all of us.

The collective decision of the Government not to rush in and change defence expenditure—for the time being, at any rate—and not to hold an immediate defence review is exceedingly wise and encouraging. I entirely agree with the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) about the need not to make any changes in the position of the Royal Navy. Within the lifetime of many, the western democracies have time and again been totally and absolutely wrong when the threat against them has appeared to fade.

I hope that the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) will dwell on the fact that the Labour party was no more wise than anyone else on this issue. I recall how, when I was a young man, the Labour party voted to a man against conscription only four months before Hitler invaded Poland. That was a sad day and, like other signals that had gone out from us, that was the wrong signal and Labour Members should be aware of that.

Mr. O'Neill: The hon. Gentleman is playing rather an old tune, and what he says is as true of the Conservative party as it is of the Labour party. His view of history is somewhat selective. No matter how distinguished was the hon. Gentleman's own record in the war, we do not need lessons from him about the inability of certain sections of the Labour party to anticipate the dangers of Fascism. After all, a much greater number of Conservatives actively supported and encouraged those forces in Europe at a time when most decent and reasonable people were saying that they should be stopped.

Mr. Boscawen: The hon. Gentleman should do me the credit of saying that his party was no wiser than any of us; those were the words that I used. We had a long lecture —50 minutes of it—on this subject from the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington earlier this afternoon, and the Opposition should understand why some of us are rather sceptical of their claims to be any wiser today. And at what cost was that mistake made. I remind the House that it led to a tragedy that was beyond the comprehension of anyone when the decisions that brought it about were made.

We should be very careful about rushing in with talk of defence reviews. We must be more sure what the future will bring before we do that. We must also be sure that any changes that we make are not irreversible. The time scale for rebuilding modern defence organisations and weapons is so long that it would be quite impossible for countries to re-arm during an emergency. It took long enough during the last emergency and we only narrowly escaped a terrible defeat because of that. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement was absolutely right to dwell on the need to maintain the naval presence both inside and outside NATO.

Many of my constituents, from the chief executive of the Westland group downwards, are employed in that company on Ministry of Defence contracts. The future of that company is necessarily of great importance to my constituents and to people elsewhere. When news is scarce, defence procurement is a fat and comfortable soft target for the hungry news vultures of the media; and so, sadly, are Westland helicopters, although the company is now much more hungry and thinner.

When defence procurement is brought together with Westland, the media can have a really happy time. Sadly, that has happened recently. I am sorry to say that some damaging comments made by the Select Committee on defence have fuelled these comments in the media. Of course, I am concerned about the future of Westland.

I must protest about one conclusion in the report published by the Select Committee on Defence last week which refers to the "apparent" commitment only of Westland to the EH101 project. The Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates), repeated earlier that the success of the project is far from assured, although he said that good progress is being made.

I realise that the Select Committee's report was published six months after the evidence was taken—that is the nature of the Select Committee animal, and I believe that it is now 12 months since members of the Select Committee together visited Westland. It is too late for the Select Committee to suggest that the commitment of the work force is only "apparent" and it is too soon to say that success is far from assured".

The report also uses a very doubtful arithmetical device, which encourages headline fodder. The report stated that if the programme is amortised over the production of 50 helicopters, the MOD would have to foot a bill of some £40 million for each Merlin aircraft. It was a mistake for the Select Committee to fall into the trap of making that comment because such comments are bound to lead to messy headlines.

No programme involving such immense expenditure can exist on only 40 or 50 helicopters. If it is to be a success, there must be many more. The media have already used the figure of £40 million for each Merlin aircraft, and that figure will stick, but it has a very little meaning when one regards the number of helicopters that may be produced, especially when one considers that there will be a considerable civilian market that the company can attack. The £40 million figure is very misleading and I am sorry that the Select Committee chose to include it in its report.

I was lucky enough to visit Westland in the past few days and I have visited it several times previously. I saw the pre-production aircraft and discussed many aspects of Westland's current work including the Royal Navy's Merlin mission system integration. Irrespective of the Select Committee's comments, I believe that everyone, from the chief executive downwards—the management at all levels, and the work force at Westland—is a very great deal more than "apparently" committed. Those people have the greatest incentive of all because their jobs are on the line at Westland if they fail to get the production order. They are all well aware of that.

The experience and capability of the staff are evident. The incentive is there, and they have developed a well-thought-through philosophy for developing the overall system integration. If such an approach had been present with Nimrod, we might have seen something come out of that terrible waste of money.

Westland is getting on extremely well with its Italian counterparts, which it regards as fine engineers and Westland is learning to integrate the two differing national philosophies very well. Westland is aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence is taking a direct and concerned interest in ensuring that the country gets value for money from the project.

The announcement last week of the competition for an overall prime competitor for the initial batch of 25 to 50 EH101 ASW aircraft from two bidders gives Westland the opportunity to go all out and strain itself to get that order. It needs encouragement from the House now and not intrusive knocking. The country needs the project to succeed and the Royal Navy cannot afford not to have an advanced replacement for the Sea King on time to match the new frigates and the new aircraft will be around long after all of us have been forgotten. My constituents, the Royal Navy and the country as a whole need the new aircraft to succeed. The commitment is there, and I wish the company well.

6.37 pm

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the Minister and to my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes), who opened the debate for the Opposition, for not being present earlier. I was delayed for two hours by an engine failure.

I follow the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Boscawen) with great pleasure. He was right to say that too many people in this country misjudged the security situation in the 1930s. The hon. Gentleman is aware of the personal cost, and I venture to suggest that no one is better placed than I to say on behalf of hon. Members on both sides of the House that we salute his brave and very distinguished contribution.

We will have listened with great sympathy to the comments of the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome about Westland. We know how important it is that Westland comes through with the Merlin contract, succeeds in its joint venture with Agusta, and remains in business for the future security of this country.

I listened with great interest to the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell). You will recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that he did not confine his comments to the Royal Navy. How can one possibly do that in this debate? This must be one occasion on which you permit hon. Members to stray a little from the topic of the debate.

We need to consider the Navy in the context of the recent spectacular developments in eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union. How can we resist looking at the Navy in the longer term, and perhaps even at the other services in conjunction with the Navy, and at the overall defence and security picture without which any assessment of the Navy would be meaningless?

Atlantic communities on both sides of the ocean are engaged in an extraordinary intercontinental debate on what the historic changes that have taken place in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union imply not only for future East-West relations but for future West-West relations as well as for the Alliance force structure. As the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East reminded us, all our old assumptions about appropriate processes, modalities and frameworks for positive change in relations between our great nations have been abolished by the magnitude and sheer pace of change on the continent of Europe. Let there be no mistake. Those historic developments will have fundamental implications for western security, and especially for naval forces.

Political change has begun to challenge the assumptions on which the defence requirements of NATO and the Warsaw pact are based. It has had a dramatic impact on the arms control dialogue in that, probably for the first time in recent history, arms control is arguably behind the political dialogue—not leading or defining it, as we have become used to. That will render arms control in the 1990s much more functional, more technomilitary and less political.

Those who press for instant reductions in defence expenditure and radical changes in the armed forces assume that Europe will evolve into a collection of democratic states living peacefully together. Already there are signs in central and eastern Europe—where, incidentally, the origins of the last two world wars are to be found—as well as within the Soviet Union that the process is not likely to be straightforward. Therefore, it would be foolish to undermine NATO and the stability that the Alliance provides. Without that stability we shall have no security. After all, that is the objective that we all seek and which brings hon. Members together for this debate. We shall not get that stability until there is another security organisation to take the place of NATO. At present, the only possible forum in sight is the CSCE, the conference on security and co-operation in Europe, but that is surely a long way away.

Some important questions confront us. First, how do we sustain an orderly process of arms reductions when people on both sides, including some of those who marched in Moscow last night, as well as many on our own side—on the side of the West—think that arms are no longer necessary? Secondly, what do we do about the security system that has worked so well in Europe now that the threat is diminishing?

If the careful work of the negotiators in Vienna is not to be undermined by a rush of unilateral and unverifiable gestures by both sides, CFE must be given time. I have been fortunate in my role as president of the North Atlantic assembly. Hon. Members from both sides of the House, notably the hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith), have accompanied me when we have been invited to Vienna for every single round of the arms negotiations briefings. I could not be more impressed by both sides.

We have an excellent team, led by Ambassador Michael Edes. Only last December, he reminded us of the broad conceptual convergence that has been arrived at, which, after only 22 weeks, he claimed was unprecedented. However, of the five categories that both sides are studying —tanks, artillery, armed personnel carriers, aircraft and helicopters, all involving not only reductions but, as many people tend to overlook, definitions and verification—we have a broad measure of agreement on only the first category. There is no want of good will on either side. If anything, there is more cohesion and more push on the side of the Warsaw pact. That takes nothing away from our side.

It is important that the House should know what the Ambassador Istvan Gyarmati, who leads the Hungarian delegation, had to say to us in December. He insisted that the CFE talks had not been overtaken by events, that even

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if military alliances cease to exist, countries will still have military capabilities, and that the challenge of the CFE talks in Vienna is to construct a security system that will survive military alliances. It is in that climate that the teams representing both alliances are working purposefully and, despite limited progress, constructively.

There is no agreement about when the talks will conclude. Some think that it will be in the autumn of this year and some think that we may need to wait until next year. If we can get aircraft off the agenda we will get a great deal of agreement.

I repeat my plea. None of us must feel frustrated about what is going on in Vienna. We will give the CFE talks time. Above all, given the danger of recent announcements—I have in mind President Bush's state of the union speech and a further apparent plucking of numbers from somewhere—I hope that such announcements will not affect the negotiating strategy in Vienna and that the teams in Vienna will not allow themselves to be dictated to by political pressures.

With the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) and the hon. Member for Wealden, I was in Washington just eight or nine days ago. The three of us gave evidence to the Senate armed services committee, and he had a business meeting with the House of Representatives armed services committee. The deputy chairman of the House of Representatives committee said:

"No drastic cuts will take place in defence in this year, certainly at a level of not more than three per cent. The United States will not rush into thoughtless cuts."

Another leading member of that committee said:

"There should be no precipitant seeking of a peace dividend in Europe.

The United States still expected to keep substantial forces in Europe."

He went on to state:

"United States public opinion will not wish to keep adequate forces in Europe when they see their European allies seeking the peace dividend.

President Bush came up with another set of figures, from where I do not know. Certainly the pressure does not seem to come from Sam Nunn or the deputy chairman of the House of Representatives committee, Mr. Bennett, or his senior colleague, Mr. Bateman. Therefore, there is a need to be aware of the danger of a scramble for unilateral advantage that does not seem to be confined to Belgium or Holland. We must watch for political pressures even in unsuspected places. We understand the temptation to cash the peace dividend now.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important for the Soviet Union and other countries in eastern Europe that they can cash some peace dividends to get a considerable movement of their resources away from war effort into peaceful effort? If they are to do that, surely it is logical for many people in the United Kingdom and the United States also to expect a peace dividend.

Mr. Duffy: First, it is more important to sustain the stability of the present security system. Secondly, I hope that my hon. Friend, as someone who is conversant with good trade union procedures, will value good, honest negotiations. I went into detail about the value of the present Vienna negotiations. I share my hon. Friend's anxiety—as all hon. Members do—but let agreement come about on the surest possible basis. I was arguing against political pressures in, perhaps, unsuspected places. I understand the anxiety to cash in the peace dividend now. Even without a strategic review, it is apparent that there are serious implications, even at the moment, for reinforcement, especially sea reinforcement, and therefore for the future role of the Royal Navy.

About 75 per cent. of all Warsaw pact equipment is moved by rail, whereas 90 per cent. of NATO's equipment relies on sea transportation. If there is to be any unplugging of units—as SACEUR reminds us whenever he has the chance, and did so at the Royal United Services Institute in London last May—Soviet divisions could readily be replugged while American divisions that were withdrawn could only return to the United States, from where replugging would prove much more difficult.

Both the Army and the Royal Air Force must radically rethink their roles for the 1990s and adapt to a position in which their standing regular forces must be significantly reduced. The Navy should have less of a problem. Yet, instead of feeling free to raise new and urgent questions about the post-cold war Royal Navy—as the hon. Member for Fife, North-East did—we are still obliged to pursue time-worn questions about the numbers and readiness of the surface fleet, such as whether there is to be any improvement in the ordering pattern; whether type 23s will still lack a command system, as the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) reminded the House; when the Navy can expect to receive the Merlin, the anti-submarine version of the EH101; when the Minister expects the type 23s to be armed with that kit; why the Ministry has pulled out of the advanced sea mine collaboration project as well as the NFR90 programme; and what assessment the Ministry has made of the impact on the credibility of the United Kingdom as a consistent and reliable partner.

That question was discussed during the annual defence debate last October. Unfortunately, I could not be present on that occasion as I was out of the country on North Atlantic Assembly business. However, I read the report of the debate and I know what the Minister said in defence of the cancellation of the advanced sea mine collaboration project. The Minister for the Armed Forces is present today. One of his colleagues present during that debate raised the question of the credibility of the United Kingdom as a consistent and reliable partner in such collaborative projects. That question was raised again in Washington nine days ago in my presence and that of other hon. Members.

There should be a progress report on the mine counter-measures vessels programme. What is to be done about morale and retention? Given the present developments in central Europe, there will be a challenge to preserve the high quality and motivation of the services at a time when they must be increasingly asking why they are there and what is their future.

Developments in eastern Europe and the decline of the Soviet threat clearly point to a return of the Royal Navy's primacy. That must eventually mean a different sort of fleet. It means the return of a blue water fleet with real aircraft carriers, capable of shipping fixed-wing aircraft, as well as a new force of amphibious landing vessels, aviation support ships and the correct type of helicopters, as the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome said. In short, it is not just a new role for the Navy; we must think about a new sort of Navy. I cannot help but repeat my question on amphibious capability: when does the Ministry expect to

complete the feasibility study? When does it expect to place orders for aviation support ships to accompany the Intrepid and the Fearless or their replacements?

When the Government came to power in 1979—I am touching on retention and morale—they made great play of getting forces' pay right. I had to endure taunts in the early 1980s about that, but I knew that the Labour party had started the process. Lord Bramall has reminded the other place that it was Lord Mulley who started the process. I am glad to say that I was party to it. In that process we felt that we had to give much greater weight than we had hitherto to the X factor, which was meant to compensate for the exigencies of the life of the service man and to bring service men comparability plus. As the former Chief of the Defence Staff, Lord Bramall, said in the House of Lords debate on the Defence White Paper:

"The X factor . . . now means relatively nothing. Allowances have been whittled away in a number of areas. It has greatly decreased the incentive to serve and face the rigours of military life, such as living for up to three months under water in a nuclear submarine."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 13 July 1989; Vol. 510, c. 462.]

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. It is not the custom to quote from the record of the other place, except when quoting a Minister.

Mr. Duffy: I am obliged for your guidance on that matter, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman can paraphrase.

Mr. Duffy: All that is leading to premature voluntary release. Another influence on PVR is housing.

We must base our defence on the concrete rather than the intangible, in response to capabilities rather than intentions. The hon. Member for Sommerton and Frome posed many questions that need to be answered before we can undertake a conclusive defence review. Some of the answers will be made available to us in Vienna, where, as I have been very glad to assure the House, political change and military initiatives are in the process of being translated into coherent arms control treaties.

Whatever happens to NATO and the Warsaw pact under the impact of political change in eastern Europe, we have an overriding interest in maintaining both alliances as mechanisms for controlled, verifiable disarmament, both nuclear and conventional. In the CFE talks, NATO and the Warsaw pact possess the forum, as well as the machinery, to arrange a new compact of Europe that would meet the Soviet Union's legitimate concern for security, would find a basis for the continued presence of United States forces in western Europe, and would fix the strength of a reunified Germany at a level acceptance to all its neighbours. In my view, NATO has a significant role to play in the future. Whether the Warsaw treaty organisation can also play a useful role in bolstering stability depends largely on whether it can completely reorientate its historical legacy towards being a grouping of democratic nations. I hope very much that it will succeed.

For NATO, however, the real issue today is not whether the Alliance has a future but how its future should be defined. Details need to be filled in, but the alliance is on the right path—elaborating a political relationship with the countries of the Warsaw treaty organisation aimed at normalisation across a broad spectrum; strengthening Atlantic political co-operation; and exploring every avenue towards a just accommodation of the German question in which all parties will perceive an element of gain.

Writing in 1968, Henry Kissinger cautioned:

"turning NATO into an instrument of detente might reduce its security contribution without achieving a relaxation of tension."

Despite periods of severe testing, our Alliance has come through. The Harmel principles have prevailed, and the Alliance has withstood the test of time. A new and ambitious phase for NATO lies ahead.

7.2 pm

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): I shal seek to put the case for a defence review and a much-enhanced role for the reserve forces. In doing so, I follow the line of argument presented by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy). I detect in today's debate—in contributions from hon. Members on both sides, including the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell)—greatly widened consensus. Here I refer to the response of hon. Members to recent events and the role of our armed forces. Indeed, I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Attercliffe, a former Navy Minister who knows more than a little about out-of-area naval activities and their importance.

I do not believe that, in paying this tribute, I am being in any way incompatible with the Government's defence posture or ignoring the necessity, at least for the time being, to maintain a strong defence posture and not to change either our deployment or our strategy. But in the light of the momentous events in central and eastern Europe, and of the reductions in conventional force and personnel levels by both the Warsaw pact countries and the United States, we cannot pretend that nothing has happened and go into the next century with that posture.

Sooner or later, a review of some kind will be necessary, and I believe that the start of such a review should not be put off for long. It will take time, but, of course, any shift in our procurement policy or any change in the numbers or deployment of personnel in the armed forces necessarily takes a long time. We should not be fearful about embarking on such a review.

I say this as somebody who, like my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Boscawen), bears a distinguished naval name. I say it also as somebody who, in his maiden speech in the House, and in successive debates over the years, has argued for a strong defence posture and more real expenditure on our defences. In my support for strong, well-equipped and well-deployed forces, I defer to no hon. Member. I still believe in, and will maintain my firm support for, our nuclear capability and the minimal level that we have, and must retain, in terms of a nuclear shield.

That, of course, may be a more contentious subject. But next year we will spend more than £21 billion on defence, and will have nearly a third of a million armed service men, and we cannot afford to look upon the momentous events that have taken place—the freedom revolution that has swept through Europe to the Urals, and possibly beyond—without beginning to respond to them. Some of the talk about turning tanks into tractors has been derided. There is a danger that some past postures, some of our strategies and policies, may box us in and make us less willing to

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regard this process of change as an exciting opportunity for all our peoples and as an opportunity to reorientate our defences for a new century and for a new task.

There are two lessons to be drawn from our recent experience. The first is that political initiative succeeds where, very often, arms dialogue fails. If we look at what Mr. Gorbachev has proposed and has brought about already and at what President Bush has announced, we see what executive political decisions can achieve in a short time and, sadly, how little many of the worthy arms dialogues over a long period have achieved. The INF treaty may be an exception, but even that was instigated partly by the political decision to deploy cruise missiles in Europe.

The second lesson that I draw from recent events is that partitions, so easily set up in history to buy peace for a time, to resolve disputes and stop bloodshed, inevitably and invariably crumble. When we look at Vietnam or Korea or Germany or elsewhere, we see that partitions remain a source not just of obvious division but of antagonism, and a wound that continues to weep over the years. I believe that, for the future, we should use the opportunity of the crumbling wall to try to reorientate the defence policies of western Europe, and not look at the situation purely from a nationalist point of view.

Any assessment of threat must take into account not only the equipment and the manpower of a possible enemy, but the credibility element: whether a potential enemy is prepared to use that capability. We must all agree that, while, for the time being, events in central and eastern Europe are uncertain, there is very little doubt that there is no political backing for any great military adventurism by the Warsaw pact.

I venture to suggest that, even if there were political consensus for such a move, there are no political mechanisms that could support it. Indeed, the command structure of the Warsaw pact must be exceedingly tenuous at the present time. I do not believe that our defence policy should be orientated in a fixed manner—as were the guns of Singapore, by being pointed in one direction—when, in the event, the threat comes from a quite different direction.

Peace has broken out in central and eastern Europe, and, happily, peace appears to be breaking out in other parts of the world, such as the Gulf. There are encouraging signs in South Africa and there is a new dialogue with Argentina. We should not let those events lull us into hasty decisions about a reduction in conventional or nuclear forces unilaterally or in NATO. However, we cannot ignore them when making expensive procurement decisions at the taxpayer's expense in the next year and two years. Some of those decisions have been referred to during the debate—we cannot look back, but must look forward.

That may be a truism, but—to give one example—whither the role of battlefield tanks in the next couple of decades? They are enormously expensive and the decision will be highly political. Such major decisions will affect the ordnance factories and have employment implications, but, as the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East said, there is nothing intrinsically good about defence expenditure or defence capability. We must consider the necessity for that and whether we need it to deter aggression and secure freedom and liberty.

The future threat to be assessed should not only be on the central front. It has inevitable implications for our commitment to the northern and southern NATO flanks. A major part of our commitment, apart from the maritime commitment, has been to northern Norway, essentially an airfield-denial strategy of rapid reinforcement and specialist capability in the Arctic area to deny a major cross-country push from the Kola peninsula. We have had an important naval commitment to guard and patrol the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom gap, and to provide the air support that goes with it.

However, the position is changing. It is almost inevitable, not just because President Gorbachev has announced it, but because of economic and political pressures, that the Soviet naval and maritime fleet will have to be reduced. He has a people to feed. Whether he has a wider democracy or maintains the pre-eminence of the Communist party in that country, he must find the money to feed a hungry people, whose aspirations have been raised by rapid political change. It will be exceedingly difficult, and even more so as the country becomes democratised, for him to justify the diversion of funds on a massive scale towards the new generation of surface and submarine weaponry which was so ordered in the defence programme of the Brezhnev years.

For the future, we should look to different priorities, not the central, northern and southern European flanks. First, we should look primarily to defence of the United Kingdom home base. Secondly, we must play our part, in NATO for the time being, in the move towards common European security. Like others who have spoken in the debate, I believe that we must orientate our defences much more towards the protection of our training routes and to areas where we may perceive a need for political intervention either individually or in conjunction with other states. We must also ensure the continued defence of our dependencies.

Therefore, there is a case for a defence review in the future. I have no divine wisdom on this issue, but a professional view together with the judgment of our Select Committees, should determine our future strategy. There is a case for a rapid reinforcement capability and recreating what we destroyed in 1976—Transport Command. There is a case for buying some of those transport aircraft which the Americans are disposing of as they take their troops back to the United States. There is a case for bringing our war stocks—which have been up front and have been increased—back into the United Kingdom. Those are specific, important decisions which we should begin to look at; we should not carry on as if nothing had happened.

There should be nothing sacrosanct about the level of ship commitments. I understand the sensitivity of that subject and the importance that many of my constituents in Chichester attach to it. Many of them have strong naval backgrounds. However, the nature of the threat has changed and the needs of the future will be quite different.

For these reasons there is a case for considering whether our reserve forces should begin to play a much more enhanced role in our defence strategy. I pay tribute, and I am sure that the House will join me in doing so, to the outstanding commitment of our reserve forces over the years. If at some stage there is a case for cutting the regulars, in the way that the United States, the Soviet Union, Warsaw pact and other countries are doing, there will then be a strong case for building up the reserves.

The 1989 defence White Paper, which follows a creditable tradition every year of improving accountability to Parliament and which spells out our defence posture, reads slightly like an historical document barely a year on from when it was published. It recognised that the

"Reserves are an integral part of the forces"

and

"would play a vital part in defending the European Mainland and the UK".

The Royal Navy, in particular, has an outstanding record on this. The Royal Navy Reserve, which provides mine counter-measures protection, logistical supply and medical services, has played an outstanding role over the years. The Royal Marines Reserve, which defends NATO's northern flank and United Kingdom base, has done similar excellent work. The Royal Naval Auxiliary Reserve, which defends British ports and anchorages, is an essential back-up and support in times of heightened threat.

Even in a debate about the Royal Navy, no mention of the reserves can exclude mention of reserves for the Army and the Royal Air Force. The Territorial Army, including the Home Service Force, make up more than half the infantry of the British Army on the Rhine and are an integral and essential part in our reinforcement capability, our operational posture and our deterrent over the years. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates), with the considerable knowledge that he has built up through his services to the Select Committee and in other ways, would agree with that. The professionalism and personal dedication that our Territorial Army soldiers have shown in giving up their spare time and the tolerance that their employers have shown in giving them the time to play their part in the defence of this country and our contribution to NATO deserve great recognition and repetition in the House.

The Royal Auxiliary Air Force and the RAF Reserve provide indispensable personnel to airfield defence, intelligence and communications. In all those regards, I welcome and pay tribute to what the Government have done in improving both the pay of reservists compared to regulars and training bounty payments. That has been an essential means of retaining and attracting skilled people into the reserve forces. In future, in terms of protecting our United Kingdom base and sea routes and maintaining our NATO commitments, an enhanced role for reservists is absolutely essential.

This is an important debate, because it gives us an opportunity to let the Government know what we think about defence expenditure while the next White Paper is being drafted, the Chancellor is drawing up his Budget and at an early stage before the next round of discussions about public expenditure next year. There is no doubt that changes will be included in the defence estimates or the Autumn Statement, which respond to these momentous events worldwide. If the House lags behind international changes and what the Government say we must put up with, we shall not be playing our role in ensuring that the taxpayer's money is well spent and the enormous resources of public expenditure are used to the best advantage.

We should be beginning to think—even if we do not insist upon it now—about the new needs and the new generation. In doing so, the House and, in particular, the Select Committee, will be playing a major and positive role —of which the House will be proud in the next century —in ensuring that peace, democracy, freedom and the role of our defence forces, in a different way, continue to thrive.

7.19 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson). I admire him for stating that we should have a major defence review. There is a series of arguments in favour of that and I support him in his demand for such a review from his perspective.

I apologise to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement for not being present for the first quarter of an hour of his speech. My researcher made me a note of what he said. I was not here because I was in my constituency attending a meeting at lunchtime, which was fixed up by the Church leaders in Brinnington. It was a meeting of health workers, social workers, doctors, teachers, housing officers and community officers to discuss the problems of Brinnington. It is important to contrast that activity with this debate on defence. The two are linked. We are discussing defending the people of Brinnington.

I ask whether there should be a transfer of resources from the defence of the realm to the defence of the people of Brinnington. Brinnington is a substantial part of my constituency. It is surrounded by countryside and has some attractive housing, but it also contains some high-rise flats and some council properties that have been neglected. In the area, there are pockets of people who are suffering great deprivation. They need money to be spent on their housing and education, on care of the elderly and on relief of poverty. Those people deserve part of the peace dividend.

People in Brinnington are no longer convinced that there is any chance of the Russians invading this country or, indeed, of anyone else invading. They are worried about different problems. They are worried about law and order in Stockport, poverty, the lack of resources in schools and in the Health Service, and care of the elderly. When they look beyond Stockport, they look to Third-world poverty and wish that people there enjoyed the peace dividend. They are not enthusiastic about continuing to spend more money on a defence system that they perceive as increasingly out of touch with reality.

The people of Brinnington fear, not only that they will not enjoy the benefits of the peace dividend, as they have not enjoyed the revenues from North sea oil, but that reductions in defence expenditure will result in a disadvantage for them. They fear that someone else will enjoy the peace dividend and that they will see the other side of the coin. They will suffer unemployment as a result of a loss of jobs in the defence industry. That is a real fear for the people of Brinnington.

Over the past few months, I have tabled questions to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. I did so on 11 November and 12 January and I have another tabled for next Wednesday. I have been disappointed at the Government's unwillingness to consider the implications of a rundown of world armament industries. We must start to look for alternative jobs for people in those industries. The Government's failure to take that into account in reviews of defence spending is appalling.

I am lucky that in my constituency—although I have one defence contractor, Fairey, close to it—other firms

[Mr. Andrew F. Bennett]

which make considerable contributions to Ministry of Defence projects are involved mainly in civil work and in some military work. It will not be too difficult to expand their civil work. Many companies in Britain are completely dependent on defence contracts.

It is important that we begin to develop contingency plans at an early stage to take into account arms agreements and a reduction in regional tensions and to seek alternative products. Our defence industries employ 500,000 people. Last year, they brought into Britain over £1 billion in foreign exchange. We must plan to find jobs for those people. We must not only endeavour to produce a peace dividend to be used for other needs, but we must seek alternative jobs.

It is increasingly difficult to justify the House debating the Navy separately. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy) said, we must consider all Ministry of Defence activities. We must seek a rational way of discussing them together, rather than separating them out into Army, Navy and Air Force, as we have done for about a hundred years. I question whether the three services need to be separated at all. I understand all the nostalgic arguments for three separate services in the past, but now it does not fit into logic.

Why do we need a defence review? There are three different strategies. No doubt people could put forward more. It is argued that we must not cut defence expenditure and that it is too soon to do so. The hon. Member for Chichester put that argument strongly. Even if we do not get rid of a nuclear deterrent we must still examine the changing pattern of strategy. I agree with him that it is crazy to consider ordering new tanks.

There is no point in having tanks unless the Government have somewhere where they can train people to use them. It is inconceivable that during the next five or six years the West Germans will allow the level of tank manoeuvres that has taken place there to continue. The West Germans will not put up with it. Perhaps the Ministry of Defence can find places in Britain for tank manoeuvres, but I am sceptical that people will put up with such levels of training manoeuvres in the British Isles. Perhaps the Ministry can use the Falklands or somewhere else, but the Government have a major problem in finding places where tanks can be manoeuvred. The Government must weigh up whether it would be better to use helicopters to fulfil the role of tanks. That is one of the fundamental issues that must be reviewed.

The Government must make sure that their commitment to expenditure on Trident does not leave them insufficient funds to spend on small ships. They must weigh up whether our way of life is under threat more from being undermined by the rapid surge of drugs into our inner-city areas than from anything else, and whether we have the boats and equipment to stop people bringing drugs into Britain.

The Government must seriously consider the problem of recruitment. As yet, the Government have not addressed the question of whether the defence budget could be altered to make better use of the numbers of people available. They must also realise that in this changing world where people see less threat from eastern Europe or elsewhere, it will not be as easy to recruit people into the armed forces. For the past 15 or 20 years, people have been convinced that they can have a long career in the armed forces. It will be much harder to convince a 16-year-old that if he goes into the armed forces he will have a job for the next 20 years. Young people perceive that there is a good chance that at some point the armed forces will be cut.

One can argue for a review, even if it is accepted that Government defence expenditure should be kept at the present level and the nuclear deterrent maintained. Whether arms negotiations progress quickly or slowly, they will bring about a substantial cut in armaments. That is another argument for a review. A review should not deal with only one scenario. It must take into account alternative scenarios. The arms negotiations may not bring success, and levels of armaments may remain the same.

We must plan for the future, because we all know the time that is involved between placing contracts and having them carried out. There is a possibility that the arms talks will be very successful and that we shall get rapid change. I hope that they are successful. It is high time that the Ministry of Defence took all those possibilities into account in a proper review.

The credibility of the Government's idea of a 50-ship Navy is now disappearing, because I do not think that the Government will be able to find the money to continue placing the orders. We are then faced with the question of what will happen to the people who work in naval shipyards. The Government ought to look quickly to try to find alternative work on civil ships. It is worrying that in all past conflicts the Navy has relied on the merchant fleet. However, we know that there is virtually no merchant fleet left and it seems logical to look for ways in which we can protect it by placing new orders and ensuring that we still have the capacity to build merchant ships and, if necessary, warships.

In the debate on the defence estimates I asked about Fylingdales. I said that the Soviet Union had announced, more or less unilaterally, that its early warning station at Krasnoyarsk was to be dismantled and that it had raised the matter of Fylingdales. Has there been any further discussion about that?

There have been exchanges in the debate about nuclear-powered submarines and their future. That raises questions about Britain's reliance on Trident because I understand that those submarines are important in protecting the Atlantic so that Trident can be hidden. In an intervention my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) asked whether Russian advances in working in space mean that it will be much more difficult to hide Trident. Is Trident now vulnerable to cuts in United States expenditure? I have raised that with the Minister several times and he says no, but I have the feeling that in the next year there will be a substantial argument in the United States about the budget.

My hon. Friend the Member for Attercliffe seemed absolutely certain that the United States armed forces committees were firmly committed to defending the programme. My information is that many people in the United States and in Congress are demanding a peace dividend. When negotiations start on that, we shall see whether Trident will be at risk. The Minister says that he is confident that the teething problems of the missile system have been overcome. That must go into the defence review to find out whether we should now be relying on such a system.

We have questions about the extremely low-frequency transmitter that the Government are committed to building on an experimental basis at Glen Garry forest. Given the tremendous changes that have taken place in eastern Europe, would it not be better to delay expenditure on that programme for another couple of years, to see whether it is necessary, before we start to tear up another bit of our countryside for defence installations?

Our first demand is that the Government set in train a defence review. It should not be tied to any certainties, but should weigh up the options and come up with proposals that take into account little change in terms of how much we spend; arms negotiations that are moderately successful; or very successful. We should look at how we can transfer resources from the peace dividend to peaceful expenditure, and we must consider the job implications that will flow from that.

We must look seriously at arms conversion. The Government are in grave danger of ignoring the real defence needs of the British people by insisting that we can go on as if nothing has happened in eastern Europe. A great deal of change has taken place there and we should try to prevent future conflicts by means of a realistic defence policy rather than trying to go on preparing for the sort of wars that happened in the past—or those that did not happen. That is looking to the past and not to the future.

7.34 pm

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) spoke repeatedly about the peace dividend. He must choose his words with great care because it is wrong to assume that there will be great benefits so early from a peace which, although it can be seen, has not yet revealed its real substance. He also spoke about the need to find alternative employment for those who find themselves out of a job in the defence industry. I recall the savage cuts by a Labour Government, but I cannot recall any provision being made for the employment of people who lost their jobs as a result.

This is a timely debate in which to reappraise the role, size and purpose of our defence forces. I had hoped that the speech by the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) would enlighten us about how the Labour party saw the future of the Royal Navy, but I was hugely disappointed. I was left with questions and very few answers.

One of the questions that came to my mind as a result of what the hon. Gentleman said was whether a Labour Government would maintain aircraft carriers in the Royal Navy. What would be the size of the Royal Navy if a Labour Government came to power? I suspect from what the hon. Gentleman said that it would be a small Navy designed for shore protection. We shall read his speech most carefully in *Hansard*. We want to know the policy of the Labour party.

Mr. O'Neill: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could enlighten us about his conclusions on the Government's intentions on the size of the Navy in respect of their performance and ordering record for surface ships. What are the Government's intentions? This may be the first speech that the hon. Gentleman has made in a Navy debate. Those of us who are fairly regular attenders have year after year heard questions from Back Benchers about the intention of the Government over Fearless and Intrepid and on the aviation support ships. The Government have the information and the power, but they have done nothing to satisfy the House. The hon. Gentleman should not ask the Opposition. He should ask the Government, because for the next two years they have the power to make the decisions which, no doubt, will satisfy the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Banks: My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement gave the commitment that we were seeking to maintain a 50-ship Navy. That is as clear as a bell. I have attended many debates on the Navy and have spoken in them. We have consistently supported the concept of a 50-ship Navy.

Mr. Alan Clark: It is 300 ships and 50 frigates.

Mr. Banks: Frigates and destroyers; it is a fighting-ship number.

The changes in the Soviet empire have probably been more speedy and momentous than the demise of any great power structure in history. That is a victory for political ideals, and the proven value of democratic government. Above all, it is a victory for the strength of the armed forces of NATO and the political and economic example of the West. The years of misery and oppression by Communist regimes have been lifted from eastern European countries and from the Soviet Union itself, which is about to go through a momentous change. The only certainty is that we do not know what the future holds. It is therefore right to reappraise our defence role and that of NATO—and that must be undertaken not in haste but balanced by the scaling down of Soviet and Warsaw pact forces. My advice is that we should be "steady as we go".

NATO must work together and stay together. The process of holding, checking and preventing a Soviet invasion of Europe may be less thinkable now, but the Soviet navy remains unaltered in terms of its size and power. I welcome the cuts made in conventional and nuclear forces through patient negotiations. The navies of the world possess about 16,000 nuclear weapons, of which 9,500 are intercontinental ballistic missile warheads. Ninety per cent. of those weapons are deployed in American and Soviet units, and fewer than 1,000 of them in the British, French and Chinese maritime forces, so there is scope for a reduction in the number of nuclear weapons. The scaling down of the naval forces themselves is extremely difficult to accomplish because of the different roles of those navies. That point has already emerged in today's debate, in connection with the Royal Navy's influences and responsibilities worldwide.

Trident spearheads Britain's defence, and it must be maintained. I congratulate the Government on the savings that they have achieved in the construction programme and on the programme's timing being on course.

The Royal Navy's shape and purpose should be the subject of a long and searching debate. For as long as there are sizeable navies patrolling the seas, Britain must maintain her sea strength and maritime capability. Our interests span the world and the maintenance of order, prevention of disruption to merchant shipping and ability of our naval forces to land troops and to supply our forces in trouble spots, wherever they may be, are the purposes for which the Royal Navy has always been ready—and for which it must be maintained.

[Mr. Banks]

Our forces must be flexible. The reduction in army personnel is inevitable, given the new situation in Germany. To maintain flexibility, the Royal Marines should be strengthened. They currently number 7,700, which, by our standards, is a small force. Army units need to be transformed into a different type of fighting force. By strengthening the Royal Marines, we shall be able to maintain the flexibility that is necessary quickly to deploy fast-acting forces in different parts of the world.

The age of the tank and of the tank battle is nearly at an end, and we must examine carefully their role in today's Army. Air platforms and amphibious forces are vital to the concept of a mobile, combative and flexible force. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces will reach a decision soon on the futures of HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid, and that they will be replaced by new ships.

I welcome the aviation support ship because air power is enormously important in a combative scenario. Support for the Royal Navy from the merchant shipping fleet is as important as maintaining our RFAs. The tonnage of British merchant ships has steadily declined, and it will be further depleted in 1997 when Hong Kong-registered ships are no longer available. For both commercial and defence reasons, fiscal measures are needed to stimulate investment and to increase ship numbers in the industry. After all, the merchant fleet produces £2 billion in foreign exchange every year, in addition to the revenue from insurances that it brings to the City.

Our objective must be a highly skilled and mobile combat force and the means to back it up, with the force of RFAs and the use of merchant shipping at times of necessity. The three services must work more closely together if the concept of worldwide deployment is to be achieved in their strategic planning. NATO must address the question of its role and territory of operations, and whether now is the time for it to assume a role that takes it farther afield. No United States marines are currently stationed in NATO areas in Europe.

In peacetime, the Royal Navy must give priority to advancing the technology of its weapons and operations. Wars are prevented, or won, not just by numbers but by having the edge over the weapons possessed by others. That means having improved engine technology for our ships, submarine design and detection, weapon range and accuracy, flying operations, and technically based, more accurate methods of minesweeping. Those are all areas for advance research.

NATO can and will adapt itself to changing times, but we must not lessen our efforts to co-operate in research and development. We have the prospect of a period of lasting peace. Let us not leave the door open for an intruder or troublemaker to test our resolve to keep the peace.

7.45 pm

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): Like almost every other right hon. and hon. Member who has spoken tonight, I believe that the extraordinary changes in the Soviet Union and in eastern Europe over the past few months have profound implications for the future of our defence. What was so threatening about the Soviet Union over the past 40 years was not its sheer military might but the offensive nature of its full structure on the continent of Europe. So much of Russia's armour and military capability was in a forward situation, which enabled it always to be capable of launching a sudden and devastating attack on western Europe.

Clearly, the CFE process has begun to reduce that risk. The Soviet Union has already accepted the principle of reducing the number of Warsaw pact tanks by two thirds, from 60,000 to 20,000, and its armoured troop carriers from 70,000 to 16,000. Cuts of that kind, together with the reductions currently being negotiated in artillery, will substantially reduce the offensive character of the Soviet forces deployed on the European continent.

We have seen also unilateral cuts made by the Soviet Union, such as the withdrawal of specialist bridging units, which underlines Russia's apparent willingness to relinquish its ability to launch a sudden and devastating attack. No serious analyst currently argues that there is any risk of a surprise strike being launched in Europe. That view is reinforced by changes in the Warsaw pact nations.

It is not just that the previous satellite countries are reducing their forces, or that they are no longer concentrating them on their western frontiers. It is not even that they are taking steps to secure the removal of Soviet forces. The most important aspect is the political change that has occurred and the collapse of the Communist regimes. The prospect of free elections also strongly suggests—I put it no higher than that—that we shall soon see elected positive, non-Communist Governments in almost every one of the nations concerned. No doubt they will seek good relations with the Soviet Union, but they are not likely to be pliant, vassal states of the kind that we have seen for the past 40 years.

Because those new states will have serious economic problems, they will look to the West for solutions, which again makes it unlikely that they will serve as any kind of springboard for a Soviet attack on western Europe. The opposite is true. In future, they will present an obstacle to any such Soviet adventurism.

As other hon. Members have said, the situation in the Soviet Union is changing in no less dramatic a way. The Soviet Union is no longer a monolithic super-power. It is riven with economic, ethnic and nationalist problems. If the Soviet leadership wants to meet the aspirations of its people, aspirations that we see expressed on our television screens almost every night, it cannot continue to pour resources into arms at the level that we have seen during the past 40 years.

The basis of the deal that is emerging between East and West is that the Soviet Union desperately needs economic expertise and technological know-how from the West; in exchange, it can offer stability and security—the removal of the threat under which we have lived since the end of the second world war. That basic and fundamental ideal gives us hope for the future.

However, nothing is certain in this life, and there are obviously risks in the current position. Perhaps the most worrying risk is not the possibility of a return to the old hard-line, concrete-faced Stalinist rulers in the Soviet Union, but, as the empire breaks up, the greater risk of chaos, civil war, ethnic and religious conflicts in the Soviet Union and in parts of eastern Europe. There is always a risk that such untidy and unpleasant situations could spill over into neighbouring areas, particularly in the southern flank of NATO.

I agree with hon. Members who have said that the forces that we need to deal with a new situation are different from those needed to deal with the threat with which we have lived since the end of the second world war —a major pitched confrontation on the continent of Europe. In future, we may need smaller, well-trained, well-equipped, more flexible and more mobile forces than we have at present. That implies that we need to reassess the threat and our future defence needs. As we can see, our NATO allies are going down that track: some of them seem to be stampeding down it.

There will be cuts in United States forces deployed in the continent of Europe. In many ways that strengthens the case for Britain to have effective naval forces. Europe is likely to be more dependent on North America for sudden reinforcement in the event of an unexpected crisis. NATO needs to review the size, shape and character of its naval forces.

I would be strongly opposed to early steps to extend the disarmament process into the maritime area, and not just because of the complexity of the issue. We have quite enough to do at the moment in dealing with the complex negotiations on land forces and aircraft without adding something as mobile as naval forces.

When we begin to negotiate about naval forces in the future, I hope that we will remember that the sea lanes across the Atlantic are as vital to us as roads and rail links across Europe are to the Soviet Union. Any deals that we do on reductions in naval forces will have to bear in mind the basic vulnerability of NATO's position. There may be a case for considering naval confidence-building measures, and perhaps for exchanging technical information, or alerting each side to plans for maneouvres and exercises, but that is a long way from the sort of naval disarmament that is being peddled in some quarters.

The coming changes, and those that are already taking place, seem to underline the need for the sort of burden-sharing and specialisation within NATO that we have talked about frequently for years but of which we have achieved little. If we get the sort of CFE deal that seems likely, and we seek to share out various ceilings in equipment and forces across the European part of NATO, there is a risk that we shall end up with ineffective defence systems.

It seems to me that CFE ceilings and the well-established prospect of reductions in American forces in Europe will force the European NATO nations to embrace the concept of sharing out who does what at long last. We cannot have every European member of NATO trying to do everything in defence right across the waterfront. I strongly endorse the idea put forward by a number of hon. Members and people outside the House that it is logical for the continental nations of Europe to concentrate more on land defence, leaving Britain to develop its maritime role. Historically we have done that, and it is in our best interests. It would improve the mobility of our armed forces and give us the ability to deal with out-of-area problems which we may well have to face in the future.

I shall mention briefly the concept of forward defence, which featured in the earlier part of our debate. I have no difficulty with the basic concept of forward defence in the naval sphere. If we could guarantee to bottle up the Soviet navy, and the submarine forces in particular, north of the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom gap, that might be sensible and the best way to protect NATO convoys across the north Atlantic.

However, I have three basic worries about the practical application of that sort of concept. We would have to deploy those forces forward well before hostilities started —if they ever broke out. Therefore, we would have to deploy them at a time of tension, and their deployment would be obvious to the Soviets. At a time of tension, our forward deployed naval forces could no nothing to stop the Soviets moving out of their North sea bases. All that we could do is watch them sail past into the calmer waters of the Atlantic. Also, in my view merely deploying forces forward at a time of tension could risk strongly aggravating the situation, and make matters worse.

When resources are scarce, as we know naval resources are, using them to shut the stable door after the horse has bolted is not the best use. Therefore, in view of the changing situation, forward maritime defence strategies must be reconsidered.

We all welcome the prospect of a 50 per cent. cut in strategic nuclear systems deployed by the US and the Soviet Union. It has been talked about for so long, that it will be something of an anti-climax when it occurs, but it will be welcome none the less. We should not under-estimate the fact that it will leave the Soviet Union with a massive strategic arsenal, a good deal of which will be targeted on western Europe.

While nuclear weapons remain, there is always the risk of a nuclear attack on Britain. Therefore, I see no reason to alter my view, despite the changing international climate, that, while the Soviet Union retains nuclear weapons, it is crude common sense for Britain and France to keep a minimum effective nuclear ability, something that will provide a degree of security to Europe, and will guarantee against any possibility that the United States may not deliver on its nuclear guarantee to NATO powers.

It is well known that Trident was not my first choice for a strategic nuclear system in Britain, but that argument ended a long time ago. I think that Trident now has a lot to commend it as a powerful, accurate and flexible system. It is perfectly possible for us to tailor the number of warheads to suit changing circumstances, and in that sense it can be described as an effective minimum nuclear deterrent.

I am glad to see that the trials of the Trident missile have turned out to be more successful than some pessimists thought in the early stages. Perhaps inevitably, those who gleefully seized on the two unsuccessful sea launch trials have been quieter about subsequent successes. I am glad to see that the missile is doing no worse than any predecessor missile did at a similar stage in its trials.

I believe that the major threat to the British Trident missile system comes from problems with warhead production at the atomic weapons establishment at Aldermaston, rather than problems with the missile. The Defence Committee has drawn attention on a number of occasions to the problems of recruitment and retention of the scarce and vital labour needed to produce those warheads. I shall watch with interest to see how the Government's contractorisation programme will tackle the problem—although I remain somewhat sceptical about the possibility that labour can be produced out of thin air at a time when it is so scarce, and can then be

[Mr. John Cartwright]

persuaded to stay on, without the improvements in pay and conditions that were possible without the introduction of contractors.

I do not want Britain to make any unilateral defence cuts: I do not want us to spend the peace dividend before the cheque arrives at the bank. I do not believe, however, that we can stick our heads in the sand and argue that the world has not changed dramatically over the past 12 months. We should be working with our NATO allies to assess the implications of those changes; we must seek to reshape our armed forces to meet the needs of the future, rather than leaving them stuck in the concrete of the past. That, I feel, is the sensible, prudent course, and the sooner we embark on the process the better.

8 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): I listened with keen interest to the speech by the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright); it was one of several fine speeches in this very relevant debate.

My constituency, which contains six major naval establishments and a large housing estate, must be home to about half the members of the shore-based Navy. Nine years ago the Government conducted a major review of defence commitments, as a result of which they decided that the three main priorities should be the defence of the home base, the nuclear deterrent and the British Army of the Rhine. Over the past 10 years, the Army has remained at a strength of about 156,000, while the strength of the Royal Air Force has increased from about 86,000 to 94,000. The strength of the Royal Navy—which was excluded from that list of top priorities—has now been reduced from about 65,000 men to 57,000, and the purpose of my speech is to ask for the reduction to be arrested.

As many hon. Members have pointed out, the political background has changed profoundly since 1981. Socialism and centralism have proved economically and morally bankrupt throughout eastern Europe; an attempt has been made—and thwarted—to secure better dialogue and more democratisation in China; there has even been an attempt to open up dialogue in South Africa. I am sure that everyone marvels at the courage of those who have led the changes, and we wish them well, but it must be added that the future is potentially dangerous.

What are the defence implications of the political changes? Some nations have sought to respond to them quickly: the United States has already announced its intention of cutting defence expenditure by some 2·6 per cent. It is goodbye to the USS New Jersey, the USS Iowa and others, and the 600-ship navy concept—essentially a part of Reagan's presidency—has gone; we shall see a 546-ship navy in 1991. Holland and Belgium, too, have expressed the wish to cut the number of troops deployed elsewhere in Europe.

Before making our own decisions, we need to consider the military reality behind the political headlines. According to various intelligence reports, and comments by its generals, the Soviet Army appears to support and indeed embrace perestroika, but perestroika—which means "restructuring"—does not simply mean restructuring away from military hardware; it means a restructuring within the military establishment as well. To many Russian generals, perestroika means that they will have a chance to increase their emphasis on technology and high-quality products, which will enable the Soviet army to narrow the West's technological lead in military equipment.

There has been much talk of the conversion of the Russian arms industry to civil production, but without verification it would be unwise for us to rely on that. Similarly, there are indications—mentioned by Labour Members—of a change of strategy by the Russian navy. In recent years there have been fewer "high seas" deployments and a greater concentration on the Soviet "bastion" concept—defending the bases in the sea of Okhotsk, and the strategic submarine ballistic nuclear operations. So far, however, evidence of any Russian naval reduction is thin, and in any event such a reduction would pose major problems of verification. As has been pointed out, cruise missiles in particular can carry either conventional or nuclear warheads, which makes it difficult to verify which type is being carried unless there are people on the missile carriers.

How much reliance can we and should we place on the fact that political changes have reduced the military threat to us? My answer is that we must face uncertainty and instability, and that this is not a time to lower our guard. The likelihood of a planned Russian tank invasion through Europe—backed with the willing support of the armies and population of the Warsaw pact countries—must be less than it was, but the risk of civil dissension within the eastern bloc, provoking military action and a war that will spread, could be greater now than before.

Some hon. Members have talked rather loosely about the peace dividend. It would be a serious mistake to imagine that the changes in eastern and central Europe are a cause for unalloyed joy among the populations of those areas. There must be losers as well as gainers; for every person dancing in the street there must be someone contemplating the loss of a privileged existence—the loss of a house, a car, a privileged education for the children or the opportunity to travel. There must be immense stresses and strains in eastern and central Europe, and talk of spending a peace dividend seems to me seriously premature.

We should take note of the changing nature of the threat. The more that the forces facing each other in Europe are reduced, the greater will be the need for flexibility and improved lines of reinforcement. The more that we reduce the British Army of the Rhine and the allied tactical air force—I for one believe that, in due course, by agreement and with proper verification procedures, that will be possible—the more we shall need to keep open the routes for rapid support. Hon. Members have already compared NATO's supply routes with those of the Warsaw pact countries. Those countries rely 75 per cent. on rail communication for their reinforcements and only 25 per cent. on road and Baltic sea and Black sea ferries. NATO, however, moves 90 per cent. of its reinforcement equipment by sea.

Land wars and sea wars require different balances of troops. It has been accepted for years, perhaps centuries, that an aggressor on land needs an advantage of about 3:1 against the defender, whereas at sea the position is reversed: the aggressor has the advantage, because he has the opportunity of secrecy and surprise. It would be entirely wrong for us to contemplate reducing our sea

forces now. SACEUR—the Supreme Allied Commander Europe—has estimated that NATO could last only about 10 days without sea reinforcements.

The Royal Navy of today is leaner and more efficient than ever. It is well equipped—and I am grateful to the Royal Navy and, indeed, to ship manufacturers and builders, for giving me the opportunity to visit ships at sea and to watch the construction of every class of naval ship in the building yards. It is superbly manned; the concentration of training and personnel in the south of England—and particularly in my constituency—is, I think, now recognised as the most efficient way to run the Royal Navy, although 10 or 15 years ago their removal to the north was being contemplated. It also gives a social advantage to the men and their families.

We cannot, however, ignore the fact that concentration on the other services at the expense of the Royal Navy leads to some stretches and strains, due to concentration on the three main commitments. The commitment to an escort fleet of about 50 destroyers and frigates may still be about met, but I am concerned that there may not be sufficient personnel to man them. The Royal Navy has already been run down from 65,000 to 57,000 personnel and there has been a commitment to reduce it still further.

I do not know whether further slimming down will harm the efficiency and effectiveness of the Royal Navy, but I fear that it may. Similarly, urgent action needs to be taken to upgrade the armed forces' amphibious capacity, with replacements for HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid. I am also concerned that over one third of the royal fleet auxiliary's fleet tankers and replenishment ships are more than 20 years old. Replacements need to be ordered soon.

Like others, I am disturbed by the lack of a command and control system in the type 23 frigates. We are all concerned about the delay over the supply of a good airborne early warning system. I look forward to the arrival of AWACS in 1992.

There are two other areas of specialisation about which I am concerned. The first is the naval medical service, whose skill and courage has been proved time and again, but never more memorably than in the Falklands. The royal naval hospital at Haslar is highly regarded, but budgetary and nursing problems have occasionally caused difficulty. The medical service is an essential and integrated part of the Royal Navy and deserves steady support. Similarly, may I say a discreet word in support of naval intelligence. There has never been a greater need for us to distinguish between reports of political progress on the one hand and military reality on the other.

Finally, I refer to personnel issues. The Royal Navy is tough on some things. For instance, it does not tolerate lateness when a ship is due to sail. However, it is a caring employer. Pay is good and the Royal Navy takes considerable care to help and to understand any problems that may arise while men are in its service. The Royal Navy, however, as with the other services, is naturally more concerned about those serving than about those who have served.

It took several years to win pensions for the pre-1950 service widows who previously had no service pension. The Conservative Government can take great credit for the fact that one of their earliest actions in 1979 was to introduce a special service pension for the pre-1950 service widows. Similarly, it took many years to win improvements for the older war widows. I give all credit to the present Defence Ministers for having responded to the representations that were made on behalf of war widows. On their behalf, I thank the present Defence Ministers for enhancing older war widows' pensions.

I fear, however, that the 25,000 service men who were present at nuclear tests between 1952 and 1958 may be in a similar position to that of the widows when they were fighting for recognition. It does not take a nuclear physicist to guess that there is some connection between nuclear tests and the fact that 700 or so men have suffered cancers, deformity and in some cases death. Those who serve in the Royal Navy deserve our gratitude and support. Those who served in the Royal Navy in the past, and their widows, deserve nothing less.

8.13 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): The hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) made a fluent speech. I agree with him that those who served in the Royal Navy deserve better pensions. However, the bulk of his comments were fundamentally flawed. They were based on threats from an enemy. In the light of world events, that is now regarded as increasingly unreal—a fact that has been acknowledged even by some of his hon. Friends when they look at the state of politics in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

I pay tribute to Royal Navy personnel. They carry out their tasks ably and efficiently. I paid a visit to HMS Alacrity, which is doing excellent anti-drugs work. It has also provided hurricane relief. That is the sort of work that I want the Royal Navy to do, especially anti-drugs work with the United States coastguard. I should like it to be increased. Unfortunately, however, the Royal Navy's cold war role is regarded by the Government as more important.

Naval ratings have expressed concern to me about several issues. They moan about pay, but they are more concerned about the bills they face when they return home. The poll tax is at the top of their list of concerns. Many of them are worried about their families having to rely on social security and housing benefit. They will also, I presume, have to rely on poll tax benefit. The Minister ought to acknowledge that the Government's policies have led to the families of service personnel being forced to rely on rebates, as so many other families have to.

Those people must regard the future with as much concern as my constituent, Mr. E. Taylor, of Lea Hall gardens, Leyton, who wrote to me recently because he is worried about the effect of the poll tax upon him and his wife. He said:

"My present weekly income is £48·55 state pension, and about £64 per week"——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Is the hon. Gentleman's constituent a sailor?

Mr. Cohen: Yes. You have spoilt my punch line, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I apologise.

Mr. Cohen: I shall continue as if you had not intervened, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Taylor said:

"My wife's pension is £26·20. This being a total of £138·75 for the household."

He went on to say that their weekly average expenditure eats up all that money easily. He includes the telephone in his weekly average expenditure and says that he can take incoming calls only. He also says:

[Mr. Cohen]

"all these proposed increases are really pushing us literally to the wall."

His punch line is:

"The reason for my writing this letter is to express my protest against such severe increases to our cost of living which after my service of thirteen and a half years in the Royal Navy (including the war years), plus 30 years with the Ministry of Defence is, you will agree, against all sense of justice and fair play."

I believe that most hon. Members will agree with those sentiments. It is shocking that the Government have placed ex-Royal Navy personnel with that amount of service in such a plight.

Recently I visited Faslane. I pay tribute to the peace campers. They have obtained information that the public have a right to know, but which the Ministry of Defence has consistently hidden. They have obtained it despite Ministry of Defence police coming around every five or 10 minutes. Faslane is being prepared for Trident. Millions of pounds have been spent on it. Money is no object. It has been pointed out to me that over £10 million was spent on road construction but that it was all dug up again after the work had been completed. My borough could do with some of that £10 million, so that the proposed surface road which will lead to many houses being knocked down in Leyton and Leytonstone could be put underground.

The peace campers found out about the Ministry of Defence's plans for the site of special scientific interest at Rhu Spit. They also found out about the submarines that have limped into port during the past few months. We know now that they limped into port because of nuclear reactor faults. That was made clear in *The Independent* on 1 February. The report refers to the fact that the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority's safety and reliability directorate has expressed concern about the safety of the reactors. I hope that the Minister will be able to confirm that the safety and reliability directorate has a role to play. The report says:

"all five of the Valiant and Churchill boats are in. . . highly unusual under normal conditions.

The fault is believed to be a hairline crack in the primary cooling system of the reactor".

The report also said:

"10 days ago a Polaris class vessel had returned unexpectedly early. . .cracking of reactor pressure circuits is a well-known problem in the civil nuclear power industry."

That problem is coming home to roost in nuclear-powered submarines. The hon. Member for Gosport mentioned nuclear test veterans. Many Labour Members have been fighting for proper compensation for those involved in the A-tests in the 1950s and 1960s. What about the Navy personnel in those Polaris submarines? The Ministry should come clean about that problem. Is Ministers' reluctance to come clean about these problems one of the reasons why the Government have been so mean about paying veterans?

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I must put the record straight. The advantage for a submariner is that he is not exposed to the normal degrees of radiation that the rest of us are in the open air. The fact that he spends some of his life at sea means that he is exposed to lower rates of radiation than other people. There is no evidence that any of our submariners have suffered from radiation.

Mr. Cohen: I appreciate that point, and we must take it at face value, but that reminds me of when it was said that there was no evidence that smoking caused cancer. Years later, it was suddenly discovered that there was such a link. I fear that that may become the case in this respect.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: We should have more faith in what the Minister says if all the veterans of Christmas Island had not been told that they were under no risk. The Government should at least admit that they made a mistake and pay them compensation.

Mr. Cohen: That is exactly the point that I am trying to make. The Minister says that there is no risk of radiation, yet reactors have developed hairline cracks. That must create doubts in people's minds. All the expert opinion should be made public.

What if the Vanguard class of submarine, which will carry Trident, develops the same reactor faults? If its reactor blows, there will be enormous self-destruction. Trident has indiscriminate and massive overkill powers many hundred times greater than the bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima.

What is the point of using Trident to obliterate people who are campaigning for democracy and better economic conditions in eastern Europe? The tests carried out on Trident have been far from perfect: we remember the catherine wheel test, when it fell straight back down. Such failures would make Trident a suicide weapon.

Defence cuts have been made by President Gorbachev. If a war is started against the Soviet Union by accident or in mad circumstances, it may be argued by a Soviet general that the best way to achieve a draw is to get Trident used. That person would have to be mad because that would be suicidal for both sides, but it may be preferred to defeat, which could be inherent in Soviet cuts that are made unbalanced by Western expansion in nuclear arms.

I raised the problem of sonar in an intervention. The Minister said that the Soviet Union has substantially improved sonar techniques. The Vanguard submarine is bigger than normal submarines in order to accommodate the huge Trident weapons and it will be relatively easily tracked. The United States is aware of that problem. It is holding back on full-scale production of Trident because it knows that Congress is uneasy about it. It is using Trident as a bargaining chip for the strategic arms reduction talks. It is being built to be scrapped and the US will scrap it straight after START 2, but the United Kingdom is dependent upon the United States for Trident. The £10 billion-plus cost will be down the drain for those useless but immensely dangerous nuclear weapons that have no realistic role in the changed world.

Naval forces are left out of arms control talks. Verification has been mentioned, but I wish that there was some verification. We have had the thinnest verification that was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes), but the United Kingdom has not taken part in that and has shown no interest in doing so. It is silly for naval forces to be left out when arms cuts covering conventional forces and land and air-based nuclear weapons are high on the agenda. It is silly that naval nuclear weapons will remain untouched, unrestricted and unrestrained. Naval cuts should be made soon, not only for international peace and stability but to redistribute to people money otherwise wasted on weapons. Such cuts are best for the Royal Navy, because it cannot plan for the future while the Government fudge this issue.

The Government ignore world events. The Warsaw pact is in disarray. The Soviet Union has made substantial moves towards defensive defence. President Gorbachev has made huge arms cuts—in many cases, unilateral cuts—to support the economy and, indeed, for his own survival. He has repeatedly called for a deal. A Government booklet, "Broadsheet 89", on the Navy says:

"A number of proposals on naval forces have been put forward by the Warsaw Pact, in open speeches and at formal negotiations. These have ranged across a wide spectrum, from constraints to confidence building measures . . . The CFE talks do not impact upon the RN."

It later deals with the

"Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, (CSCE) . . . The latter does not affect Naval forces except where naval gunfire support and amphibious forces take part in exercises involving more than 13,000 troops."

That is saying that the Navy will not do a deal. President Gorbachev has been spurned by the Government when he has called for a deal on naval forces. The Soviet Union, because of economic pressures, will make naval cuts, but we shall be left with nuclear weapons based on cold war thinking and a strategy that is obsolete and hugely expensive.

We want the peace dividend, which could represent billions of pounds. It could be done in co-ordination with the Soviet Union and without any risk. Instead, we have massive overkill and massive overspend. We keep being told by Conservative Members—and the hon. Member for Gosport was no exception—that now is not the right time; it is never the right time for Conservative Members. Is it not the right time when arms cuts are being made by the Soviet Union?

The peace dividend could apply to arms conversion. We should be reshaping our yards to build merchant shipping, which is needed to boost our trade and world trade. We could be guaranteeing jobs into the future. The peace dividend could especially apply to welfare services. We could be keeping hospitals open instead of closing them.

The Government are out of touch with world events and are missing a great opportunity. If they get their way, they will be condemned in history for it.

8.28 pm

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): I wish that the hon. Members for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) and for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) could have found it in their hearts to show their appreciation of what the Royal Navy does for this country. Their lack of enthusiasm followed the speech of the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes). I was worried by not only the content of that speech, which talked about the potential reduction in naval expenditure, but the tone in which it was delivered, which showed a complete lack of enthusiasm for the Royal Navy.

I interpreted that as meaning that the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington—the same applies to the hon. Members for Leyton and for Denton and Reddish—regards the Royal Navy as an instrument of war. I suggest that it is an instrument of, and for, peace. First, it is an essentially defensive instrument, offering protection to this country. Secondly, it is an instrument that operates as effectively in peacetime as in wartime. As has been evidenced in the Gulf and the Caribbean, its role in peacetime can often be as essential as in any wartime operation, and presumably its purely humanitarian objectives would be supported by both sides of the House.

I trust that someone who says that he wants the Royal Navy developed is not seen as ignoring changes in the world. I belong to a generation that has seen changes and gone through a world war. No one of my generation would do other than welcome a move towards peace. After the first world war, we saw the rise of national independence in numerous countries in eastern and southern Europe and saw them celebrating it, yet we also saw the adventurism, nationalism and aggression that it bred. Only a few years later, some of those countries cast aside the very freedom that they had sought in the first world war or, as in the Baltic republics, had it brutally taken from them by their bigger neighbour.

It is not enough for us to say that we have had a few weeks or months of euphoria and calls from people—including those who were active during the cold war on the other side of the iron curtain or the Berlin wall—for peace, freedom and understanding. Their actions must speak as loudly as their words. It will be a long time before we can say that the leopard has changed his spots and that they are all converts to freedom, peace, democracy and liberal ideals.

In the meantime, to increase the pace of the process, we may take part in negotiations to reduce arms and arms expenditure. I do not believe that there is any great difference between the two sides of the House on that issue. Although it may be possible for us to conceive of a move towards a reduction in offensive weapons on both sides, there would be nothing desirable in having a major reduction in defensive weapons on either side. Purely defensive weapons give security, which means that there is no need for either side to fear the other or to fear change. We want change, and we shall not fear it as long as we have our national security. We in the West feel secure, and I want the nations of the East to feel equally secure.

I welcome the comments of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement. At the top of my agenda was the question whether we were still committed to an escort fleet of about 50 vessels. My hon. Friend took the bull by the horns and answered in a straightforward way, but in offering him my thanks, I feel a certain hesitation. I should have thought that "about 50 vessels" means either a little above or a little below 50, but the number is now permanently a little below 50. We know that some ships are not immediately available for use, so we have a fleet of 48—well, that is nearly 50. We know that 44 vessels could be ready in a relatively short time.

The numbers are getting perilously small. That is not a jingoistic statement—I do not want to send a gunboat anywhere. Commitments such as those that we have in the Gulf come up without any action by us. We have no control over how those circumstances arise. There is no guarantee that there will be only one such incident at a time—there could be more than one in different parts of the world which involve direct British interests and where it would be necessary for us to maintain a naval presence.

I trust that the Government are still wedded to their promise of "about 50 vessels", not to something below 50. We all welcome the building of newer ships and the reduction in the age of our fleet, about which my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State spoke, but we must remember that we will get the advantages from new equipment such as the type 23 frigate only if the ship is fully operational. It is not fully operational if it does not have the computerised control system that it was intended to have.

[Mr. Peter Griffiths]

I know that the ship can operate without that equipment, but in practice the advantages do not exist until it has that capacity. I trust that we will have from the Ministry of Defence a commitment not only to provide hulls in the water, by which we measured the success of the escort fleet in the past, but to ensure that the necessary equipment is provided—the control system and the seagoing version of the EH101 helicopter, which is an essential part of the new vessel.

It is not always easy to make a commitment to a new weapon. People often say that it will not work, that it will probably cost more and that it will take longer to develop than expected. My first duty on being elected in 1979 was to take a group of trade unionists to see the then Navy Minister on behalf of the Marconi workers who were building Sting Ray. That was one of those projects that was criticised by the Left and the Right because it was said that it would never succeed. Sting Ray is now perhaps the finest lightweight torpedo in the world. It has export markets and export potential.

We need a commitment to finishing the jobs that we have started. I have been alarmed at the talk that Marconi cannot achieve a full-scale production order for the heavyweight torpedo and to hear that Westland has not been given a production order for the helicopter. There must at some point be a commitment to buy a certain weapon because we believe that it can be made to work. There must be a point at which the advice given to the Ministry of Defence is sufficient to lead it to make a decision. I hope that it will reach quick and early decisions on these essential matters.

We need also a commitment to the support facilities on which the Navy relies. When HMS Southampton was brought somewhat ignominiously into Portsmouth harbour after she was severely damaged, it was a mistake not to have the repair work done at the naval repair base, which had the men and equipment ready for her refitting. One cannot argue that that work could not have been done there, because that is where refitting work is carried out. It has been said that a royal naval fleet maintenance base has no accounting procedures to submit a tender, but every piece of work done on the fleet maintenance base is costed.

Plenty of people in the naval base at Portsmouth would have been prepared to submit, if not a tender exactly, a firm quotation by which the success of Portsmouth in the repair work on HMS Southampton could have been judged. Instead, the vessel was taken away for all the work —not only the repairs of new damage but the work that would otherwise have been done in Portsmouth—to be carried out. The then Minister gave Portsmouth some offsetting work, but that is not the same, is it, as allowing a ship that was to be refitted in Portsmouth to be repaired there? After that blow, morale in Portsmouth will not easily be restored.

A commitment to facilities, equipment and the development of weapons is essential. It is up to the Ministry of Defence not simply to sit back and wait to see what it can get but to commit itself to developing what it wants.

Mr. David Martin: My hon. Friend knows how we in Portsmouth fought over the HMS Southampton issue and how the morale of the work force was badly affected. The package of work that was supplied has been keeping the naval base work force going, but does my hon. Friend agree that it is important that we should know what is coming to the direct labour force in the Royal Navy in Portsmouth beyond the sammer? After all, it is the one remaining direct naval force working under direct Government contract. Will my hon. Friend touch on its future?

Mr. Griffiths: I thank my hon. Friend, who has a more detailed knowledge of the workings of the fleet maintenance base than I do as he givera great deal of time to close personal study of it. We have a fleet maintenance base in Portsmouth which is part of the Royal Navy. We want a commitment to the Royal Navy—not a hand-to-mouth commitment to giving us something now and something in the future or to finding us something to offset work that we have lost, but a firm commitment that certain vessels will be based on Portsmouth for all their requirements and that when such vessels need repair, refitting and maintenance they will come to Portsmouth.

The Royal Navy as an institution in peace and war is well worth maintaining, developing and protecting. The qualities of quiet efficiency and discipline are the sort of qualities that reflect all that is best in our national life. That is why I am proud to be associated with a city that has such a long-standing link with the Royal Navy. Whatever the future may hold—whether we are to enter the golden uplands of a period of unparalleled peace or to move once again into troubled waters of political upheaval and uncertainty—we want people to be able to say for certain, "The Navy is here."

8.43 pm

Mr. Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne, East): The hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Griffiths) has urged the Government to remain armed against the Soviet Union until it has adopted, and has been seen to have adopted, liberal ideals. On that basis, the Soviet Union will most certainly remain armed against the current Government as it will see no sign of their adopting such liberal ideals. Having said that, it is a pleasure to follow the hon. Gentleman because the community that I represent, like the community that he represents, has long and close ties with the Royal Navy and because, like him, I think that the Royal Navy has an important role on which considerable emphasis should be placed. I have been emphasising that role in Royal Navy debates ever since I came to the House, and when we have debated merchant shipping orders I have tried to get a word in for our merchant marine.

All hon. Members who have spoken have referred to foreign affairs, and it is absolutely right that, in debating the Royal Navy, we should have due regard to the international position. I shall not go through all the arguments again, except to say that it is clear that whatever else may divide the House we are not divided in our analysis of what is happening in eastern Europe. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have painted a similar picture. The issue for the House, and the issue that perhaps divides the parties more, is how we should respond.

As I have said before, I think that it is a mistake to debate defence issues as we do—a day for the Navy, a day for the Army and a day for the Air Force—when the question of our strategic deterrent arises under all three headings. We should consider the issues under four

separate headings and have a debate about Trident and Britain's nuclear capability distinct from our debates on the conventional role of our three armed forces.

I shall refer specifically to the conventional role of the Royal Navy and in doing so I shall allude to what the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) said. If we are to consider a peace bonus—I would warmly welcome that, as I am sure would the majority of our fellow citizens—we must consider whether it should come from our strategic deterrent, from the Navy, from the Army or from the Air Force. The services do not all start from the same basis. The Royal Navy's conventional role has borne the bulk of the downturn in defence expenditure over the past 10 years, and I should not wish that expenditure to be diminished further. As we move from a time of real tension between the two super-powers—between NATO and the Warsaw pact—to a time of diminishing tension, the role of the Royal Navy may be enhanced rather than diminished.

Both the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) and the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright) referred to emphasis being placed on the Royal Navy's unique role within NATO. That is absolutely right. If there is to be more specialisation within NATO—I think that there should be—it is surely right that, with our traditions, heritage, background and special strategic needs as a trading nation and, above all, as an island, we should emphasise the contribution of the Royal Navy. That means funding it, not reducing our commitment to it.

The Royal Navy's contribution in international affairs is unique. It can provide a diplomatic presence or an oblique military presence overseas in a way that the Army and Air Force simply cannot. It is no accident that the role of the Royal Navy has been paramount in every conflict in which we have been involved since the second world war. The Navy is not the service whose role we should diminish if there is to be a peace bonus. The savings should be reaped elsewhere, and the Army of the Rhine is the obvious source.

As hon. Members on both sides of the House have said, the Royal Navy is an instrument of peace rather than aggression. It has a role in fighting the drugs trade and piracy and in assisting in dealing with natural disasters—a role that cannot be played by any other service. If the emphasis on the roles of the different military arms is to be changed, we should remember that the Royal Navy poses the least aggressive threat to the eastern bloc. If we are to place much more emphasis on real defence rather than pre-emptive strikes, we should be underpinning the role of the Royal Navy.

My constituency, like that of the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North has a long relationship with the Royal Navy. We make the fleet auxiliaries and the frigates for the Navy and we repair them, as we did with HMS Southampton. We provide the crews and there is a great tradition of sea-going people on Tyneside. Tyneside is also popular with the Royal Navy because it is a good shore leave. Newcastle is a good place to spend a Saturday night.

Mr. Boyes: Hear, hear.

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) is cheering me on, obviously on the basis of personal experience.

My community wants to express its wholehearted support for the Royal Navy and its role in our national life. It would be wrong of me not to associate my community with the condemnations from Opposition and Government Front-Bench spokesmen and from Back-Bench Members of those responsible for the deaths of the young bandsmen at Deal. That was a disgusting outrage and vile murder and it is wholeheartedly condemned by me and everyone I represent.

I refer to a number of procurement issues. I listened with considerable interest to the Minister's opening remarks and I broadly welcome them. If, as the Minister said, there is to be a further type 23 procurement round this year, surely it is time to consider the ratios and the further procurement of auxiliary oiler replenishment vessels. Perhaps that issue can be addressed when the Minister of State for the Armed Forces replies. If there are to be more type 23 frigate, the Government must make arrangements for their replenishment and that must mean an AOR3 or perhaps even an AOR4. I hope that the Minister can tell us something about the time scale for that.

Several hon. Members have referred to the role replacements of HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid. The Minister said that that was under full and detailed consideration. Perhaps when the Minister replies he can tell us about the time scale for that full and detailed consideration. After all, the matter has been under review for a little more than a year. Perhaps those considerations will end soon and perhaps the Minister can tell us when.

I know that the Minister of State will have received a copy of the report of the Public Accounts Committee on reliability and maintainability of defence equipment. The report states:

> "The Services have estimated that unreliability adds over £1 billion a year to support costs. We accept that not all such costs can be saved, but note that the Department consider 50 per cent. to be a fair goal for the level of achievable savings."

Does that apply specifically to the Royal Navy? Will the Minister place emphasis more on reliability and maintainability in the procurement rounds in future rather than on just the costs of procurement? Clearly, initial costs and eventual costs are not the same, as the PAC recognises. It would be heartening to hear the Minister's response about that.

I hope that when the Minister replies he can tell us something about the Royal Navy's experience with the costs and performance of the Argus which was procured on a non-competitive basis. I also hope he can tell us whether the experience with the Fort Victoria AOR1 contract continues to be happy. Can he assure us that the overall cost to the taxpayer of those contracts is still within budget and that there is no overrun? Can he tell us anything about the National Audit Office report on the Argus? I know that the MOD will want to respond to that as some stage, but I wonder whether the Minister can tell us something about it tonight.

We have had some discussions on broad and sweeping issues and great events. However, with the Minister's indulgence, I want to raise an issue which may seem more trivial, but which is a matter of some importance to our service personnel. I refer to the ceilings of modern warships while they are at sea.

As part of the post-Falklands experience and review, it has been decided to remove the ceilings from modern new British frigates, including the type 23. Those ceilings have been removed from the crew's quarters, workrooms and leisure rooms. The pipework is left exposed and the

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intention is that it should stay exposed. That is not very aesthetically pleasing. The men work in a very small space and it is obvious to anyone who has worked in an industrial environment that exposed pipework collects more dust, debris and filth than unexposed pipework.

I am sure that the idea has been sold to the Treasury as a possible cost saving. However, for aesthetic and housekeeping reasons, would it be possible for the Royal Navy to consider replacing the ceilings, at least until vessels go into combat? If there were small prefabricated panels that could be removed when the warship was at combat stations, that would make life more pleasant for the crew and result in housekeeping savings.

Having made that small and modest plea, which is probably the only point to which I will receive a response, I confirm yet again the support of my community for the Royal Navy. I hope that the peace bonus, which is the British people's due, comes from a service that has been less hard hit by expenditure cuts than the Navy.

8.56 pm

Dr. Mike Woodcock (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Earlier in the debate, several references were made to the new armed forces parliamentary scheme. I am particularly pleased to have been called this evening because this year I am on attachment to the Royal Navy under the auspices of that scheme. Many hon. Members will know that the scheme follows the familiar pattern set by the Industry and Parliament Trust and tries to give hon. Members an understanding of service life and service priorities and problems.

With the abolition of national service and inevitably smaller defence services, it is not surprising that fewer hon. Members have direct experience of service life. I have no direct experience of it. Like other hon. Members, I have to rely on briefing papers and the work of the all-party defence group to enhance my knowledge of defence matters. While commending the work of that group and the valuable visits that it organises and commending those to other hon. Members, I recognise that that experience is, of necessity, limited. The armed forces parliamentary scheme provides a great deal more depth and detail.

During my brief time with the Royal Navy I have had nothing short of total co-operation from everyone. Whether discussing naval strategy with the heady rank of admiral or whether discussing day-to-day problems with junior ranks messes, within the bounds of security, everyone has been totally helpful and willing to state their views. With the profound changes in eastern Europe and the new attitudes that are coming from the Soviet Union, it is vital that, as we consider the role of our forces, Members of Parliament are informed and have views on the role and state of our armed forces.

I shall say a few words based on my brief experience with the Navy. I stress that I have no great experience of naval matters, but, throughout a long career in industry as a consultant and writer, I have been able to visit thousands of organisations in all sectors of the economy, and I am able to make comparisons. I shall make just a few comparisons this evening. I shall refer to morale and pay, management style and practice, retirement policy, and the role of women in the Navy.

The first matter concerns morale and pay. In many years of talking to people in many organisations, I have come to realise that, almost invariably, wherever and whatever the organisation, people consider that they should be paid more and that morale could be improved. It will come as no surprise to hon. Members to know that the Navy is no exception to that rule. Many people consider that they should be paid more and that allowances should be higher and more flexible.

The Armed Forces Pay Review Body's recommendation of a 10·9 per cent. average increase will be welcomed in the Navy, as will retention incentives and the increase in the X factor. That body recognises the problems, but it will not wholly solve them. Within the Royal Navy there is a certain amount of discontent about allowances. Having seen what I have in the Navy, I think that the Minister would do well to examine this matter a little more closely.

Inevitably, as the number of our dependencies around the world declines and as our worldwide commitments are cut, there is not the same opportunity for sailors to visit foreign ports. Traditionally, many sailors join the Navy to see the world, and they are understandably disappointed when they find that their opportunities to do so are nowhere near as numerous as they were in the past.

I would not for a second suggest that the conduct and deployment of the Navy should be determined by sailors' desire to see the world, but the Minister should take into account the importance of shore visits as seen by ratings when looking at other motivational factors in Navy life. I do not believe that morale is low or that pay is bad in the Royal Navy, but there is some room for the adjustment of allowances, particularly when service men are based away from their family homes, and more account should be paid to the importance to sailors of shore leave on foreign visits.

The second matter concerns management practice and style. In recent years, throughout the economy, particularly industry, great emphasis has been placed on management practice. Every successful manager recognises that people in all walks of life today need not only to be informed but to participate in decision-making processes. Successful organisations involve people. They are organisations in which authority must be earned and in which managers at all levels lead by example. The days when the boss, whoever he was, could rely solely on his position in a hierarchy have gone, and rightly so. Only a fool pretends that the same management practices can apply in the armed forces as in industry.

In a battle it is neither possible nor desirable to arrive at decisions by consensus. We must have strong leaders and obedient followers. But not all situations are battles. From what I have seen in my brief time in the Navy, I wonder whether there is not more room for consultation and involvement of junior ranks. There is a danger that hierarchical structures, the officer class system and the Naval Discipline Act 1957 can sometimes—I put it no higher than "sometimes"—be substitutes for good management practice. That can have severe consequences for morale and retention.

The third matter concerns retirement ages. There is justifiable concern in the Navy about difficulties in recruiting, training and retaining suitable staff. Those problems are not unique to the Navy. Industry, education, medicine and almost every branch of commerce face them on a day-to-day basis. The problems will not get better; they will get worse. Increasingly, most organisations will need more intelligent and better-trained staff.

Demographic trends will make the situation worse. Competition for highly trained and motivated people will become more and more severe. Like other organisations, the Navy will find it increasingly difficult and expensive to recruit, train and retain suitable staff. Therefore, it seems strange that the Navy sometimes forces highly trained but competent people to leave the service at a comparatively early age and against their wishes.

Throughout the economy, there is a need to be more flexible about retirement ages. Not everyone is ready for retirement at the same age. Throughout industry and commerce, there is a need to retain people longer and to utilise the valuable skills that they have acquired. The Navy's present policy is partly illogical. We should be seeking to retain people and skills, not the reverse. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider that matter.

The role of women in the Navy has already been mentioned on several occasions and I wish to mention it again. The Navy can be rightly proud of the Women's Royal Naval Service, which does an invaluable job. However, I wonder if it does enough. Not least for reasons that I mentioned earlier, we need to examine the role of women throughout the economy, and the Navy is no exception. It is wrong and wasteful that women are prevented from performing those tasks that they are willing and able to perform. Many Wrens wish to go to sea —almost all of those that I have met do—and the Navy should face that challenge. The Navy can recruit and retain high-quality women, but it is not tapping that potential sufficiently. Industry is changing its attitudes. There is a woman Prime Minister; there are many first-rate women managers in industry; but Wrens are not allowed to go to sea.

I appreciate that there are arguments for that, and hon. Members have argued against the deployment of women at sea because of the strength of women, the need for separate accommodation, the inevitable male and female relationships that would develop, the feelings of wives and of husbands left at home and the moral arguments about putting women in combative roles.

This is the age of equal opportunity and the Navy must be an equal opportunity employer. The Dutch, the Israelis, the New Zealanders, the Australians, the Americans and the Norwegians all allow women to go to sea in certain types of ship. I hope that Ministers and that the Navy Board will quickly adopt a policy of encouraging Wrens to go to sea in non-combative ships. I offer those suggestions because I believe that the Navy would be improved by them. All forms of human organisation can be improved and while the Navy is no exception, I have been impressed by what I have seen of it. It is dedicated, loyal and fully professional.

The House has a duty to ensure that there is not only a constant search for efficiency and economy within the Navy but that the Navy continues to receive the resources to enable it to continue to do such an excellent job.

9.8 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South): The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Dr. Woodcock) said that some of his military experience was derived from his experience in the Industry and Parliament Trust. My similar experience with that organisation was witl. Cadbury-Schweppes. I observed more chocolate soldiers than real soldiers. Although, like the hon. Gentleman, I have not served in the armed forces, being a member of the Select Committee on Defence—of which the hon. Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) is an able and probably the best Chairman, a comment that I hope will not do him irreparable harm with his party or myself with mine—and the experience that I have derived from the North Atlantic Assembly, particularly in its relationship in recent years with eastern Europe, gives me a perspective that may be relevant to supplement the experiences of people who have been in the military services.

I do not need to speak with a sense of embarrassment from the Opposition Benches. The nightmare of the 1980s is thankfully over. That is when my party drifted into the periphery of politics, especially in defence. I was berated for my speech in the previous defence debate for wanting greater consensus on defence issues. That is something that I do not regard as worthy of public criticism. It is important that we eventually return to the concept of politics ceasing at the water's edge. Perhaps we are not yet there, but we are far less apart than we were before last October.

As someone who has studied public opinion polls, and noting Labour's new defence policy, I am confident that no one would believe that my party adapted its defence policy for other than the noblest motives, unrelated to its electoral considerations. The *Independent* poll of a couple of weeks ago showed that no more than 12 per cent. of people support what amounts to unilateralism. When members of the public were asked whether they thought that Britain should keep some nuclear weapons so long as the Russians had theirs, 76 per cent., including 70 per cent. of Labour voters, said that it should.

We wish ultimately to see a world in which nuclear weapons have been eliminated, so long as there is some parity in conventional forces and so long as Third-world nations, which have been acquiring chemical and nuclear weapons at an alarming rate, are brought into an arms control regime. In the meantime, my party has widely adopted a policy that gives it flexibility in its approach to arms control negotiations, and I hope that when it is elected to office our nuclear weapons will become part of a START 2 process. That would be an intelligent way to proceed. I do not want to see Britain adopting the electorally unpopular and pretty stupid policy of throwing in its nuclear weapons in advance of other nations abandoning theirs.

The great problem that Governments of all political hues have had, certainly since the second world war, has been the matching of commitments and resources. That problem will become even more difficult. During the cold war it was relatively easy to amass resources commensurate with the threat, but now that the cold war appears to be over, it is more difficult for Governments to retain a level of defence expenditure commensurate with the threat.

However, the present Government certainly have not just woken up to the fact that they must cut defence expenditure. According to a Defence Select Committee report about a year ago, the Committee estimated that, by 1990-91, if current trends continued, defence expenditure would fall by 3·9 per cent. of gross domestic product. The Government have been cutting defence expenditure for one reason or another. To the critics who say that NATO has been doing nothing to respond to initiatives, I point out that, over the years—this can be taken one way or

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another—almost every NATO Government, including that of the United States, has been cutting substantially the percentage of expenditure devoted to defence.

When I hear that somehow all the initiatives derive from President Gorbachev, I want to tell people that they should look at the NATO summit communique issued in May last year. If they do so, they will see that the initiatives of President Bush last year and his recently announced initiatives make those of the Soviet Union pale almost into insignificance.

Quite recently, I was in Vienna observing the CFE negotiations. Which alliance was it that produced the first draft CFE treaty? Which alliance leaked that draft treaty to the Soviet Union so that it might see what our thinking was? I do not think that we have to view our alliance with any shame as to its reticence about developing its arms control proposals. There has been a remarkable reaction. Bearing in mind the difficulties faced by 16 sovereign democratic nations in somehow calibrating their security policies, and in doing so swiftly, I believe that NATO has had remarkable success.

Bearing in mind also the fact that peace is breaking out, the diminished perception of the threat, the economic and domestic political pressures, and the pressures that will emerge from the CFE treaty, one realises that the Government will have difficulties in reconciling their commitments with their resources. Some very hard decisions will have to be made.

I am not within that spectrum of opinion that argues that nothing should be done, that the threat is still enormous, that Gorbachev may be overthrown, and that therefore we can settle down to another cold war in a couple of months' time, but nor do I adhere remotely to the euphoric attitude that, as peace has broken out, swords must instantly be transformed into ploughshares. We must be imaginative; we must take advantage of the situation. But we must proceed with some prudence, because arms decisions, including procurement decisions, taken now will set the agenda for the year 2000. One cannot suddenly and swiftly produce weapons as fast as Spitfires were produced during the second world war.

I agree that we must be prudent and cautious. The NOP survey in *The Independent* of 20 January asked:

"In the light of recent developments in eastern Europe, which of these statements comes closest to your own view?"

It continued:

"The threat of war is now less, so Britain can safely reduce the amount of money it spends on defence"

How many people agreed with that? One might think that it would be 80 per cent., but in fact 29 per cent. agreed with the statement that because of developments in eastern Europe we can cut defence expenditure. That puts the Government way out of step with public opinion.

The survey continued:

"No one can be sure what will happen in the future, so Britain should keep up its defence spending."

Some 63 per cent. agreed with that, including 58 per cent. of Labour voters. While we must be imaginative, it is necessary to be reasonably prudent. How we give that dichotomy the right proportions is something that others must decide.

I listened to the debate on eastern Europe last week. I hoped to catch Mr. Speaker's eye but was unsuccessful. In that debate, the leader of the Liberal party was attacked for his views—I thought, unfairly. Far be it from me to rush to his defence, but what some have argued was that the time has come for alliances to wither away. He correctly argued that we should hope that the Warsaw pact will survive. He did not argue that it should survive in its current form. It is necessary for NATO to outlive the present situation for a variety of reasons. Ironically, we should also try to sustain the Warsaw pact. It is as though two heavyweight boxers reached the 13th round, and one was in better shape than the other and tried to hold up the other to prevent him from collapsing. It is in our interests that the Warsaw pact survives, but in a different form.

I have been to almost every non-Soviet Warsaw pact country and contributed six chapters to "Jane's Warsaw Pact High Command," so I speak with some interest in the problems of non-Soviet Warsaw pact militaries. Clearly, the reliability of such forces to the Soviet Union is questionable. Most of them have ordered, or begun negotiations, for Soviet withdrawal.

If the alliance collapses, as it might, the Soviet Union will be in further disarray. The military will be even more angry with President Gorbachev for having apparently torpedoed its security interests. The relationship between NATO and the Warsaw pact, which is critical in terms of arms control negotiations, might be severely damaged. I put that argument in Hungary and said that it was easy for somebody who had not lived under the Soviet Union to argue for the survival of the Warsaw pact.

I am not arguing for its indefinite survival, but if it is altered and non-Soviet Warsaw pact countries inject more control and influence over it, it will not necessarily be a force of instability but will be in their and our interests. That argument should be seriously addressed and is why NATO must survive, not entirely in its present form, but more or less in the way with which we are familiar—*[Interruption.]* I give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. O'Neill: I was going to start the wind-up.

Mr. George: I am sorry. I have not finished yet.

NATO has a useful role. We are fortunate that, since the Harmel report 20 years ago, NATO has been both a political and a military alliance. Clearly, the political dimension will assume greater prominence. It still has a military role and an economic role, particularly in terms of the Third world. There are many environmental challenges which NATO can play a role in meeting. It has a role to play in combating terrorism and a critical role in arms control. It is a means by which, in these tempestuous times, there can be some stability.

It is also important to think not just in military terms vis-à-vis eastern Europe but to do far more for it economically. It is simple to applaud events in Romania when we see them on television, and it is easy to say that we must provide economic assistance. I have recently returned from spending a week in Romania, and it is with some embarrassment that I say that many people inside and outside Government believe that the British Government's aid programme to Romania, although not derisory or trivial, is at the lower end of the third division of aid donors.

It is important to think of ways in which we can help to underpin the emerging democracies in eastern Europe. If someone had told western Governments two years ago that the Soviet Union would be a marginal force in eastern

Europe, that democratic Governments would be established there within two years and had asked how much they were prepared to give to achieve that, they would have offered enormous sums. Now we have an opportunity.

I received a parliamentary answer from the Foreign Secretary stating how much we give in aid to Romania. Our private charities such as the Red Cross have been magnificent, but the Government contribution has been little short of unsatisfactory.

We are at an exciting crossroads in world and European history. We were all brought up with a cold war mentality and some of us with a pre-cold war mentality so it is difficult for us to adjust to changed circumstances. There are enormous opportunities. Clearly, defence expenditure will have to fall. Nevertheless, it is critical that the Alliance that has helped to maintain our security for over 40 years survives. It is important that we relate to the Soviet Union and eastern Europe in a way that will help to underpin the democratic forces that are emerging there.

Perhaps the time will come when the amount of money that we need to spend on defence will genuinely fall and we shall see the beating of swords into ploughshares, but that time has not quite come.

9.21 pm

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): I was beginning to feel that my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) had reached the end, but not quite yet.

The debate was prefaced by discussions between what are known as the usual channels, about which we dare not speak. Suffice it to say that we discussed whether it would be better to have separate debates about deployment and procurement or debates about the individual services. In some respects, our discussions were largely academic. The ingenuity of both Opposition and Conservative Members has been such that they have wangled in every service and piece of hardware, and every thought or idea about the world situation.

Of the six or seven debates on the Navy in which I have participated, this has been the most exciting, varied and encouraging. Although hon. Members have shown varying degrees of optimism, few of us have been too bleak in our expectations. Of all the issues, the most difficult is how to deal with the Navy and naval arms control in a world of disarmament. It can be said that, because in NATO there was so much anxiety about the disposition of forces in central Europe, it turned its attention there when we first had signs of improvement in East-West relations. It is natural that we have had a CFE discussion in Vienna and that, of all the issues, the Navy is at the bottom of the list.

Despite that justification, I am impatient about the way in which we address maritime strategy. Although it is mainly the Norwegians and ourselves who make a substantial contribution to the defence of the north-eastern Atlantic, we seem reluctant to throw our weight around and to try to encourage proper discussion of some of the problems.

To an extent, I understand why some of those difficulties arise. Naval power is essentially about the projection of power. It is a flexible asset that can be moved across the globe with relative ease and lack of obstruction. It is therefore desirable for super-powers—in their eyes at least—to have such flexibility in moving the pieces around the chessboard.

It is a paradox of our modern political systems that the Navy is perhaps the most expensive of all the services. It certainly has the most expensive equipment. An aircraft costs £20 million to £30 million at most. For the purposes of the example, I am not looking at such aircraft as stealth bombers. A frigate is essential to naval deployment and costs at least £100 million. For amphibious craft such as Fearless or Intrepid, the cost may well be twice that or more. It is uncertainty over those sums that causes the Government to take so long to make up their mind. I shall come back to that.

The Navy also requires highly qualified and skilled service personnel because expensive weapons platforms require high technical skills and a great deal of training. They also require maintenance that would tax the ingenuity of the best engineers. All those factors give rise to problems with the Navy across the globe. The Navy probably has one of the tightest and most effective political pressure groups in any political system in the shape of its procurement systems and its friends. Because of that, it is difficult to get beyond the starting gate on matters such as the confidence-building measures that are necessary, before we get to arms control.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South spoke about consensus. The consensus that some of us would like to see—by that I mean the Government agreeing with us—would take account of the provocative and potentially destablising nature of the forward deployment of ships in the North sea and at the edges of the Arctic. Cat-and-mouse tactics are often a feature of their deployment and they are relatively close to the Soviet fleet in the Kola peninsula. To use an inelegant phrase for which I can never find an alternative, it is thought, as John Lehmann said, that the aim should be to beard the bear in its lair.

It is felt that there should be a first-strike capability, certainly of a conventional nature, as close to the Soviet Union as possible—and that could lead to the early start of a nuclear confrontation. Because of that, we are getting a measure of agreement across the political spectrum about the desirability of less provocative deployments of sea-launched cruise systems and the like.

It is notable that Ambassador Nitze and Admiral Crowe, who are not known as long-time supporters of irresponsible disarmament or of giving the game away to the Soviet Union, or as being open to the sort of challenges made by Conservative Members, have made constructive statements about the desirability of changing some of the maritime strategies and about the possibility of finding ways to have more confidence-building measures in respect of naval deployment and so on.

I wait with interest to hear what the Minister of State for the Armed Forces has to say about some of those matters. The Under-Secretary did not cover them to any great extent and was non-specific about many others. Adjournment debates present an opportunity for right hon. and hon. Members to take a balanced approach, but today we listened to a narrow expression of Government policy on the north Atlantic.

I should have been pleased to hear more about the sea lanes of communication and the reinforcement of the United Kingdom and Europe. Are the sea lanes as essential as they were some time ago? We are told that it would take 40 days to realise that a threat was emerging.

[Mr. Martin O'Neill]

In those circumstances, the reinforcement of Europe would still need to be effected as rapidly as it could be today. Would a post-CFE deployment of American and British troops need the same level of rapid deployment across the Atlantic that is possible today?

Conservative Members may argue that the Soviets have uninterrupted railway lines that just happen to pass through Czechoslovakia, Hungary and the German Democratic Republic and that railway carriages full of troops would be greeted with open arms. There is an assumption that the workers, peasants and students of those people's republics would join the Red Army, cross the Oder-Neisse line, and liberate the people of western Europe from capitalism. Is that the argument that is being posited by the Government in the context of the length of time that it would take for an invasion threat to materialise? If so, they are still living in the bleakest days of the cold war.

This evening, we should have heard a clearer exposition of the problems. Is it better for us to have a surface fleet to secure the sea lanes of communication, or can a better case be advanced for the use of submarines? The Government are not sustaining a rate of ordering compatible with that required to keep open the sea lanes. If the Government are thinking in terms of submarines, do they propose placing orders additional to those already announced? The Minister should have dispelled such confusion.

Mr. Mates: Some of the questions that the hon. Gentleman poses are valid and should be debated. However, when he talks of a diminishing threat and of reducing our forces in Europe, he must agree that the more we take away—as peace breaks out and the situation improves—the more will be the need for reinforcement. There will be more to reinforce if anything goes wrong.

Mr. O'Neill: That assumes that American troops, for example, will not be civilianised but will be landed in the United States and returned to military bases. However, from last week's statement I am led to believe that President Bush intends to close many of them. We are talking of armies of a different size, and that raises different questions of support. It is incumbent on the Government to anticipate events and to inform the House of their thoughts.

It may be that we shall have to wait until the White Paper is published. If it contains the right information, perhaps I shall not have to make the same speech when the House debates the defence estimates, and the hon. Member for Hampshire, East, (Mr. Mates), or his Committee members, will not have to ask the same questions when the Minister and his officials go before them in the early summer.

We must be clear also about our view of the reinforcement of Norway, as that will probably be the last matter dealt with in the CFE talks and in negotiating the settlement of the European question. If there are no answers yet, the Government should be frank and say so, rather than use that as an excuse and have Ministers saying at the Dispatch Box year after year, "We are still thinking about what to do with HMS Fearless and HMS Intrepid. We are not sure what to do about aviation support vessels. We do not know our plans for amphibious vessels. We are still considering." Those excuses have been trotted out for an intolerable length of time. When that is set alongside the manner in which the Government are ordering ships and the way in which the hulls are being laid, it is even more intolerable. We have to be grateful to the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence for making that valid point.

It is one thing to announce that there will be orders, but it is another to have competition and get the orders. There is an even greater delay before the hulls start to be laid.

This evening we have had no clear statement about the number of surface ships available to us—perhaps the Minister can help remedy that in his speech—the net number of the Armilla patrol, the net number of the commitment to the Falklands, and the number of ships that we would need if there was a crisis. The Government seem to be conscious of the fact that a crisis could arise quickly.

We are still no clearer about support for the frigates that have been ordered, and that has emerged in several speeches. For example, there is the absence of CACS for the first four years of the life of some of the type 23 frigates, or the problem with the EH101 and the likely cost overruns. Those cost overruns seem to be consuming a great deal of the savings that we used to hear about in the days when competitive tendering was all the fashion. I realise that it is still available in some areas of procurement, but opportunities for competitive tendering in shipbuilding are becoming fewer and fewer.

The failure of Cammell Laird to secure any part of the most recent round of orders is having a devastating effect on employment prospects in the Wirral, and in that part of Merseyside. It is also fair to say that Yarrow has been afflicted by its failure to get any part of those orders. Problems are now arising in yards such as Yarrow because of the doubt surrounding the future of the Euro-frigate.

Understandably, there will be national difficulties and differences about the hull design of such a ship, and, as I understand it, that is why the programme has collapsed; but, since modern frigates are nothing if not weapons platforms, perhaps the Minister can give us a clearer idea of what will happen to that ship. Are the Government committed to sustaining the effort to secure an agreed programme for the Euro-frigate?

We know that fewer armaments will be required, and that there will be problems of employment in the defence industries. We also know that the Government, almost alone among Governments in the Alliance and the Warsaw treaty organisation, choose to pour cold water on any prospects of a conversion programme.

I know that the Minister is not responsible for procurement. That is the responsibility of the Minister of State for Defence Procurement. However, throughout Europe and across the Atlantic, people are concerned about the economic and industrial consequences of peace. Perhaps the Minister is not aware of it, but he should ask his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State because he and I spent a weekend at a conference on the subject.

In Britain we have a fundamental problem with shipbuilding skills, because the crucial mass of those skills is contracting to such a point that it may not be possible to transfer them to merchant yards if there were a need for an upturn in merchant shipbuilding in Britain. At the moment, most shipbuilding skills are based in warship building yards.

All hon. Members who have spoken in the debate have praised the quality of our service personnel. I referred to their skill and dedication earlier. A new round of pay awards has just been announced. It will probably take us some time to appreciate the fine print of the awards and for messages to come back to us about them. As for my hon. Friend for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy) said, the Government have honoured their commitment to the pay review process that was entered into while Lord Mulley was Secretary of State for Defence.

The arrangements for wages set up by the Labour Government have largely been honoured, but the arrangements for conditions have not. There is an X factor, in that, although we may not be able to say that promises have been broken, undertakings have certainly not been fulfilled to the satisfaction of the personnel. That is why many are voting with their feet. It is only right that people who are both expensive to train and valuable to the nation's security should be given a better deal in the 1990s, when the demographic trough will hit recuitment in all the armed services.

Nuclear submarines have been mentioned in the debate. The Minister has said that he is satisfied that the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority is investigating, and we appreciate its record; nevertheless, if a fault were found in a commercial aircraft, I cannot imagine that the airline company would get away with allowing it to continue flying. It would not say, "We shall have to wait until it gets back to the airport." How long must the nuclear submarines in the categories that are prompting anxiety remain at sea before returning for a thorough check? Surely we owe it to the crews and their families to ensure that safety is taken seriously.

I realise that questions of confidentiality and security arise, but it ought to be possible to make such undertakings, and to make them in a way that the public can understand. A number of anxious calls and letters have already been received, and they will continue and increase unless the Minister takes the necessary steps to reassure the public.

The split in today's debate has been less between optimists and pessimists than between the optimistic and the less optimistic. There is a case for caution, but that caution should not be based on the bleakness of spirit that sometimes emanates from Conservative Members. There is also a case for the pursuit of stability, but that should not be based on the rigidity that has characterised statements on the armed services in recent months. All our clippings files are replete with quotations from generals and admirals who say that not another troop must be allowed to leave Europe; last week, President Bush said that another 100,000 would go.

We now have a better chance than ever before to seize the challenge—to seize the peace. The optimism that many of us feel could be reinforced if the British Government began to exercise the political independence exercised by our German allies across the political spectrum in areas where the Royal Navy makes its unique contribution to the safety of Europe. The Germans have forced America to reconsider the basis and priorities of many of its policies. I am sure that we should have a safer Britain and a safer Europe if we took such action, but I believe that it will take a change of Government for that to happen.

9.43 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): I agree with the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) that this has been an excellent debate.

The hon. Gentleman—and the hon. Members for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes), for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) and for Leyton (Mr. Cohen)—all raised the issue of the safety of our nuclear submarines. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington for reading into the record my letter to him of today's date. I am sorry that he did not receive it earlier—he might then have incorporated it in his speech a bit earlier—but he has removed the necessity for me to repeat the essence of its contents.

I assure the House that the Government place a high priority on the safety of nuclear-powered submarine operations. There are rigorous monitoring and safety standards. The decision to inspect all submarines as they come alongside from their operational tasks is in line with that policy. It was taken as a prudent precaution, to deal with a possible defect with potential safety implications. I reiterate that there has been no incident, accident or injury to anyone and that submarines alongside present no hazard to the public.

I said in my letter to the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington that detailed information on the design of nuclear power plants is classified, so he will understand why I cannot comment on the nature of the defect; nor can I comment on any implications for submarine operations —which are also classified—except to say, in order to avoid any doubt, that the deterrent force certainly remains operational.

Mr. McFall: Mention has been made of a hairline crack. Could that have occurred in a number of submarines, because the manufacturer was Rolls-Royce in Derby?

Mr. Hamilton: I repeat that I cannot comment on the defect with which we are dealing. The design of these nuclear power plants is classified.

The hon. Member for Houghton and Washington also referred to protecting the deterrent. He missed the point, due to his concern that there has been some increase in the Royal Navy's role in the protection of the deterrent, which was mentioned in the defence White Papers of 1988 and 1989. It has been the practice of the Royal Navy for many years to provide forces to protect Polaris submarines during their deployment from the Clyde. That does not reflect in any way on the ability of the submarines to maintain a deterrent patrol undetected by hostile forces.

The hon. Member for Dumbarton referred to maritime nuclear weapons. They have an important role to play in support of NATO's strategy of flexible reponse. We must also bear in mind that the Soviet Union has an impressive array of sub-strategic maritime nuclear weapons. In meeting that threat, the Royal Navy must maintain a full spectrum of capability in order to give sufficient operational flexibility to respond to acts by an aggressor at sea.

My hon. Friends the Members for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) and for Harrogate (Mr. Banks) and the hon. Members for Houghton and Washington and for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy) asked about the replacement of the assault ships Fearless and Intrepid. The

[Mr. Hamilton]

Government remain committed to maintaining an amphibious capability in the longer term. We have been assessing the results of studies into replacing the capability offered by these ships, either by new build or by extension of their current lives. A decision will be made within the ships' current planned lives. Tenders for the aviation support ship were received in July 1989. We hope to place an order later this year. No decision has yet been taken on when to order a second vessel.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East is concerned about when the latest type 23 frigate which has been ordered will be laid down. There is normally a gap between order and the laying down of the first vessel in a new class to be built at a particular yard, in this case Swan Hunter. Work will start this spring on the next type 23 frigate, HMS Westminster, and the following two will be built to a phased programme at six-month intervals.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East asked whether we intend to procure more than the initial batch of 50 Merlin ASW helicopters. We expect to order further aircraft in due course, but no decision has yet been taken or needs to be taken on the size and timing of the second batch.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): Will the additional ships enable the Royal Navy to fulfil its traditional role of providing a guard ship for the royal yacht Brittania during Cowes week? Last year, was, I believe the first occasion in peacetime when that was not possible.

Mr. Hamilton: I am well aware of the concern on the Isle of Wight that there was no guard ship for the royal yacht, but I cannot guarantee that there will always be a guard ship. That will depend on the number of ships that are available.

Mr. Rogers: It was originally proposed that the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force might order as many as 200 Merlin helicopters. The present figure is estimated at 50, which enhances the single cost of one helicopter alarmingly. Will the Minister say whether he will order 50 or nearer 200 of those helicopters?

Mr. Hamilton: I thought that I had made myself quite clear on this. It is not yet necessary to make a decision about future orders, but we shall keep that under consideration.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East asked about the disposal of decommissioned nuclear submarines. The Ministry of Defence continues actively to consider the options for disposing of the nuclear reactor plant from the Royal Navy's decommissioned nuclear submarines. The options are the piecemeal disposal of the reactor plant in the deep-level repository to be developed by Nirex, or shallow land burial of the intact reactor compartment. Sea disposal of the intact submarine has not been excluded, but we remain keenly aware of public concern in the United Kingdom, and internationally, about that method of disposal.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East asked about the vertical-launch Sea Wolf. As he knows, a contract for a vertically launched version of the Sea Wolf system was placed with British Aerospace in 1984. To date, no major delays have occurred in the development and production of that missile. The project's costs were thoroughly reviewed in 1985 and subsequently re-endorsed in 1986, since when there have been no notable increases in real costs.

The hon. Member for Dumbarton questioned the minimal real growth in the defence budget, which he thought thoroughly inappropriate to the times in which we live. I remind him that, when trying to maintain defence expenditure and capability at the same level, one faces rising wage costs, increases in the number of people employed and the fact that as equipment becomes more sophisticated it becomes more expensive.

The hon. Member for Dumbarton mentioned the use of private security firms. Labour Members suggest that the only good security guards are those employed in the public sector. I remind them that many lives were saved in Germany when a German civilian boilerman alerted people to an IRA attack, but was knocked over the head for his pains. We should concern ourselves with the quality of security guards, not who employs them. We aim to improve the quality of security firms employed at our bases.

The hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) made several remarks with which I had much sympathy; I normally find that I agree with the bulk of what he says. Significantly, he said that we must get the conventional forces in Europe negotiations out of the way. Let us get the treaty signed before considering maritime arms control. If we were to add the further element of maritime arms control we would delay the formal signing of that treaty. I need not remind the House that originally maritime arms controls were specifically excluded from the CFE arrangements.

The hon. and learned Member rightly said that in future we will need to consider the question of reinforcements, our ability to have mobile troops and the specialisation that we may need following future arms control agreements.

My hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Boscawen) made a welcome contribution to the debate. It is sad that he has had to wait so many years to address the House. I should like to remind the House of the sacrifices that are made by Whips, which are rarely appreciated; they are appreciated probably even more rarely by our constituents. He wondered, and I could not agree with him more, whether the Labour party is any wiser today than Governments were in calling for disarmament before the last war.

The hon. Member for Attercliffe paid tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome, and mentioned his courage in the last war. My late father served in the same Guards armoured brigade as my hon. Friend. They were both Coldstreamers, but my father was on his feet and my hon. Friend was in tanks. My father saw him blown up three times. The last time that he saw him carried away, he thought that he would never see him again—and he nearly did not. My hon. Friend was critically ill for many months, and it is a miracle that he is with us today. It is a matter of great sadness to me that he will be leaving the House at the end of this Parliament. Let us face it, we do not have many people here who are decorated as he was in the last war. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

The hon. Member for Attercliffe went on to spell out the difficulties that we are facing with CFE. It certainly is not a simple business of negotiating with the Warsaw pact. It is not a matter of lack of good will on either side. There

are great difficulties of definition and verification but, as the hon. Gentleman said, there is no reluctance to reach agreement.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed) raised the issue of women going to sea. He seemed to be against it, but I am grateful that my hon. Friends the Members for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) did not agree with him. I think that many Opposition Members believe that it is right that women should be able to go to sea.

I am pleased to be able to announce that we intend to extend the employment of members of the Women's Royal Naval Service to include service at sea in surface ships of the Royal Navy. Our decision has been taken against a background of concern about the Royal Navy's future manning position, but we have also been mindful that the current restrictions on Wrens' employment were in any case ripe for review in the light of developments in other navies and of domestic social trends. It follows decisions already reached and announced to widen the employment opportunities for members of the Women's Royal Army Corps and the Women's Royal Air Force.

There is one important distinction between these earlier announcements and that for the Royal Navy. It stems from the nature of naval operations, and it is that officers and ratings of the Wrens serving at sea are liable to serve there in combat. This represents a change in the long-standing policy that women should not undertake duties that may include direct combat. We have concluded that to attempt to categorise ships as "combat" and "non-combat" would be artificial and misleading in the context of modern maritime warfare, when all ships will be liable to serve in potentially dangerous waters.

We plan for women to serve on a wide range of ships, including the carriers and amphibious ships. A team has been appointed to plan the early selection and modification of vessels so that members of the Wrens may be drafted to sea, and our aim is for the first of them to be embarked by the end of the year. Present plans do not include extending mixed manning to the submarine flotilla, but early studies will be conducted into the employment of women as naval air crew and in the Royal Marines. Separate work is in hand to determine how women can serve at sea in ships of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

Serving members of the Wrens will be given the opportunity to volunteer for sea service and those selected will then receive appropriate sea training. From a date to be announced, all new recruits will be required to accept liability for sea service throughout their careers. Initially, sea service for women will be more common in branches and specialisations in which there are shortages of men. The aim, however, is to offer the widest possible opportunities to all Wrens.

Clearly, it is important in this context to seek the greatest possible equality in terms of service for women. This principle is being extended to our administrative planning including pay for Wrens at sea and, logically, includes the right for women to remain embarked whatever the nature of the vessel's employment. That, of course, means that, if a naval vessel is going to war, there will be no question of taking the women off it.

This major change will also help to ease the pressures on men by reducing gapping in the fleet and improving the ratio of sea-to-shore service in those branches where shortages have been most pronounced. We are conscious of the fact that this decision marks a significant step in the evolution of the role of women in the armed services. On the one hand, it opens up important new opportunities for members of the Wrens. On the other, it will expose them to all the potential dangers of service in naval vessels, dangers from which they have hitherto been shielded. I am sure that, as ever, the service will rise to meet the challenge.

Mr. Sayeed: I think that my hon. Friend should have had that part of his speech rewritten. Does he think that the proposal will pose any problems of retention for those currently serving in the Navy? Will their wives be happy about their serving alongside Wrens? And did the Second Sea Lord, the director of personnel, fully agree with the idea?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, the decision was taken unanimously by the whole Admiralty Board. My hon. Friend asked about the reaction of womenfolk at home. That was certainly a problem encountered by the Dutch navy, with whose representatives I went to talk. They said that there was a problem initially—lasting 12 to 18 months—and they operated a hotline so that people could ring up and find out what was going on. That reassured them, and they now have no difficulties.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 7th February,

(1) notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Newton relating to Social Security (in respect of the Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating) Order 1990 and the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 1990), Terms and Conditions of Employment and Pensions may be proceeded with until Seven o'clock; and, if those proceedings have not previously been disposed of, Mr. Speaker shall at that hour put the Question already proposed from the Chair and shall then put forthwith successively the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the remaining Motions; and

(2) notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Orders Nos. 14 (Exempted business) and 15 (Prayers against statutory instruments, &c. (negative procedure)), the Motions in the names of Mr. Secretary Newton relating to Social Security (in respect of the Social Security (Industrial Injuries) (Regular Employment) Regulations 1990 and the Social Security (Recoupment) Regulations 1990) and of Mr. Neil Kinnock relating to Social Security may be proceeded with until Ten o'clock; and, if those proceedings have not previously been disposed of, Mr. Speaker shall at that hour put the Question already proposed from the Chair and shall then put forthwith the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on the remaining Motion in the name of Mr. Secretary Newton, and no further such Motion shall then be made.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Tuesday 6th February, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), Mr. Speaker shall not later than Ten o'clock put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to Agriculture.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Hospital Provision (Altrincham and Sale)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

10 pm

Sir Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): I am grateful to have the opportunity of this Adjournment debate to bring to the attention of the House the provision of hospital beds in my constituency. I shall give a little background—not that my hon. Friend the Minister will need any background information because, as a diligent Minister, she will not doubt have done a great deal of homework on the problems that my constituents face.

My constituency is in the south of Trafford and I feel that, in hospital services, we have been the Cinderella of our area. For years, we were promised a new hospital. The site was even chosen and I believe that we were on the verge of getting a decision when suddenly the hospital was chopped, not by the Department of Health but by the North Western regional health authority. Over the years, I have repeatedly tried to find out why that decision was made and I have never really had an answer. It must go down as one of life's great mysteries.

If that promise had been kept and we had had the new hospital, my constituents would have had much better hospital provision than they now enjoy. I must stress to my hon. Friend the enormous sense of disappointment in our area when the decision to chop that hospital was made. We were promised at the time that Wythenshawe hospital would be made available to my constituents. I realise that in Trafford we have our own district hospital, which was called Park hospital and is now called Trafford general hospital, but that is in the north of Trafford and it is difficult for some of my constituents to get there. In 1988 my father, then in his nineties, was a patient there and we had to visit him regularly. We had a car but we noticed how difficult it was to get there and thought how much more difficult it would be for people without their own transport—particularly elderly people.

Wythenshawe hospital has always been much more readily accessible to my constituents, and as long as that was an option, people were not too unhappy. But in 1989 both Trafford and South Manchester health authorities issued consultative documents. I shall deal first with that issued by Trafford. Trafford feared a £1·1 million overspend and put forward a number of options, which it said may—I stress "may"—have to be implemented.

The first of these was perhaps the most controversial, and that was the proposed closure of the accident and emergency service at Altrincham hospital. If that happened, residents needing casualty treatment would have to go to Trafford general hospital, Withington hospital or Wythenshawe hospital, all of which would entail travelling a considerable distance, which is unacceptable to my constituents. Almost 20,000 patients are treated in the accident department in a year.

Altrincham hospital has a special place in the affections of the people in the area. The hospital is small and has been there for many years. I was a patient there in 1978 when I had my gall bladder removed. I went in as a National Health Service patient, and I cannot speak too highly of the treatment that I received. I am sure that thousands of people who have been patients at that hospital over the years would take up that theme. There is an enormous feeling for the hospital, but over the years the facilities have been reduced, and the closure of the accident department would be the last straw.

The next option was the closure of the geriatic inpatient services at St. Anne's hospital. A few years ago, there was a geriatric unit at Denzel hospital. That hospital was a beautiful old house, but it was not quite the place for a geriatric unit. When the decision was taken to close it, I did not shed any tears. I was told that the elderly people from that unit were to be dispersed to private homes in the area and I was assured that they would all be taken care of. However, the point was missed.

That little collection of geriatric patients had formed a community. Their relatives cared deeply about them. They visited them regularly and wanted to keep them together as a community. I respect the way in which those people fought for their elderly relatives. In the end they won the battle and those elderly people were kept together as a community. Wards were reopened in St. Anne's hospital and the old people went there. However, they are now under threat once more.

The third option was the cessation of general family planning services. I will say nothing about that tonight, because this debate is about hospital provision.

When Trafford announced that there was likely to be a deficit of £1·1 million, my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) and I went to see my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health. He assured us last year that more money would be going to Trafford. However, we are still not sure how much money will come to us or what affect it will have.

Trafford community health council, in its response to Trafford health authority, said:

> "Her Majesty's Government should provide sufficient funds to enable Trafford health authority to maintain appropriate and adequate National Health Services within Trafford."

The theme that more money is the answer to our problems is repeated over and over again.

When my hon. Friend the Minister replies, will she tell us what Trafford health authority's budget was in 1979 and what it is this year? More importantly, will she tell us the level of activity during those years? More and more people have been treated, but people's expectations have also risen enormously.

It is very interesting that the local Labour party always takes 1979 as the starting point for its comparisons. Apparently something very startling happened in 1979, and of course we are all aware what that was—the Conservative party was returned to office. By starting from 1979, the Labour party conveniently forgets what happened before then.

Labour Members are like political Rip van Winkels who sleep for years. If they managed to sleep through the whole of the period of the last Labour Government, they were very lucky. If they had remained conscious, they would know that under a Labour Government the NHS suffered the most severe cuts in its history when the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey), as Chancellor of the Exchequer, had to go cap in hand to the International Monetary Fund to bail us out after Labour's disastrous policies had ground to a halt.

Tonight Trafford community health council is holding a public meeting in my constituency. With its customary vigour, the local Labour party has sent out leaflets urging people to attend. I have sent my hon. Friend the Minister

one of those leaflets, because I believe that it is scaremongering in the extreme and full of half truths. One of the thorny issues to be discussed at the meeting is the consultative document from South Manchester health authority which was published at the end of September 1989. Since its publication, I have been bombarded with letters from anxious constituents.

The health authority's ultimate aim is for a single site hospital to cater for the south Manchester area, but it would take at least 10 years to achieve that. The great problem is what happens in the interim 10 years. The health authority believes that a programme of rationalisation between Wythenshawe and Withington hospitals will be necessary.

The health authority put forward two options. It recommended what it called option A. In option A, Withington hospital would be the major centre and would also be allocated general surgery. The effect would be that residents in my constituency would be more remote from district general hospital services. That would also lead to an over-concentration near the centre of Manchester.

Most people who have written to me have emphasised how strongly they felt that Wythenshawe hospital should remain a major accident centre. After all, we have a major airport in our area. Manchester international airport has grown enormously in importance over the past three years. It has been estimated that travelling time from the airport to Wythenshawe hospital is up to 10·5 minutes, whereas from the airport to Withington it is up to 19·75 minutes. That difference could be vital if we had another disaster at Manchester airport. No doubt that is why the police, the fire service and the airport have objected to Wythenshawe's limited accident and emergency role as envisaged in option A. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can visualise the anxiety that has been expressed by my constituents.

The staff at Wythenshawe hospital have not been idle —in fact, they have been very active in putting forward their views. They have now published their own document, which they call option C. They believe that, if their option is adopted by the local authority, it will match the savings that have been put forward in option A, will provide increased patient choice and, perhaps most important, will provide an acceptable soluton for patients, general practitioners and consultants. I am told that option C is being given serious consideration and that no decision is likely to be made by the health authority before mid-March at the earliest.

Having read all the papers, I must say that, in its response to South Manchester health authority, Trafford health authority has suggested that the management of Wythenshawe hospital be transferred from south Manchster to Trafford because it believes that that would be beneficial to residents in south Trafford. I am anxious to ensure that my constituents have the best possible health care. I await my hon. Friend's speech with interest.

The infamous Labour party leaflet states that cuts are imminent. In fairness, nothing could be further from the truth. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will confirm that if South Manchester health authority's conclusion is unacceptable to the community health council, the matter will be referred to the North-West regional health authority and that, if matters are not resolved at that stage, the issue will be taken to the Department of Health—in other words, that nothing has been decided, nor is the final decision imminent. As usual, in its desire to cause mischief, the Labour party either does not know the facts or has ignored them. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can give some reassurance and nail some of the misrepresentations that have been put around by political opportunists.

10.13 pm

The Minister for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): With his usual eloquence, my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale (Sir F. Montgomery) has outlined his constituents' concerns and their understandable wish to ensure that they receive a high standard of medical care. I am shocked to hear about the way in which the local Labour party has been exploiting people's fears—once again being involved in scaring rather than caring for people. As my hon. Friend rightly said, consultation is going on at the moment, but no firm decisions have been made. I shall outline the situation as we see it.

I compliment my hon. Friend on his thorough exposition of the current provision of hospital services both in his and in neighbouring constituences. It is true that he has certain advantages in so clearly presenting the facts, not the least being that he has been such an assiduous Member of Parliament for many years. It is almost 10 years since he raised the very same issue in the House with one of my predecessors, my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young), who was then the Under-Secretary of State. Many aspects of health care have changed dramatically since that debate—perhaps not in terms of the physical hospital buildings, but in the number and quality of health treatments enjoyed in Altrincham, Sale and other parts of the Trafford area.

It might be helpful to consider how hospital care in the district has been developed since that earlier debate in June 1980. Trafford general hospital at Davyhulme park now provides district general services for the district, having been built up from some 360 beds in 1980 to about 470 beds now. There has been a £4 million development providing modern acute geriatric and rehabilitation beds —something which my hon. Friend was particularly keen should be provided for Trafford residents.

The district health authority has decided to develop mental illness services within the district boundary. It has been decided to build a £2·8 million extension at the Trafford general hospital to provide acute in-patient and out-patient facilities. That project should be completed by 1991. Even more important than buildings and beds is the number of patients who are treated, and there has been a one third increase in the number treated in each available acute bed since 1982.

That has meant that the total number of patients treated has increased by 7 per cent. overall and by far more than that in some specialties. For example, the number of ear, nose and throat treatments has increased by two thirds. A similar pattern emerges from a study of day case patients at Trafford general hospital. In the six years since 1982, the annual number of patients has almost doubled —it has increased by 92 per cent.—from 2,600 to 5,000. In fact, all specialties—general surgery, urology, orthopaedics, ENT and gynaecology—are achieving more treatments for day patients.

I want to illustrate just how much hospital care the residents of Trafford are now receiving. For district acute specialist services, Trafford residents do far better than others in the north-west region. Of 21 wards in the district, residents in all but four have more treatment in hospital

[Mrs. Virginia Bottomley]

than the average for the region as a whole. The same picture emerges for all specialties funded by districts and the regional health authority, excluding maternity and psychiatry.

I hope that my hon. Friend recognises that, although a district general hospital has not been built in Altrincham to serve the residents in that part of south Trafford, there has certainly been no reduction in hospital treatment. The reality is that far higher efficiency in providing modern medical treatment has more than enabled existing hospitals to provide adequate treatment.

Another key indicator is that waiting times for treatment at Trafford general hospital are far better than those experienced in other districts in the north west region. One could be forgiven for concluding that, in many respects, Trafford district health authority has been and is providing better access to hospital treatment for its residents than many other districts.

The necessity for a second hospital at Altrincham was being sharply questioned as long ago as 1980. It is clear from the remarks of my hon. Friend the then Under-Secretary of State that he had not been convinced, at that stage, that the relocation of acute beds in south Trafford was vital in relation to the level of services that the residents were then receiving. He was not sure about the plans for 140 new acute beds as there was then overprovision of acute beds in Manchester generally which was well recognised. It is fair to say that my hon. Friend showed remarkable prescience in that judgment, as the events of the intervening years have shown.

The regional and district health authorities have since come to recognise that those additional new acute beds could not be justified against a background of shorter stays in hospital allowing acute beds, medical staff and medical equipment to be used more intensively. There is no debate about them now, because in 1988 the regional health authority agreed with a submission from Trafford district that the future hospital development in the south of the district would be for an out-patient department for investigation and diagnostic work, short-stay cases requiring minor treatments, day facilities for geriatric and elderly mentally infirm patients living in the community, with, possibly, some long-stay beds for elderly patients.

In short, the option appraisal by the district had shown that there was a need for a community hospital which would be a referral centre for district specialty services —for example, orthopaedics, urology, general surgery, gynaecology and obstetrics, and paediatrics at Trafford general hospital, Wythenshawe and Withington.

My hon. Friend will recall that in 1980 it was said that the residents of south Trafford received a substantial part of their acute services, including maternity, accident and emergency and paediatric services, from Wythenshawe hospital. Now, I am told, in-patient acute treatment for Trafford residents is handled at Trafford general hospital —about 60 per cent.; at Wythenshawe—about 30 per cent.; and at Withington—about 10 per cent. A few cases go to Hope hospital in Salford and to the Manchester royal infirmary. Often this is to obtain a regional specialty treatment available at those hospitals for all the residents of the north-west region.

Present-day preoccupations can be summarised in three questions. First, what has happened to the plan for a community hospital to serve primarily the residents in the south of the Trafford district? Secondly, where will these same patients go to be treated for conditions normally handled at district general hospital level if Wythenshawe hospital loses some of its district specialties? Thirdly, will Trafford district be able to continue to develop hospital treatment and care for all its residents now and in the future given present and future funding?

The community hospital plan was agreed by the North Western regional health authority in May 1988. The authority resolved then to develop plans for a community hospital in south Trafford. It decided that an application should be prepared for the Department of Health to give approval in principle to the development, and that there would be rationalisation of district specialty services in south Manchester.

I can assure my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale that the regional health authority has not ruled out the development of the Trafford community hospital. Equally, it has not rejected the option appraisal and conclusions that led up to its decision in May 1988. I understand that the earlier provisional date for a start on the south Trafford community hospital was in 1995-96, and, of course, the present three-year regional capital programme does not go that far. There is therefore no firm decision about the programme in the longer term.

I believe that the regional health authority has since stopped further design work on the plans for the hospital only because there is more urgent work to do on developments in the early years of the capital programme. I can state categorically that this does not imply that the regional health authority has withdrawn its support for the scheme.

Let me turn to the recent public consultation undertaken by South Manchester health authority on the future provision of district and regional specialties in Withington and Wythenshawe hospitals. My hon. Friend mentioned these and the decisions to be undertaken.

The South Manchester authority issued in September last year what it called "Strategy for the Future: Proposals for Consultation." As my hon. Friend said, no decisions have been made. I emphasise that the proposals were for public consultation, and a three-month period was allowed for the submission of comments and observations. This period has just ended, and, as my hon. Friend has said, Trafford district authority has forcefully made its views known to the South Manchester authority. I know, too, that there have been energetic representations at other levels.

The regional general manager has clearly stated the managers' position. First, the regional health authority has not abandoned previous agreements. Secondly, the Trafford managers always recognised that South Manchester would at some point need to rationalise district specialty services between Wythenshawe and Withington. Thirdly, future hospital development in south Trafford was, and continues to be, focused upon improved provision for the elderly and mentally infirm. Those groups, in whom I know my hon. Friend has a special interest, are often the ones that do not hit the headlines, but they are enormously important in the context of the provision of health care.

At the heart of the Trafford authority's concern is the proposed rationalisation of the acute medical wards and the fact that the major part of the accident and emergency department might be transferred from Wythenshawe to

Withington, which, as my hon. Friend said, might be less convenient for patients in the south-west part of Trafford district, who might then prefer to be treated at Trafford general hospital.

I sympathise with Trafford health authority in its concern to protect the high hospital treatment levels currently enjoyed by their residents. That is a major responsibility for the authority, and it is right to make its views known to South Manchester. I hope and am confident that those views will be fully noted and taken into account. Trafford authority is right to consider how the potential rationalisation at Wythenshawe will affect its own district specialty services provided at the Trafford general hospital. It is also clearly right to seek to ensure that better provision for the mentally ill and elderly in Trafford finds a place in future regional plans for the Greater Manchester area.

My hon. Friend will understand that Ministers would not intervene in the planning process at this stage. The Government intend to establish a broad set of policies to give health authorities the greatest possible discretion, within those policies, to allocate priorities and make their own financial arrangements. That is endorsed in our recent White Paper, "Working for Patients".

The responsibility of access to district specialty services for the residents of south Trafford lies fairly and squarely on the regional health authority and the district authorities for South Manchester and Trafford. Clearly, it would be helpful if they could get together to discuss the next action before final decisions are taken after the public consultation on South Manchester's recent consultation document.

It is not the right moment for Ministers to consider the options. However, as my hon. Friend knows, no final decision on the rationalisation of hospital services will be taken without the agreement between the South Manchester authority, the community health council and the regional health authority. If, sadly, agreements cannot be reached, the matter will come to Ministers for a decision on such a significant change of use of hospital facilities. My words should not be construed as supporting a policy of inaction by the South Manchester authority which needs to ensure that its services are provided in an effective manner providing high standards for local residents.

Finally, I shall refer to future financial resources for the north west region as a whole and Trafford in particular. My hon. Friend will know that the public expenditure plans which have been published result in the north-west receiving an additional £77·8 million funding this year. That represents a real increase in resources of 2·21 per cent. Those are impressive figures, especially against the background of broadly unchanging total population in the region as a whole. My hon. Friend will know the precise allocation of resources to his district in the near future, but the final details are a matter for the regional health authority.

The Trafford district health authority clearly has to maintain existing services within its budget and is committed to doing so. When it receives its cash allocation for 1990-91 in the next few weeks, it will be better able to judge what savings it can make on existing patterns of patient care in order to finance the many improvements that it has made or intends to make.

I should like my hon. Friend to know our overall record of spending in the north-west. There has been more than a 33 per cent. increase in real resources since 1978-79, even greater than the average for England as a whole, which has increased by 30 per cent., and that is for a region which is not growing in population size, as many are. In terms of treatment, in-patient cases have risen by 43 per cent., day cases have almost doubled and out-patient numbers increased by 11 per cent. There have been 23 per cent. more doctors, 16 per cent. more nurses and 37 per cent. more occupational and physiotherapists over the past 10 years. That is a remarkable and dramatic record.

Trafford health authority's spending has risen from £12·2 million in 1979-80 to £32·3 million in 1989-90. South Manchester's spending has risen from £37·4 million to £102·6 million. That is a dramatic real increase—20 per cent. for Trafford and 24 per cent. for South Manchester. Those are significant advances.

My hon. Friend deserves our credit for raising this enormously important issue. His constituents rightly look to him for guidance and advice. We in the House respect and admire the way in which, with clarity and conviction, my hon. Friend ably and articulately represents the needs of his constituents. I shall certainly draw his remarks to the attention of the chairman of the regional health authority so that when looking at the development of services and the allocation of resources throughout his region he will be well aware of the concerns that my hon. Friend has so ably expressed on behalf of his constituents.

The motion having been made at Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 6 February 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

PENZANCE ALBERT PIER EXTENSION BILL

Lords amendments, as amended, agreed to.

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

Conventional Forces in Europe

1. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications of an elimination of the imbalance of conventional forces in Europe for the procurement of theatre nuclear weapons.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Tom King): While we warmly welcome the current changes in eastern Europe, we strongly support NATO's strategy that an effective mix of conventional and nuclear forces will continue to offer the best guarantee of our future peace and security.

Mr. Cohen: As President Bush's proposed troop cuts in Europe were warmly greeted in the Soviet Union, there must be a real chance of eliminating conventional forces imbalances and making attack impractical. In those circumstances, is not the Government's strategy of having and using early theatre nuclear weapons obsolete? Are not the Government guilty of taking no account of what is happening in Europe? As proof of that, are not the Government contemplating taking the follow-on to Lance in the United Kingdom in the hope of foisting it on Germany in future? Is not that plain barmy?

Mr. King: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is aware that our strategy is NATO strategy, which his party —certainly its Front-Bench spokesmen—is supposed to support. We continue to support an effective mix of conventional and nuclear forces. That is NATO strategy.

Sir John Stokes: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, contrary to what the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) has just said, the vast majority of people in this country fully support the nuclear shield in the present uncertain times and believe that on no account must it be dropped? My right hon. Friend has the backing of the vast majority of people in this country.

Mr. King: The truth is that balance or imbalance in conventional forces has never been a pure deterrent. There was a clear message from the last war, which Hitler started with an imbalance against him. He showed how he could still succeed with conventional arms. It is clear that nuclear weapons have been a deterrent. That is widely recognised and is the policy which we support and shall continue to support.

Mr. O'Neill: What evidence does the Secretary of State have to support the view that there will be any financial capability in either the Senate or the House of Representatives to back a follow-on to Lance?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman knows that Mr. Cheney has put forward his proposals to Congress, which include financial provision for the modernisation of theatre nuclear weapons. That is the position of the United States Administration. The hon. Gentleman also knows that that was covered in the summit communiqué of the NATO leaders, which I imagine that he supports, in which the need for modernisation was recognised.

Arms Reductions

2. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the imbalance between Warsaw pact and NATO forces in *(a)* tanks and artillery and *(b)* combat aircraft following the completion in the reductions announced by the Soviet Union in December 1988.

8. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will make a statement about the relative level of conventional forces in eastern and western Europe.

Mr. Tom King: At present, the Soviet Union and its allies retain a substantial advantage in conventional forces and, even after the completion of the unilateral withdrawals and reductions programmes announced by them, and before a CFE agreement is implemented, we estimate that they will continue to have an advantage of some 2.4:1 in tanks and artillery, and 1·8:1 in combat aircraft.

Mr. Evans: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. Does he agree that with the changes going on in eastern Europe and with Russia falling apart, the nuclear deterrent and nuclear forces should be maintained? With Libya, Iraq and Iran likely to have nuclear forces in future, does he agree that we should maintain our nuclear presence and, in future, have more conventional forces and more nuclear weapons? What price freedom?

Mr. King: We all welcome the tremendous changes that are taking place in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union at present. Obviously, that holds out the prospect of a greater chance of peace and greater stability, and a lessening of tension, armaments and weapons. At the same time, it is clear that there are real dangers and tremendous uncertainties now, and it is necessary to be prudent. Many people think that the present time is particularly dangerous and, while we welcome the end of the sterile and frozen position of the cold war, none the less those changes bring dangers of their own.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that when empires are collapsing, there is a real risk of war? Does he not agree that that fact, and the huge imbalance between East and West, emphasises that any talk of a peace dividend at present is excessively premature?

Mr. King: My hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) referred to the nuclear deterrent. While we can see what look like substantial and probably irreversible changes in the structure of the Warsaw pact, and of its conventional forces, there is no question but that, under Mr. Gorbachev, there has been a significant strengthening of Soviet strategic nuclear forces and of their capability. We certainly hope that we are moving towards a more sensible and rational relationship between East and West, but we must recognise the very real forces that could be used against us.

Mr. Duffy: However satisfactory the outcome of CFE1—and there is no want of goodwill on either side—given current Soviet tank technology and the urgency that the Secretary of State quite properly attaches to a successful third generation of Trigat, there remains a residual need for main battle tanks, although they may well become lighter and more portable. Will the right hon. Gentleman consider acknowledging that publicly, thus reassuring those responsible for preserving the industrial capacity without which we shall not be able to provide tanks in future? I am thinking of those who work at Leeds tank factory.

Mr. King: I understand entirely the hon. Gentleman's point, which he put so eloquently on behalf of his constituents. Certainly, arms reductions and the proposals in CFE involve some reductions in tanks on either side, but there is no doubt that, even within that framework, we have certain problems with the age of present tank components, and we need to ensure that we have a modern tank capability. I think that there is a prospect of significant purchases of tanks, and it is worth putting that on record, but I will not be drawn further on exact details.

Mr. Rogers: In view of the Secretary of State's expressed concern about the imbalance that will occur after the talks, and in view of the answer that he gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy), will he tell the House when he will make a decision on the Challenger replacement and on the European fighter aircraft? Many hon. Members on both sides of the House are extremely concerned that we shall go outside of Britain to purchase a battle tank and that it will mean the collapse of the tank industry in this country.

Mr. King: I think that the hon. Gentleman is aware of the programme that is set up for that. The final milestone is in September and, subject to satisfactory achievement of that, which we obviously hope will happen, we shall sit down and examine all the options and reach a decision as early as we can.

Mr. Jack: May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his efforts in connection with the European fighter aircraft radar? He will be aware that there is still uncertainty surrounding that project. Will he confirm to the House today that the Government are still 100 per cent. committed to the project, and will he outline the future course of action that he sees being pursued, particularly with the West German Government, to resolve outstanding problems?

Mr. King: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. He will have noticed that, at the last meeting that I had with Dr. Stoltenberg, the West German Defence Minister, we both reaffirmed the commitment of our two Governments to the EFA project. In respect of the ECR90 radar, developments associated with it, the acquisition of Ferranti Defence Systems by GEC, and any remaining contractual matters, I hope that it will be possible for them to be resolved shortly. I also hope that it will be possible for there to be public confirmation of that by both Governments.

Recruitment

3. **Mr. David Young:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the number of *(a)* entrants and *(b)* leavers for each of the services in the latest year available.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Michael Neubert): In the 12 months ending 30 November 1989 there were 6,396 entrants and 7,609 leavers in the Royal Navy and Royal Marines; 22,063 entrants and 25,129 leavers in the Army; and 6,957 entrants and 9,570 leavers in the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Young: Do not those figures—coupled with the Statement on the Defence Estimates—show a clear dissatisfaction with life in the forces? Given the current reduction in tension between East and West, would not a more realistic policy be the reduction of arms and personnel rather than an attempt to redeploy the Wrens or to stockpile the successor to Lance?

Mr. Neubert: I have to listen attentively to the hon. Gentleman when he mentions dissatisfaction in the armed forces, because he was PPS to the last Labour defence Minister, Lord Mulley. At that time—the late 1970s—there were many premature departures as a result of the demoralisation caused by poor pay and conditions and the low priority given to defence expenditure. Under the present Government, with their buoyant economy, the problem of retention is caused by employment opportunities outside the forces, despite the greatly improved pay and conditions.

Mr. Wilkinson: In my hon. Friend's review—although he would probably not call it that—of the long-term consequences of any continued outflow of experienced and highly skilled personnel, will he examine the possibility of the reserves—particularly air and naval reserves—playing a much larger part in our defence, especially if the reduction in European tensions persists?

Mr. Neubert: I assure the House that recruitment is doing rather well. In 1988-89 it was up on the previous year, and the current recruitment year looks set to be better than the last. We are obviously able to recruit large numbers of young men and women to the armed forces. As for the future, we have achieved under this Government a cash settlement for the next three years, an increase of £1 billion in each year, an increase in real terms, and this does enable us to boost measures both to recruit and retain. The reserves are an important factor in our equation, and we shall continue to recruit extra members.

Mr. O'Neill: Hon. Members on both sides of the House welcome the contribution to be made by women in all three services. Will the Minister tell us, however, what preparations he has in mind to accommodate Mr. Colin Wallace in the armed forces if the Calcutt inquiry finds in his favour? Would it not be simpler to arrange a wider

inquiry that would cover all aspects of the matter, rather than dealing merely with the employment rights of one individual involved in the smear tactics of the 1970s?

Mr. Neubert: To the best of my knowledge, Mr. Colin Wallace was neither an entrant to nor a leaver of the armed forces in the year ending 30 November 1989. I can suggest only that the hon. Gentleman stays up late tonight and listens to the Adjournment debate on the subject.

Mr. David Martin: As my hon. Friend faces the problems of retention, will he always keep under review policy on retirement ages? The royal naval detention quarters at the Portsmouth naval base provide a good example of good service by people who would normally have retired, and I am sure that the services provide opportunities for a much more flexible policy on retirement age generally.

Mr. Neubert: I welcome my hon. Friend's commendation of flexibility in that regard, as in others. We shall be considering a wide range of imaginative measures to improve our retention rates. We are seeking to improve the quality of life through a major programme of refurbishment of married quarters, and trying to provide better professional job satisfaction by contracting out cleaning and the painting of ships. We are also seeking reduced turbulence in the Army by increasing the length of tours.

Nuclear Weapons (Anglo-French Co-operation)

5. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on current Anglo-French co-operation on nuclear weapon development.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Alan Clark): Discussions are taking place.

Ms. Primarolo: As the threat from the Soviet Union and the eastern bloc has diminished virtually to non-existence why is the Minister having discussions with the French about building a nuclear weapon? Will he tell us at whom the weapon is targeted, whether it breaches the intermediate nuclear forces agreement and how many billions of pounds will be wasted on that cold war attitude, when we could be spending money on diversification programmes to employ people in the defence industry?

Mr. Clark: I have some sympathy with the first part of the hon. Lady's question, but lead times in weapons procurement are such that we are discussing a weapons system that is unlikely to be in service until the first decades of the next century. I cannot predict, and nor can anyone else in the House of Commons, who the enemies of the United Kingdom will be or where they will be located.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: When looking at the extent and development of Anglo-French nuclear co-operation, will my hon. Friend bear in mind the recent modernisation by the Soviet Union of its own nuclear capability, including air-launched cruise missiles?

Mr. Clark: I certainly attach importance to Anglo-French nuclear collaboration. I hope that it will increase and produce good results in the near future.

Mr Hardy: Do not recent comments by French Ministers suggest that the French Government intend to have the last nuclear weapon on the planet; they will allow everyone else to disarm but will insist that the last nuclear weapon bears the tricolor alongside its registration number? In view of that ambition, will the Minister make sure that we are not tied down to follow the same policy, which may be unwise and utterly unimaginative?

Mr. Clark: I am glad to say that I have absolutely no responsibility for what French Ministers have to say.

Eastern Europe

6. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on defence policy in the light of the latest developments in east Europe.

Mr. Tom King: We shall continue to provide for the strong and assured defence of the United Kingdom, and to meet our NATO and out-of-area obligations. We shall maintain the conventional forces that we need for those tasks, together with an independent nuclear deterrent. The future structure of our forces will need to take account of international developments and progress in arms control negotiations; and naturally we shall continue to examine options for change, subject always to assuring the United Kingdom's fundamental security.

Mr. Leigh: My right hon. Friend is right to be cautious. The events in eastern Europe are as momentous as their outcome is obscure. Is my right hon. Friend aware of a growing body of opinion among those whose commitment to defence is not in doubt, that if we are to avoid dangerous delays in future, contingency plans may have to be made now for what may be forced on us: a traditional alliance based on strong maritime defence and a well-equipped, home-based Army? It would be a tragedy if the Government, having so decisively won the cold war, were to fail to inherit the uneasy peace.

Mr. King: I entirely understand why my hon. Friend speaks as he does. If he studies my answer, he may feel that it meets the points that he raised.

Mr. James Lamond: When the Soviet Union was alleged to be strong and in full command of the Warsaw pact, we were told that it was impossible to contemplate disarmament. Now that the talks at Vienna are going very well and President Bush is negotiating troop reductions with President Gorbachev over the heads of NATO, why does the Secretary of State for Defence still say that we need the strongest possible defence and to build more nuclear weapons? Will he tell us when and in what circumstances we can begin to dismantle our nuclear weapons?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman referred to the United States Government negotiating over the heads of their allies. I should like to pay tribute to the consultation from President Bush, Mr. Eagleburger, Mr. Gates and General Butler, whom I had the pleasure of meeting on Monday before I went to Washington, well in advance of the communication with the Soviet Union that confirmed the President's proposals.

Mr. Duffy: Two days' notice.

Mr. King: It was earlier than that. That consultation was extremely helpful to us, enabling us to support President Bush's proposals and the changes that are taking

place in eastern Europe, which we hope will endure and which offer the prospect of economies and changes in our defence arrangements.

Sir Jim Spicer: In looking to the future, will my right hon. Friend make it quite clear that he will not react to what I call the immediate "action man" calls from Opposition Members, but that any statement that he makes and any review that is undertaken will be measured, will take account of all the circumstances and will, in particular, bear in mind the absolute certainty that we need to change the weight of defence policy from armour to airborne?

Mr. King: We certainly need to ensure that we maintain effective security for our country and that we make an effective contribution to the Alliance. Those are our clearly stated objectives. The point was well put by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement that it is easy to stop things, but it is very much harder and takes very much longer to start them again. Some of the procurement processes in which we might be involved to ensure the long-term security of our country can be very long indeed.

Mr. Sean Hughes: Which specific conditions need to be satisfied for the Government to argue the case for NATO to revise its strategy on flexible response?

Mr. King: This is part of the general consideration that we take——

Mr. Hughes: I referred to specific conditions.

Mr. King: No, it is not a question of specific conditions. We must keep under review the changes that are taking place. There is not some quick trick or some smart answer to this problem. We must make an overall assessment of the threat that we face—whatever it may be or from wherever it may come, not just in western Europe—to determine what effective response to make.

7. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with his counterparts in NATO on the defence implications of recent developments within eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Mr. Tom King: The last NATO meeting was on 28 and 29 November. Since then, I have had meetings with my German and French colleagues, as well as my visit to Washington last week for discussions with Mr. Cheney. In addition, I met informally a number of other NATO colleagues last weekend at the Wehrkunde conference.

Mr. Viggers: Having sat through yesterday's debate on the Royal Navy, I should like to ask whether my right hon. Friend shares my concern about the siren voices of Labour Members urging us to contemplate how to spend the so-called peace dividend. Does he agree that this is the modern equivalent of what used to be called careless talk? The right attitude, surely, is to work carefully with our NATO colleagues, bearing in mind the comments of its Secretary General that there are many destabilising, and prospective destabilising, elements in Europe, not least of which is the uncertain status of a prospective united Germany?

Mr. King: My hon. Friend highlights the dishonest approach of the Labour party. It claims to support NATO's policy of maintaining an effective and credible defence, yet it claims that the peace dividend should be made available immediately for spending. The British people recognise that dishonesty.

Mr. Cartwright: As there is clearly a need to reshape NATO's forces to take account of the changing threat, is not it essential that that process is undertaken on an Alliancewide basis rather than by unilateral cuts? Is the Secretary of State happy that some NATO members seem to be determined to cash in the benefits of arms control before the cheque has arrived in the bank?

Mr. King: I certainly agree that any changes must be made after consultation among allies and must follow clear advice from the military advisers, under the leadership of Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, General Galvin, to ensure that whatever changes and reductions are made, they maintain the military credibility and effectiveness of Alliance defence.

Mr. William Powell: Is my right hon. Friend aware that yesterday I attempted to cross the Berlin wall at the Brandenburg gate and that despite my possessing a British passport the East German border guards, courteously and correctly, directed me to Checkpoint Charlie, because British citizens are able to cross from West to East Berlin only under a treaty signed in 1948? Is not that completely out of date, and will my right hon. Friend discuss with our NATO partners, as a matter of urgency, the revising of the arrangements for Berlin so that they more accurately reflect current and contemporary practice?

Mr. King: We welcome my hon. Friend back from his interesting visit and I take note of his point. I suppose that it is technically correct to say that it does not merely involve our NATO allies if he is seeking to regularise the point that he mentioned.

Mr. Douglas: The Secretary of State should not stay in the ranks of the Tory troglodytes when even someone as obdurate in relation to the Soviets as Richard Perle recognises that there are changes in the eastern bloc. Can the Secretary of State not bring himself to contemplate the distinct change in the threat from the Soviets and from the so-called Warsaw pact and move towards a reassessment of our defence strategy, which would enable us to look more carefully and fruitfully at Mr. Gorbachev's overtures and to give him some assistance in his present difficulties in the Soviet Union?

Mr. King: Everyone is aware of what appear to be the fundamental and irreversible changes that are taking place, but I counsel the hon. Gentleman to realise how fragile the present situation is. At the very moment when I was talking to some Congressmen in Washington last week, a message was brought in to say that President Gorbachev had resigned. It transpired subsequently that it was an incorrect rumour, but it brought home clearly how fragile the situation was. The nervousness in that room brought home to me just how insecure the present position is.

United Nations Forces

9. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what part British service personnel play in United Nations international peacekeeping and monitoring activities.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): We currently provide contingents to the United Nations force in Cyprus and the United Nations transition assistance group in Namibia. British Forces Cyprus also provide logistic support to the United Nations interim force in Lebanon and the disengagement observer force on the Golan Heights.

Mr. Shaw: Does my hon. Friend agree that over the years the record of British forces in supporting the United Nations peacekeeping forces has been admirable? Does he further agree that British forces might contribute quite a lot to a peacekeeping force in Cambodia? The great tragedy is that Cambodia has been invaded over many years by countries in its vicinity which have professed to instil a Socialist structure that has caused agony, dread and hatred in the Cambodian community? Does my hon. Friend agree that the presence of a British peacekeeping force with the United Nations in Cambodia would be a tremendous advantage for that country?

Mr. Hamilton: I share my hon. Friend's view that we should do everything that we can to help that unhappy country. I am aware that there is renewed interest in the possibility of United Nations supervision of a settlement in Cambodia, but it is too early to speculate on that, although I am sure that any request for British troops would be looked at sympathetically.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: In so far as the complement of British service personnel included Mr. Colin Wallace, who was also involved in monitoring activities as set out in the question on the Order Paper, and as I have sent the Secretary of State all the documents that were in my possession the other day, along with a 20-page written——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must relate his question to the question on the Order Paper. I am finding it difficult to understand it.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: In so far as I sent the Minister a copy of a 20-page document which was hand-written by Colin Wallace in 1973 or 1974, and in so far as it relates to Clockwork Orange and attempts to undermine individual Labour, Conservative and Liberal politicians——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must relate his question to the question on the Order Paper. It is unfair to the whole House to seek to introduce other matters.

Mr. Rathbone: Will my hon. Friend reassure the House that Her Majesty's Government would make available British forces to the United Nations should it become more involved in the war against drug trafficking?

Mr. Hamilton: It is a novel idea that the United Nations might become involved in the war against drug trafficking. We are already playing a role by giving assistance to Colombia and because of the presence of the West Indian guard ship in the Caribbean. However, it is a proposition that we would consider with sympathy.

Service Personnel (Benefits)

10. **Mr. Ray Powell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what advice is given to armed services personnel and their families about their eligibility for social security and housing benefits and poll tax rebate.

Mr. Neubert: In general terms, the eligibility of service personnel for social security benefits, housing benefits and community charge rebates is the same as for other members of the public. Therefore, the various leaflets issued by the Department of Social Security and local authorities are equally applicable to them. These are supplemented, where appropriate, by information from service sources. As for the community charge benefit, personnel have been advised of the existence of the scheme and are encouraged to check their eligibility for it.

Mr. Ray Powell: Is it not obscene that a top general can be receiving £95,000 a year, and an ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer £200,000 a year, yet our service men have to depend on handouts from social security? Is it not about time that the hon. Gentleman and the Government started to give real people real money instead of protecting the powerful and the rich?

Mr. Neubert: It is extremely disappointing that the politics of envy are still alive and well on the Opposition Benches. I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that the circumstances that he outlined would be very untypical. It would have to be a squaddie with a number of children and a wife not working to qualify for community charge benefit. This is because today's modern professional armed forces, under a Conservative Government, receive very good rates of pay.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my hon. Friend agree that far from the picture painted by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell), the members of Her Majesty's armed forces understand very well that their terms and conditions and pay under a Conservative Government are far better than they have ever been, and that they dread the thought of a Labour Government coming to power?

Mr. Neubert: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The pay and conditions of today's armed forces are a crucial factor in our sustaining their support, loyalty and dedication, and there is no question but that if a Labour Government dedicated to substantial cuts in defence expenditure were to be returned to office, the prospects for serving men and women would be very bleak indeed.

Mr. Wigley: In the context of state assistance for those who have served in the armed forces, can the Minister give any idea of the Government's latest thinking on the undoubted suffering of those who were exposed to radioactivity in tests in the south Pacific? Will he come forward with compensation payments for those people?

Mr. Neubert: That scarcely arises from the question on the Order Paper, but I can say that the Government's position remains the same: if there was evidence that such illness were directly attributable to taking part in those tests, compensation would be considered as a matter of course.

Mr. Sayeed: As there is no doubt in service men's minds that it is a Conservative Government who look after them best, can we make it easier for service men to vote?

Mr. Neubert: It is hoped that the introduction of the community charge scheme for serving men and women as well as for the civilian population will encourage them to play more of a part in their local community. To do this they are encouraged and advised to register electorally so that, by their votes, they can influence decisions at the town hall. We are anxious not to encourage a laager mentality among our serving men and women.

Arms Exports

11. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on offering advice to the Export Credits Guarantee Department on the insurance of arms deals with foreign countries.

Mr. Alan Clark: The insurance of arms exports, as for any other form of exports, is primarily a matter between the Export Credits Guarantee Department and the exporter concerned. My right hon. Friend may give advice where the Defence Export Services Organisation has been involved in the sale negotiations or where specific matters of defence interest are concerned.

Mr. Cousins: Since £2·5 billion worth of arms exports are covered by export credits guarantees, what steps does the Minister take to ensure that the end users of those weapons are not terrorists, official or unofficial? In particular, did the Minister okay the sale of radar equipment for Chinese fighter aircraft last summer when the blood of Tiananmen square was hardly dry on the ground?

Mr. Clark: There are strict controls which are applied jointly by a consultative process among my Department, the Foreign Office and the Department of Trade and Industry. They sometimes relate to the countries involved in particular conflict areas, such as the Gulf, and they are invariably broadly drawn to take into account human rights and other considerations. I was at the Department of Trade and Industry at the time of the sale of the radar to China. My recollection differs from that of the hon. Gentleman because I believe that the export licences were granted before Tiananmen square, not afterwards as he maintains.

Mr. Barry Field: Does my hon. Friend agree that events in eastern Europe could seriously affect the British arms export industry? Will he commission an appreciation of the effect on jobs and prosperity, particularly in the south-east, if there is a substantial cancellation of or downturn in arms sales from Britain?

Mr. Clark: No procurement decisions have been made which may relate to whatever interpretation my hon. Friend or others put on events in eastern Europe. But they will not necessarily have as severe an impact upon employment as my hon. Friend suggests.

Trident

12. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the United States Defence Secretary on future progress on the Trident programme.

Mr. Tom King: That was one of the matters that I discussed with Mr. Dick Cheney during my visit to Washington last week, when he confirmed to me that the Trident D5 system is expected to enter service with the United States navy at the end of next month.

Mr. Bennett: Does the Secretary of State agree that many defence analysts in the United States think that there is at least a 50 per cent. chance that the Americans will cancel the D5 programme, that there is grave concern about its technical problems, that there is great pressure in Congress for financial savings and that there is also a possibility that the United States will negotiate it away? Does not that leave the British Government with a major strategy problem and is not that the explanation for the talks with the French to try to develop a new nuclear weapon?

Mr. King: The answer to the latter part of the question is no. That is an entirely different sort of weapon. The hon. Gentleman cannot have listened to my answer. He says that he thinks the Americans might be about to cancel the Trident D5 system, but did he not hear me say that it is coming into service at the end of next month? He may also have noticed the proposal that the United States Administration put to Congress last week requesting funds for the 18th Trident submarine and 52 Trident 2 missiles.

Dr. Hampson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, given the potential instability in central and eastern Europe, and who knows what might be the longer-term commitment of the United States to Europe, it becomes even more crucial that we retain a credible independent nuclear deterrent so that potential territorial ethnic disputes in central Europe are not dragged into a wider context of the major powers?

Mr. King: My hon. Friend is aware that even if the Start negotiations are completed successfully, the Soviet Union will still be left with a substantial and modernised strategic capability. Contrary to what the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) implied about the attitude of Congress, I found that, not only in the Administration but among the responsible leaders in Congress, whatever other changes might be envisaged, the importance of preserving a strategic nuclear deterrent was clearly recognised throughout Congress.

Safety

13. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make it his policy that safety practices to be observed by members of Her Majesty's services and contractors undertaking work for them are subject to adequate monitoring and that the results of such monitoring is open to normal public access where no considerations of national security dictate otherwise.

Mr. Neubert: Service units and other Ministry of Defence establishments already carry out checks on all work activities as a normal routine to ensure the safety of the operation. They are also subject to periodic checks by the Health and Safety Executive. We do not intend to publish the results of such monitoring which are produced for internal management purposes. It is our normal practice to ensure that the public are properly informed in any case of wider concern.

Mr. Michael: Why does the Minister seek to limit public access to information when no national security is

involved? Is he aware that it looked ludicrous a few weeks ago when he tried to limit answers about broken hawsers on a submarine? Is he aware that it became absolutely ludicrous when a Member of this House was unable to get answers about an accident in his constituency, yet a member of the American legislature was able to get answers in Washington about that precise accident, which took place in Gwent? Does he agree that there is something wrong about that?

Mr. Neubert: The Government are required to observe the Health and Safety at Work Act etc. 1974, except in a very few circumstances which relate to national security and the defence of the nation. There is, therefore, no call for the wider access for which the hon. Gentleman asks because routine matters are dealt with under that Act and meet the requirements of the legislation. Other matters would, in any event, be classified.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Sean Hughes:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 6 February.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

This evening I shall attend a reception to commemorate the 150th anniversary of New Zealand's founding treaty.

Mr. Hughes: Will the Prime Minister explain which is the more effective way to enhance the security of this country? Is it by investment in a new short-range nuclear missile or by development aid to the economies of those very countries against which the missiles are targeted?

The Prime Minister: It is to keep a sure defence, both for the NATO area and for our out-of-area obligations. That means keeping good conventional forces, which also means keeping a nuclear deterrent, and reducing those conventional forces only in accordance with the CFE negotiations that are being conducted and in agreement with NATO.

Dr. Michael Clark: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 6 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Dr. Clark: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the high value of the green pound is adversely affecting farm incomes in a serious way? Does she agree that the green pound is an anachronism which should be abolished so that British farmers, like other British business men, can trade in the pound sterling?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend that the green pound system at present causes British farmers to receive lower prices than their competitors and that those lower prices must be eliminated by 1992 at the latest. We agree in the European Community that they should be eliminated and we also agree that progress should be made towards that objective in the forthcoming negotiations on farm prices.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Prime Minister accept the conclusions of Her Majesty's inspectors who say that one third of Britain's schoolchildren are getting a raw deal? Does she consider that to be a damning indictment of her Government?

The Prime Minister: I have read the inspectors' report very carefully—*[Interruption.]* Paragraphs 3 and 4 give the overall picture and perhaps a better summing-up than that given by the right hon. Gentleman. They say:

"The overall picture is of a service in which most of what is done is of reasonable quality or better. That is a sound basis for improvement and change and should be recognised as such."

Of course, they went on to say that a number of things were wrong and needed to be remedied—*[Interruption.]* —and they went on:

"Across schools and colleges around 70 to 80 per cent. of the work seen was judged to be satisfactory or better: roughly one-third of it at all levels was adjudged good or very good. That is not a profile of a service in great difficulty about its general standards of work."

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Prime Minister realise what she is really saying—that because on two thirds of cases things are not bad, it somehow justifies the fact that in one third of cases they are lousy? Does she recognise that the inspectors themselves—since the right hon. Lady wishes to quote from their report—say that the

"overarching picture must not hide the fact that there are serious problems"

and that in 30 per cent. of cases pupils are "getting a raw deal"? If she intends to try to get at the truth, why will she not go for the whole truth?

The Prime Minister: I have read out the general view and the words that I used were the inspectors', not mine.

Mr. Kinnock: It is in the report.

The Prime Minister: Yes, I have the report, too. I pointed out that some things still need to be done, although much is being done and improvements are being made under this Government. More is being spent on education per pupil than ever before; there are more teachers in proportion to pupils than ever before; the new national curriculum is warmly praised by the inspectorate; and there has just been a recommendation for teachers' pay which gives special help to those teachers whom we need, especially in the shortage subjects. It is a good report. It highlights things that need to be done. Those things are under way, including an extra £400 million capital support for further developments in schools.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister speaks of a good report. That shows how easily she is satisfied with the mistreatment of other people's children in education. She speaks of reforms. Which of her reforms will provide the maths teachers, the science teachers, the technology teachers and the language teachers where there are none or when, as the report says, they are inadequately trained? Which of her reforms—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members do not even send their children to state schools. Which of her reforms will provide books in libraries where there are no books; equipment in laboratories where there is no equipment; raise the morale of the teaching force; and stop the buildings from crumbling? *[Interruption.]* Eighty-five per cent. of parents are concerned. Which of those reforms will stop the children of this generation being failed and their future being betrayed?

The Prime Minister: I am glad that the inspectors faced their task more calmly that the right hon. Gentleman—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let us settle down.

The Prime Minister: More money is being spent per pupil in real terms than ever before. There are more teachers in proportion to children that ever before. There is a good new teachers' pay settlement that will help to recruit those teachers that are in short supply in particular subjects. There is a new national curriculum, and the inspectors' report says:

"Across schools of all types, the implementation of the national curriculum is beginning to bring about specific and general improvement",

"The majority of the primary schools visited had suitable and reasonably well-maintained accommodation".

Yes, of course there are still things to be done. There always will be, but it takes time—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members ask questions in a very temperamental way and refuse to listen to the answers. The education service is in far better shape than it has ever been.

East Germany

Q3. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Prime Minister whether she will pay an official visit to East Germany.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs made a successful visit to East Berlin and to the German Democratic Republic on 22 to 24 January.

Mr. Latham: Since a free and reunified Germany seems not only inevitable but imminent, will my right hon. Friend confirm that that will have immense implications for western defence policy? Will it not require detailed, radical and possibly uncomfortable consideration by the NATO leaders?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend that the German people are likely to vote for unification. I agree with him, too, that it is a matter not only for the German people but for other countries which will be seriously affected by it. Germany has also entered into obligations under the NATO Alliance—we must consider its effect on that—the Helsinki accord which 35 nations signed, and the four-power agreement on Berlin. We must agree these things. It seems that a lengthy transition period is needed so that they can all be properly worked out and so that the unification of Germany gives rise not to more worries but to greater security.

We must keep up the level of our defence, both conventional and nuclear, and not make changes until they are agreed with NATO or through the CFE talks.

Mr. Harry Ewing: Will the Prime Minister give an absolute guarantee that if the two Germanys want to unite she will not use the veto available to her under the 1954 convention signed by the United Kingdom, France and America, but will allow the will of the German people to prevail over her prejudice?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman had been able to listen to what I said, he would have found his question answered. It is also answered by the agreement in the Strasbourg communiqué from the European Twelve, after we had agreed that unification must come about in accordance with the other obligations that Germany has entered into—the NATO agreement and the Helsinki agreement, under which 35 nations agreed not to change boundaries except by peaceful accord—and in consideration of the four-power arrangement in Berlin. I do not think that there will be any difficulty with Chancellor Kohl in trying to meet these obligations. That is why he has formally proposed a considerable transition period, so that they can all be met.

Sir Alan Glyn: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, whatever happens in East Germany, the future of Europe is so uncertain and the Soviet Union is still building up such an enormous defence that, until matters have settled down, it is essential to retain the nuclear deterrent?

The Prime Minister: It is essential to keep—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to settle down and listen to the questions and the answers that are given.

The Prime Minister: It is essential to keep a strong and assured defence of the United Kingdom, both within NATO and outside it. That means effective conventional forces and reductions only in accordance with the negotiations taking place in Vienna and in agreed numbers between us. It also means maintaining a strong nuclear deterrent.

Mr. Cohen: Will the Prime Minister meet the people of East Germany and explain to them why she wants a whole new assortment of short-range nuclear weapons to blow them to smithereens at a time when they are struggling for democracy?

The Prime Minister: The changes and negotiations that are taking place will require some differences in the weapons that we need, but those can be brought about only by agreement with our NATO partners. That is absolutely vital to the future of Europe, and I was glad to see President Bush's assurance that American forces and American nuclear weapons will remain in Europe; it is a recipe which has ensured the security and peace of Europe for many a long year, and we should not discard it lightly.

Engagements

Q4. **Mr. John Browne:** To ask the Prime Minister is she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 6 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Browne: Does my right hon. Friend accept that in the United Kingdom cot deaths claim roughly 2,000 babies' lives each year and that the presence of certain fire resistant and preservative chemicals in cot mattresses appear to be the common cause? Will she agree to speed up the Government chemist's inquiry and, in the mean time, issue a Government warning to parents as a matter of urgency?

The Prime Minister: I share the great concern of parents and Health Service staff about the incidence of unexplained cot deaths, the suddenness of which is especially tragic for the families. The Department of Health has promptly commissioned the laboratory of the Government chemist to undertake a scientific assessment, which is under way. I understand that, so far, those tests

have not reproduced the result obtained by the independent researcher who proposed a link with fire-resistant chemicals. We shall, of course, consider whether it would be right to issue warnings in the light of the scientific assessment currently being undertaken—[HON. MEMBERS: "Come on!"] One was concerned to get an accurate assessment of the report; Opposition Members perhaps are not.

Mr. Ashdown: Is the Prime Minister aware that, despite his welcome speech on Friday, President de Klerk's Government today kicked out two British journalists—Mr. Paul Weaver of *Today* and Mr. Gareth Forby of Independent Radio News—apparently for unwelcome reporting of the Gatting cricket tour? Will the Prime Minister now realise that this is not the time to relinquish sanctions but the time to continue international action until a true democracy is established and Mr. Nelson Mandela and his people are free?

The Prime Minister: President de Klerk's speech was very widely welcomed—I believe the world over. As we agreed both at the last meeting of the European Community and in the Commonwealth, it is necessary to have encouragement for such steps as well as chastisement for what has not yet been done. We believe that when Mr. Mandela is released it would be advisable to relax some of the very minor sanctions that we have—in particular, the voluntary ban on new investment.

The right hon. Member referred to the two journalists. As he knows, President de Klerk announced on 2 February that the state of emergency would be fully lifted as soon as circumstances on the ground permitted. We support the freedom of the press and we have told the South African authorities that we regret the expulsions. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will look at the reasons that have been given for the expulsions. I am advised that one of the journalists entered South Africa as a tourist, failing to obtain the necessary brand of visa and permit. The other gave a first-person account of a demonstration at Johannesburg airport that greeted the cricket tourists' arrival but it later transpired that he had not been present. I emphasise that that is the explanation that the South Africans have given of the incident.

Criminal Justice

3.32 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Waddington): With permission Mr. Speaker I should like to make a statement about the Government's proposals for criminal justice—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. We cannot hear the Home Secretary.

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I ask hon. Members who are not remaining for this important statement to leave the Chamber quietly?

Mr. Waddington: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer).

With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the Government's proposals for criminal justice legislation, which we are publishing today in the White Paper "Crime, Justice and Protecting the Public".

In preparing these proposals for a coherent legislative framework for sentencing, our aim has been to ensure that offenders are punished according to the seriousness of their crimes and receive their just deserts, and to see that the public are properly protected. Really serious crime, especially serious violent crime, has to be followed by really severe punishment, and I am sure the House would agree that the right punishment for serious violent crime is a long prison sentence. But we know that prison can all too often reinforce criminal habits, and many more people convicted of less serious offences could be punished in the community, where they could repay their victims and do tough and demanding work for the community.

It is therefore important that the judges, before passing a custodial sentence, should satisfy themselves that no other course is right, and it is important that realistic options for punishment in the community should be available, with those options presented clearly to the courts. We therefore propose, first, that the Crown court should have a new power to impose a longer sentence on a persistent violent offender than would be justified solely by the seriousness of the immediate offence, in order to protect the public from serious harm from him. But the distinction between violent crime and property crime should be more clearly marked by changes: in the maximum penalty for theft, from 10 to seven years; and in the maximum for non-domestic burglary, from 14 years to 10 years. The maximum for burglary from a person's home, quite rightly, would remain at 14 years.

We propose, secondly, that new legislation should require a court to consider whether the offence is so serious that only a custodial sentence is justified. For all but serious offences the court would be required to give reasons for passing a custodial sentence and, before doing so, would have to consider a probation report setting out options for punishment in the community.

We further propose to increase the courts' powers to impose community penalties. There would be a new power to combine community service and probation. Community service ensures that the offender makes reparation to the community through unpaid work. Probation gives offenders an opportunity to sort out their problems and to lead a law-abiding life in future. We do not think that one should exclude the other. The courts would also, and additionally if appropriate, be enabled to make curfew orders, with monitoring, to keep offenders at home and away from their criminal associates at particular times of the day.

We plan new national standards for the most important aspects of the probation service's work, including preparing reports for the courts and running probation centres. We shall shortly publish consultation documents about some of these standards and about the future organisation of the probation service. We believe that the probation service should make more use of voluntary organisations and of the private sector to carry out its increased responsibilities effectively. The probation service will, however, keep its central role in supervising offenders and ensuring that court orders are carried out.

Many offences can be dealt with adequately by financial penalties. The priority should be offenders paying compensation to their victims, but fines could be used effectivly for more offences if they were assessed in units according to the seriousness of the offence and then converted into money according to an offender's means.

We believe that custody should be reserved for the most serious offenders. We can justify spending well over £1,000 per month in housing, feeding and clothing a criminal, and we can justify depriving an offender of the opportunity to maintain his family, compensate his victim, or make reparation to society, only when the offence is so grave that there is no realistic alternative to imprisonment. But when imprisonment is the right and proper sentence, it is essential that the sentence served should be more closely related to the sentence passed, and we are going to introduce new parole arrangements based largely on the recommendations of the committee set up to review parole arrangements in England and Wales, and chaired by my noble Friend Lord Carlisle of Bucklow. The Government are most grateful to my noble Friend and his committee for their really valuable work.

These would be the effects of the changes. First, remission, which at present reduces most sentences by a third and which is in addition to any parole granted, would be abolished. All prisoners would serve at least half their sentence in custody whereas at present most can be released after one third.

Secondly, those serving up to but not including four years' imprisonment would have to serve half their sentence, followed, except in the case of sentences under a year, by a period on licence under supervision.

Thirdly, those serving from four up to, but not including, seven years would serve at least half their sentence and would then be eligible for release on a selective basis until they have served two thirds of their sentence. The decision on this would be delegated to the Parole Board. When released they would be under supervision until three quarters of their sentence has expired.

Fourthly, those serving seven years or more would be subject to release on a selective basis after half their sentence, but the final decision will rest not with the Parole Board but with the Secretary of State.

The decision whether or not to release a person on parole would be clearly based upon the risk to the public of that person committing a further serious offence. We intend to take new powers to give policy directions to the Parole Board so that we can lay down these criteria. This would make for far greater consistency in the decisions to release, the conditions of the parole licence and the arrangements for supervising prisoners after release.

If a released prisoner is convicted of a further imprisonable offence before the end of his sentence, the court would be able to return him to custody to serve out the remainder of that first sentence, in addition to any sentence it gives for the new offence.

There are important proposals in the White Paper about young offenders. The juvenile court would become a youth court and would deal with offenders aged 17 as well as those aged 16 and under. We intend to increase the powers of the courts to make parents take greater responsibility for the offences committed by their children under 16. In particular, we intend to require parents to attend in all cases when their children are brought before the court on a criminal charge, and we are going to make it possible for the magistrates to take into consideration the means of a parent in deciding on the appropriate fine.

The Government firmly believe that in all we do we should have at the forefront of our minds the victims of crime. It is time to spell out what victims are entitled to expect and the help available to them, and to consider what more needs to be done. We shall therefore on 22 February, European Victims day, publish our victims charter. But the proposals I have outlined today should make sure that criminals are properly punished.

These proposals point to the most fundamental and far-reaching changes for at least half a century in the way we punish offenders in this country. They are part of our wider policies on crime, with the greater emphasis we have given to crime prevention and more help and support for victims. They offer just deserts to the offender and reassurance to the law-abiding citizen.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): May I begin by offering our strong support for the principles on which the White Paper is based? The only critical question that we have to ask about those principles is, why has it taken the Government so long to accept them?

May I assure the Home Secretary that we agree that it is right to draw a sharp distinction in sentencing policy between violent and sexually related crimes on the one hand and less serious crimes against property on the other? It is clearly right that those who commit violent and sexually related crimes should serve substantial prison sentences. It is equally right that less serious offenders should, whenever possible, be punished within the community.

Paragraphs 2.7 and 3.2 of the White Paper give a devastating account of the real effect of prison on first and trivial offenders. No one who reads them can doubt the wisdom of placing a greater emphasis on alternatives to custodial sentences, not least because prison is often more likely to promote a life of crime than to prevent it.

I offer the Home Secretary our support for a number of his specific proposals: reduction in some maximum sentences, relation of fines to ability to pay, requiring courts to consider the probation service's report before awarding a custodial sentence and then give reasons for insisting upon prison. We also support the abolition of partly suspended sentences and bringing 17-year-olds into juvenile courts.

Our specific questions and our areas of disagreement concern not the Home Secretary's objectives but the way in which he hopes to achieve them; not the principles, but the best way of putting the principles into practice.

The White Paper rightly talks about the need for more consistent sentencing, and implies that it could be achieved under existing arrangements. Why is the Home Secretary so sanguine about that prospect? There are still intolerable discrepancies between sentencing in different courts, sentencing of men and women, and sentencing of black and Asian British and other citizens.

For some time, the Government have been urging the judiciary to make more use of non-custodial sentencing, but very often the judiciary has not responded. Without taking further steps to ensure greater consistency, how can the Home Secretary be sure that his hopes will be realised? Why has he set his face against a sentencing council, which virtually all those who share his aim regard as necessary if his aim is to be fulfilled? Will he think again about the necessity and desirability of introducing such a council?

Is the Home Secretary confident that his proposals for combined sentencing will not produce a result exactly opposite to that which he intends? Is there not a risk that some courts will immediately apply simultaneously probation and community orders and, if the orders are broken or the offence is repeated, immediately impose a prison sentence?

We welcome the Carlisle report proposal to make probation automatic for prison sentences of less than four years, but what assessment have the Government made of the effect on the number of men and women serving custodial sentences if the Carlisle report is immediately implemented? If parole is awarded only when half the sentence has been served, will not the prison population rise by about 4,000? It would be absurd if the first effect of this White Paper was an actual increase in the prison population.

Can the Home Secretary explain the decision to alter the procedure for young offenders? We welcome the decision to allow 17-year-olds to appear before juvenile courts, but why is the Home Secretary proposing to alter the punishment available for 16-year-olds when there has been so much success in dealing with this age group in recent years?

The Home Secretary referred to the future statement he is to make about support for victims. Can he assure us that, when that statement is made, it will, as an absolute minimum, replace the rights to compensation which were removed or reduced by the Criminal Justice Act 1988? Will he also reconsider the change that he recently made in the threshold for those entitled to claim compensation for violent crime? Those changes removed the right to compensation from something like 10,000 people a year. Since he is to make the announcement on European Victims day, can we take it for granted that the Government will recognise the European convention on compensation for victims of violent crimes?

The White Paper makes very many references to the probation service and its importance to the Home Secretary's plans. Can we be promised that nothing that the Government do—of course, I refer to privatisation and loss of status—will undermine the service's morale?

Finally, I reiterate our support for the White Paper principles. The Government's task is now to achieve their stated aims of reducing both crime and the prison population from their present record levels. The real test of the White Paper is the determination and courage with which the Government put its principles into practice.

Mr. Waddington: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his generous support for the proposals. It is a little churlish to complain about the proposals only

[Mr. Waddington]

just having been brought forward because, during the past few years, a number of Criminal Justice Bills have passed through the House and paved the way for this measure. I mention in particular the 1983 Act and the 1988 Act. The community service orders are already in place and are being most successfully operated by the probation service.

I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for emphasising the need for us to make a bigger distinction between violent crime and property crimes. I took the trouble to read the Opposition's so-called "White Paper" on this issue. There is a great distinction between the approach suggested by the Opposition and the Government's approach.

We are determined to make the sentence served far closer to the sentence passed by making everyone serve 50 per cent. of his or her sentence in custody. The Opposition have shrunk from that most important conclusion which would give added protection to the public, and are determined to stick to a policy which would release into the community even violent criminals after they had served only a third of their sentence.

The right hon. Gentleman is entirely right: we must aim for more consistency in sentencing. However, he was less than just to the judiciary when he said that they had not responded to the calls which had come from this place for changes in sentencing practices. Far from it being the case, as was misstated by the right hon. Gentleman, that the prison population is at record levels, it has fallen by 2,500 in the past 12 months, not least because judges have responded to calls to send fewer young people to prison.

I hear what the right hon. Gentleman has to say about a sentencing council. There is no need for a new elaborate and formal structure which would interfere with judicial discretion. We certainly do not want to take action which might result in mandatory sentences which would mean far longer sentences and more people in prison than now. There is a danger of being forced towards a more rigid system.

The object we wish to achieve—a more coherent sentencing practice—can be achieved in four ways: first, by the new requirements which we shall place on courts so that they must give reasons for choosing a custodial sentence rather than punishment in the community, show that they are satisfied that only a custodial sentence is justified and consider options for punishment in the community before sending anyone to prison. Secondly, new maximum penalties laid down by the House send out signals to the judiciary that we believe that a greater distinction should be made between property crimes and crimes of violence.

Thirdly, at present the Court of Appeal gives guidance on sentencing, and there is every reason to suppose that it will use that power more frequently to achieve the result which this House undoubtedly wants. Fourthly, not long ago, the House gave the Attorney-General a new power to refer over-levient sentences to the Court of Appeal; that power was opposed by Opposition Members. However, it is clearly a most useful power, which is now being used effectively and playing a big part in achieving coherent sentencing practice. On top of all that, the Judicial Studies Board plays an even more active role with its training arrangements and the operations it carries out to disseminate good sentencing practice.

I take the point that the right hon. Gentleman made about the danger of magistrates and judges combining too often different forms of non-custodial sentences. We need to spell out the relevant and appropriate importance of one form of non-custodial sentence as compared to another.

The right hon. Gentleman asked me for an estimate of the effect of the proposals. I must refer him to chapter 9 of the White Paper. We point there to what would happen if one made a series of assumptions. Nobody can make a firm estimate of the precise consequences of each part of the package, but we can look to the future with confidence, and there is every reason to believe that this measure will have a downward effect on the prison population.

I should say, in answer to the right hon. Gentleman's question about young offenders, that, by setting up youth courts, which will deal with 17-year-olds as well as 16-year-olds, we have to face the fact that such courts will be dealing with young people at different levels of maturity. Therefore, it is essential that the youth courts should have flexibility in sentencing powers. They should be able to impose, for example, community service orders on a 17-year-old or on a 16-year-old, a supervision order on a 16-year-old, or a probation order on a 16-year-old, if he is as mature as a 17-year-old co-defendant. We want more flexibility to be available to magistrates in the youth courts because they have to deal with 17 and 16-year-olds.

I heard what the right hon. Gentleman had to say about the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board. We still have the most generous system of criminal injuries compensation in the whole of the western world, and I assure him that we shall proceed to ratification of the European convention on compensation for victims of violent crimes.

I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman was right to mention the morale of the probation service. I have been immensely impressed with the way in which the service has responded to the new challenges which it has had to face in recent years. The way in which it has operated community service orders should command the admiration of all of us. It knows that we are talking not of a slimmed-down, but of an expanded, probation service because of the new challenges that we have to face. Not only are there more community service orders for it to administer, but the new licensing provisions will mean more supervision of offenders released from periods in custody.

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): Would my right hon. and learned Friend agree that his White Paper proposals today are among the most radical and most practical to emerge for nearly 50 years, not least because he defines a proper use for the sentence of imprisonment? Secondly, he makes parents properly accountable for the wrongdoing of their offspring and thirdly, he proposes that hooligans will at last be dealt with in an accountable way, which the public would want.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Can we have a long answer?

Mr. Waddington: I shall be very brief.

I agree with what my hon. Friend has said about hooligans, and I do not think that we can over-estimate the importance of the new provision for curfew orders, which will be very relevant to the problem. I think that the proposals are both radical and practical. As for parental responsibility, the new powers for the courts to fine

children according to the means of their parents and to bind over parents, including those who refuse to be bound over, will also be extremely important.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Much in the White Paper will command a widespread welcome. It makes a clear attempt to distinguish between serious crimes and less serious crimes which are unsuitable for custodial treatment, and that marks a major step forward in penal policy.

Is the Home Secretary aware, however, that many people will have doubts about the efficacy of the measures that he is proposing? For that reason, and because the Court of Appeal guidelines have in the past proved such an ineffective way of bringing about consistency in sentencing—and reducing sentences that are extraordinarily long in comparison with those in other countries—we ask the Home Secretary not to set his mind firmly against the idea of a sentencing council and sentencing guidelines if his current proposals do not prove adequate.

Mr. Waddington: I doubt whether a new body would be able to achieve more than the present system. My understanding is that a sentencing council would merely lay down, as it were, guidelines on the appropriate sentences for particular categories of offence. There would always be cases in which an individual judge would have to deal with an individual offender in his individual circumstances. I think that the way I have set out the position—pointing out the various weapons already at our disposal to achieve consistency in sentencing—is very potent. Undoubtedly the Judicial Studies Board will make more and more use of its power to disseminate good sentencing practice.

I am grateful for the general welcome that the hon. Gentleman has given the proposals. Let me point out that we are not fighting against the tide but going with it, in the sense that we are pushing matters along a little faster than they might have moved otherwise. Credit must be given to the judges: the figures for sentencing practice, particularly involving young offenders, show that it has been changing, and that is one of the reasons for the fall in the prison population.

Mr. Steve Norris (Epping Forest): My right hon. and learned Friend and his ministerial team deserve the congratulations of the whole House for the welcome initiatives contained in the White Paper, coming, as they do, hard on the heels of the Government's success—a success that is unique in recent decades—in bringing down the recorded crime totals in Britain.

Bearing in mind that, until recently, the peak age of offenders in Britain was still 15 for both sexes, may I give a particular welcome to the proposals concerning parental responsibility? Surely there can be no more powerful weapon to reduce criminality in society than linking rights with responsibilities once and for all.

Mr. Waddington: My hon. Friend is entirely right. Parents, after all, are a child's first teachers, and have the first opportunity to inculcate an understanding of the difference between right and wrong, respect for the property of others and all the other values that are so important.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his congratulations. Let me make a full confession, however. I did not wake up one morning with a brilliant idea in my head; I went into the Home Office to find that a great deal of work had already been done, and nothing has been more pleasant than being able to get down to the job of finalising proposals on which so much work had been done before I arrived on the scene.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): I warmly welcome the Home Secretary's intention to give proper treatment to those found guilty of violent crime, and hope that those found guilty of violent rape will receive the toughest treatment of all. Will he, however, give more consideration to the victims of violence, especially when he comes to make his announcement about the victims charter? Will he in particular make improvements to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, which has proved pathetically inadequate to its task?

Mr. Waddington: I have to tell the right hon. Gentleman that the threshold of payments under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board recently went up, but the increase was more or less in line with inflation. As I said earlier, it is the most generous system of criminal injuries compensation in the western world. Recently, its power has been extended. The right hon. Gentleman may have read that in certain cases it can now make awards of compensation to people who have suffered shock and to women who decide to have children after a rape attack, so we are constantly extending the remedies it can afford to the victims of crime. I am very grateful for what the right hon. Gentleman said about violent offenders, and I hope that he wholeheartedly supports our plans to bring the sentence served closer to the sentence passed.

Dame Janet Fookes (Plymouth, Drake): May I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on a remarkably good package of measures? Will he expand on how the system of fining according to means will work—a reform that was advocated by the Select Committee on Expenditure in the late 1970s but turned down flat by the then Labour Government?

Mr. Waddington: The starting point should always be the seriousness of the offence. Then an appropriate number of units are allocated for a certain offence, and double that number of units for a more serious offence. The units are then translated into money terms according to the weekly income of the person before the court.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Could I refer the Home Secretary to paragraph 8 of the White Paper which deals with young offenders? I particularly welcome paragraph 8.23 which gives positive support for pioneering schemes. I have in mind the West Yorkshire probation service scheme, which has a bail information service. The Home Secretary will know that Armley prison in my constituency is most overcrowded and that, in the past two years, there have been five suicides among youngsters on remand there. Will the Minister assure me, the people of Leeds and the prison governor who has expressed such an intention, that the introduction of the White Paper will bring closer the day when the remand wing at Armley is phased out and practical support given to positive alternatives for young people in remand?

Mr. Waddington: What we want to achieve is fewer people being kept in criminal institutions when on remand. The best way to do that is to have more bail hostels and bail information schemes, so that the officer of the Crown

[Mr. Waddington]

prosecution service knows what arrangements are available for the accused person and can therefore persuade the magistrate that it is not necessary to keep somebody in custody. I am grateful for what the hon. Gentleman has said about the scheme in his part of the world, which incidentally is funded, at least in part, by the Home Office.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): I did not hear my right hon. and learned Friend say that the Government would pay the whole cost of the new measures. Bearing in mind that the Government pay the whole cost of people in prison, how much of the cost of the scheme does my right hon. and learned Friend expect to fall on the community charge payer in terms of the supervision of the new system of punishment and the production of the necessary reports to the courts?

Mr. Waddington: The criminal justice system is to a very large extent funded by central Government, and there will be no difference there. I do not think that I can help my hon. Friend as to the precise percentage, but the lion's share is and will continue to be paid by central Government. I am informed that 80 per cent. is paid by central Government.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Does not the Home Secretary agree that, for his reforms to be properly implemented, there has to be harmony between the various elements of the criminal justice service? Has he had a chance to see the evidence of the Director of Public Prosecutions to the Select Committee on Home Affairs last week, in which he said that police officers of all ranks were failing to co-operate with the Crown prosecution service? Does he not agree that that is a disgraceful state of affairs, and what proposals does he have to solve that difficult problem?

Mr. Waddington: That is not a matter for me, and it certainly is not covered by the statement. The hon. Gentleman raises an important matter, and I shall study the evidence that was given to the Select Committee.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the Gilbertian notion that the punishment should fit the crime is widely held by the general public, and that his statement on getting tough with violent sexual offenders will be popular? Does he further agree that the public want a charter on hooliganism and yobbish petty criminal behaviour by teenagers? Does the White Paper include any of the measures recommended by Lord Justice Taylor to deal with football hooligans?

Mr. Waddington: I mentioned curfew orders, which could be monitored by electronic tagging. One must remember that tagging is merely a means of enforcing an order. All hon. Members would agree that a curfew order has merit in itself. If it can be more effectively monitored and enforced by electronic tagging, so much the better. It certainly is relevant to the problem of hooliganism.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): If the Home Secretary is anxious to avoid the use of custody for non-violent offences, will he immediately stop the widespread and growing practice of his Department of using administrative detention powers for immigrants?

Mr. Waddington: I do not agree with a word that the hon. Gentleman has said. His comments have nothing to do with the subject that we are discussing. We are talking about punishment for criminal offences; we are not dealing with the difficult problem of what to do if somebody arrives on these shores without entitlement to be here. Nor are we dealing with the difficult problem of what happens if somebody is picked up in a community who is not supposed to be here but must be kept in custody until his removal.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): In joining almost every other hon. Member in congratulating my right hon. and learned Friend on his proposals, may I commend him especially for rejecting the idea of putting fetters on judicial discretion in sentencing? The trial judge is in the best position to determine the appropriate sentence, according to the circumstances of the case and the character and past experience of the individual. It would be undesirable if we were gradually to fetter that discretion and so produce a system of mandatory sentences.

Mr. Waddington: My hon. Friend is entirely right. No two offences are alike, so there must be judicial discretion. That does not mean that one should not aim for more consistency in sentencing practice.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): Government policy on law and order has relied heavily on political stunts and gestures, of which the short, sharp shock shambles was an obvious example. I hope that the Government have learnt the lessons of that political gesture.

When will the Government recognise the effectiveness and success of the traditional role of the probation service —I stress "the traditional role"—and properly resource it to allow it to expand? It is important that the Government should recognise that there is a clear correlation between their policies, which directly encourage greed and selfishness, and the record levels of crime that they have created.

Mr. Waddington: There is certainly nothing gimmicky about these proposals. All informed commentators will echo the statement made by the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook that these are important reforms.

I do not understand what the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) means by "the traditional role of the probation service." Its traditional role is to act as officers of the court. There is no doubt that it has responded most magnificently in recent years to the challenges that it has faced as a result of the expansion of community service orders. I give it all credit for that.

It is cheeky for a Labour Member to talk about a rise in the crime rate. Labour Members have never been over-generous in their support for the forces of law and order. Two Labour authorities have fought tooth and nail against crime prevention and neighbourhood watch. That shows the irresponsibility of Labour local authorities.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the police will greatly welcome his decision to crack down on serious crime and that they regard this sensible and balanced White Paper as most appropriate to the times in which we live? Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it will no longer be possible for a member of the public to say of a convicted, violent criminal that he will be out of prison in a couple of years or so, as a result of the decision that he has

announced today to abolish remission? Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the police and my constituents will be pleased by his announcement that any criminal serving seven years or more will complete half his sentence at the very least and will be set free only as a result of his decision, rather than that of the Parole Board?

Mr. Waddington: I agree with my hon. Friend. The abolition of remission and the adoption of the Carlisle proposals are immensely important. We have added to the Carlisle proposals in one respect. In the case of sentences of seven years or more, even when there is a recommendation from the Parole Board, if the Secretary of State thinks that there would be danger to the community if the person were released, he will have the power not to release him.

Mr. Corbyn: The Home Secretary must be aware that, in recent years, there has been deep concern about the safety of the evidence that led to the conviction of the Guildford Four. New evidence was submitted to him concerning the Birmingham Six and many have deep concern about the evidence against and prosecution of those who were imprisoned following the death of PC Blakelock in Broadwater Farm. In those circumstances, what consideration has he given, or is he prepared to give, towards establishing a new form of appeal procedure so that new evidence could be examined by judicial procedure rather than by a private committee of civil servants within the Home Office?

Mr. Waddington: The matters that the hon. Gentleman raises are of great importance, but they have nothing to do with the White Paper, which is concerned with sentencing policy. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the matters that he has raised are within the remit of Lord Justice May.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will my right hon. and learned Friend accept that my constituents will be very pleased that he is putting the accent on the victims, rather than the perpetrators of crime? Will he also accept our thanks for differentiating between crime outside, in the community, and crime inside somebody's home? Will he pay tribute to the neighbourhood watch schemes—there are 100 in my constituency alone—which are flourishing and preventing such crime?

Mr. Waddington: The Home Office has done a great deal of work in recent years to push along crime prevention. It has done marvellous work in bringing on stream the "safer cities" initiative and in encouraging neighbourhood watch, and I am grateful for what my hon. Friend has said about that. In our proposals, we are careful to differentiate between domestic and non-domestic burglaries, as people would expect.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): The Secretary of State will be well aware that the Achilles heel of his proposals is the judiciary, which has a considerable capacity to undermine any good intentions. He may have set his mind against a sentencing council, but has he thought about requiring each group of judges on a geographical basis to say why they refuse to use non-custodial sentences, what gaps there are and why they continue to use custodial sentences when they use non-custodial sentences elsewhere?

Mr. Waddington: A sentencing council would not get over the difficulty that the hon. Gentleman identifies. A sentencing council could establish good sentencing practice, but certain judges would still decide to sentence in a way that did not appear to correspond with that practice. One must have some mechanism to correct such errors and that mechanism already exists because a defendant can appeal to the Court of Appeal if he considers that the sentence is too tough and the Attorney-General can take to the Court of Appeal a case in which he considers that the sentence has been too lenient.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): Has my right hon. and learned Friend included, in the excellent White Paper, any reference to the sentencing of those involved in drink-driving cases? Is he aware of the very tragic case of my constituent, Martin Allsop, who was run down by a drunken driver on a zebra crossing and killed? When the case came to the Crown court, the driver was found guilty of careless driving, fined £250 and banned from driving for two years. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that that was not worthwhile or honourable British justice? Is there anything in the White Paper which will give hope to my constituents that proper justice will be applied in such cases?

Mr. Waddington: I can assure my hon. Friend that there is nothing in the White Paper to dissuade, let alone prevent, sentences for dealing severely with cases of drunk driving.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): I welcome the statement by the Home Secretary that the punishment will now fit the crime and that compensation will be paid to victims of offences, but I stress that this is much too late because, like the case cited by the hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames), a constituent of mine has suffered a severe disability because of an accident and she will not receive the assistance that is now being put before the House by the Home Secretary.

Will bail hostels be purpose-built rather than converted chapels or churches, which could be misinterpreted? Will the Home Secretary take note of the seriousness of these issues?

Mr. Waddington: I understand that in fact it is for the local probation committees to decide on the design of the bail hostels. I do not think that it is really for the Home Office, but I will bear in mind the points that are made by the hon. Gentleman. Of course it is always the case when worthwhile reforms are introduced that those who have suffered misfortunes beforehand are not going to be able to benefit from them, but I am quite sure that the hon. Gentleman's constituent will feel that we are now correcting what he apparently conceives is an injustice.

Several Hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is great pressure of time on the subsequent debate on agriculture, and I shall have to ask for a 10-minute limit on speeches. I will call hon. Members until half-past four, which will give Back-Bench Members exactly the same length of time that the Front Bench spokesmen took, but I would ask for brief questions, please.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will my right hon. and learned Friend assure the House that community penalties will be tough on the lager lout and on the hooligan? Can we be assured that they will be put to work

[Mr. Jacques Arnold]

to do something useful for the community, perhaps for the first time in their lives, such as picking up litter and clearing up the results of vandalism and the eyesores that we have it in our communities. Can we be reassured that they will actually be put to work?

Mr. Waddington: We shall lay down national guidelines for community service so that there is consistency. I can assure my hon. Friend that we have in mind that community service should be tough and demanding.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that among the many important matters touched upon in his excellent statement today, the one that has given the most concern to many members of the public in the past is that, when people are let out of prison early, for whatever apparently good reason, they then proceed to reoffend in the very near future? Is he aware that the proposals that he announced today to deal with that matter will be warmly welcomed, and will he tell the House a little bit more about how that would work?

Mr. Waddington: The general theme of the White Paper is just deserts and that a person is sentenced for the instant offence before the court. A persistent violent offender is one of the exceptions, and in such cases the court should be able to consider not only what is appropriate for the instant offence but what is necessary to add on to that appropriate penalty for the instant offence in order to protect the community within the overall maximum laid down by Parliament.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): I warmly welcome and congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on the statement that he has made to the House today, in particular the part which affects the responsibilities of parents for their under-age children. In view of this reinforced responsibility, does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it would be logical for parents to be given the right to at least be informed if their under-age children are prescribed contraceptive drugs or devices or have abortions performed upon them?

Mr. Waddington: That question raises wide issues, which I should be glad to answer on another occasion, but it does not have a great deal to do with sentencing policy.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): My right hon. and learned Friend will know that most people in Britain will be relieved that prisoners will stay in prison for the sentence that was thought appropriate when they were sent down by the courts, and that is a welcome move, but will he also take note of the wide welcome for the new youth courts, for which credit should be given, as my right hon. and learned Friend said, to my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten) for his work over many months, which will ensure that parental responsibility comes back into our judicial system? Will he consider whether parents should carry out community service?

Mr. Waddington: I would not advocate that, but I do advocate that, as at present, parents can be made to pay the fines which it is thought appropriate to impose on their children. It is high time that courts had the power to impose much more realistic fines so as to bring home to parents the true gravity of the offence, and I am all for exercising persuasion on parents to see whether we can obtain their attendance at some of the sessions when their children are taking part in community service orders.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): In reassuring the House that it is his intention that community service should be a rigorous rather than a soft alternative to imprisonment, will my right hon. and learned Friend also consider making community service available to youth courts for application to those under 16 as well as those above? May we hope to see a Bill incorporating all that in the next Session of Parliament?

Mr. Waddington: I think that I am right in saying that, for those under 16, the attendance centre is available, and there is no reason why attendance there should not involve a tough regime. I am not entirely convinced by my hon. Friend's argument, but I am prepared to study it.

Mr. Chris Butler (Warrington, South): Will my right hon. and learned Friend assure me that nothing in his proposals today will alter the present severe restrictions on parole for drug traffickers?

Mr. Waddington: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. A serious drug trafficking offence merits a sentence well over seven years, in which case parole could not be granted except by the Secretary of State.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): Will my right hon. and learned Friend say a little more about his proposal to use volunteers in the wider probation service? He will know from his professional experience, as do I, that, unfortunately, many criminal children come from feckless or criminal parents, or both, and they will never accept responsibility for their children's actions. In those circumstances, would it not be a good idea if the child were assigned to a sensible volunteer, on a one-to-one basis, to guide that child into adulthood, failing which the child would have to be put into care?

Mr. Waddington: We shall be publishing a Green Paper on the probation service in the near future, and that may answer some of my hon. Friend's questions. I have already made it plain that probation officers are highly skilled people who give advice to and prepare reports for the court and there is a strong case for their advising on the appropriate type of punishment. However, voluntary organisations such as the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders should be used to carry out individual programmes. After all, it is unnecessary for the probation service to run hostels. It is far better that voluntary organisations should do so.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that there will be trepidation among Conservative voters when they learn that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) supports his proposals, but that, when they read paragraphs 3.12 and 3.13 of the White Paper and realise that it is the Government's intention that those who are convicted of sexual offences, violent offences and offences involving the burglary of dwelling houses will receive longer prison sentences than before, they will be reassured, and I am sure that they will support my right hon. and learned Friend's twin-track policy?

Mr. Waddington: In this mood of bonhomie, I do not want to say anything nasty about the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook, so I shall content myself with saying that I agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware of the substantial support for his proposals to make parents responsible for young offenders. Will he challenge those who think otherwise to say who is responsible for young offenders if not the parents who brought them into the world?

Mr. Waddington: I shall certainly issue that challenge. It is somewhat surprising that, in its so-called "White Paper", the Labour party said nothing about parental responsibility.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): The right hon. and learned Gentleman will forgive me if I do not make the bonhomie total on this occasion. We in the Labour party welcome all converts, and much of the White Paper shows a conversion on the part of the Conservatives to many of the policies that we have been advocating, after they have been getting their policies wrong for 10 years.

The result of their policies has been an increasing crime rate—60 per cent. up in 10 years—overfull prisons and a criminal justice system that is seen not to be working. That is why they are introducing policies that we have been advocating for a long time.

There are objectives in the Government's proposals with which we agree, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said. But we must point out that the results of research into the sentencing policies applied throughout the country in different courts, from magistrates courts to Crown courts, show that something must be done to achieve uniformity in sentencing policy if justice is to be seen to be equal throughout the country. That leads us to believe that yet again there will have to be a Government backtrack or U-turn in this matter.

Any Home Secretary, when introducing a document such as this, must be aware that rehabilitating offenders in the community is a tough job. The right hon. and learned Gentleman paid tribute to the probation service and the social services. He was right to do that, because those services carry much of the load that goes with the responsibility of caring for and rehabilitating the offender.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman must also be aware that the work of those in the probation service and the social services must be undertaken against the background of other policies that the Conservatives have introduced in the last 10 years. Providing the right type of help to the offender and released prisoner is extremely difficult in the atmosphere and environment of the social security and benefit changes that have occurred during that time.

Great changes have been made in the policies of the Department of Health from the point of view of care in the community. Many people who are today in prison and who are coming into the criminal justice system should not be there. It is happening because of a misconceived care in the community policy adopted by the Conservatives over the years.

Mr. Waddington: I could not agree with the final remarks of the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), and, in any event, that matter has little to do with sentencing policy.

He began by congratulating the Government on introducing policies which, he said, Labour had been advocating. He has it slightly wrong. Labour is not advocating what we are proposing. Labour is still soft on the issue of parole and is still saying that violent offenders should be released on parole after serving only one third of their sentences. Therefore, I shall not be put in the same bracket as the Labour party, with which I am in fundamental disagreement on that important point.

The hon. Member for Huddersfield went on to talk about sentencing uniformity. Nobody is after that, because sentencing uniformity is unattainable. We are concerned with more consistency of sentencing practice, and I spelled out how that could be achieved by the weapons already at our disposal.

I pay tribute to the probation service. I have done so already, and I do so again.

Dorlux (Redundancies)

4.34 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the announcement this morning of 150 redundancies at A. Sykes and Company—better known as Dorlux—bed manufacturers, in Halifax."

According to the management, those redundancies are being made as a direct result of the Government's economic policies. High interest rates and a decline in consumer spending are the reasons given for the proposed job losses. In fact, after the irresponsible consumer boom sponsored by the Government, and within the context of a 7·7 per cent. inflation rate, the Government are now trying to put the brakes on the economy through their high interest rate strategy.

That is undermining economic growth and investment and is slowing down the rate of productivity. Not only will high interest rates and the decline in investment make our long-term inflation and balance of trade position even worse, but they will mean a rise in unemployment, as we see with the latest redundancies in my constituency.

In spite of some welcome jobs from the Halifax building society, Halifax remains—as do many towns in the north—a manufacturing town. For generations, people have used their skills to manufacture goods to sell in the marketplaces of the world. Dorlux is a well known name with a reputation for producing quality goods. The Government should understand that the 400 people who work there have real jobs. The 150 people who will be made redundant want real jobs and work, not some Mickey Mouse scheme that helps the Government to fiddle the unemployment statistics.

Those redundancies need never have happened. We are entitled to ask Tory Ministers what twisted logic allows them to claim as a success the slowdown in the economy that leads to those sort of job losses. How many more jobs have to be lost before this madness stops? Interest rates have increased 11 times in the past 18 months, and our interest rates are the highest among the leading industrial nations.

After 10 years of this Government, Britain stands on the brink of another damaging recession. The manufacturing base in my town suffered severely at the beginning of the 1980s, causing great misery. Between 1979 and 1989, the north lost 30 per cent. of its manufacturing and employment—almost 1 million jobs—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry that the Minister finds it funny. We certainly do not. We cannot afford to lose another million jobs. The House should debate this issue immediately and make it clear to the Prime Minister——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady has had her three minutes.

The Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) seeks leave to move the Adjournment of the House——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): She was interrupted.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The hon. Member seeks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that she believes should have urgent consideration—*[Interruption.]* Order. These are serious matters—namely

"the announcement today of redundancies at A. Sykes and Company, bed manufacturers."

I listened with care to what the hon. Lady said. As she knows, I have to decide whether her application comes within the Standing Order and, if so, whether the debate should take priority over the business set down for today or for tomorrow. In this case, I regret that the matter she has raised does not meet the requirements of the Standing Order. I cannot, therefore, submit her application to the House.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Well, we have a very heavy day ahead of us. What is the hon. Gentleman's point of order?

Mr. Corbyn: Like you, Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the Standing Order No. 20 application by my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) There was one interruption. It is convention that the Minister should come and listen to the application lest you, Mr. Speaker, should grant it. He did not listen—he was smirking and laughing throughout and talking to his hon. Friend the Minister for Corporate Affairs. My hon. Friend was only drawing attention to the misery created by the market forces——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that we can raise the level of interventions. Interventions such as that of the hon. Gentleman do not help in any way.

BILL PRESENTED

TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT 1984 (AMENDMENT)

Mr. Jimmy Hood presented a Bill to amend the Telecommunications Act 1984 so as to make it a criminal offence to send, or allow to be sent, certain types of message by means of a public telecommunications system: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second Time upon 30 March and to be printed. [Bill 63.]

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS &c

Ordered,

That the draft Hill Livestock (Compensatory Allowances) (Amendment) Regulations 1990 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

Motor Trade (Consumer Protection) Bill

4.40 pm

Mr. Gareth Wardell (Gower): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the law relating to the supply of unroadworthy motor vehicles and trailers and the alteration of vehicles so as to render them unroadworthy; to regulate the manner and circumstances in which vehicles may be supplied, repaired and serviced; to regulate the way in which mileage information relating to motor vehicles is recorded; and for connected purposes.

The purpose of the Bill is to protect the consumer from those motor traders who practise dishonesty, deception and fraud. This is by no means all motor traders, and I wish to say at the outset that national organisations such as the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders and the Vehicle Builders and Repairers Association have contributed to consultations about the Bill and support the proposed measures. Dishonesty, deception and fraud are, however, rife in the motor trade and the time is long overdue when these problems should be tackled by legislation.

Each year, 7·5 million second-hand cars are sold, half of them through the motor trade. The Institute of Trading Standards Administration reports that three out of every four of these cars will be sold in an unroadworthy condition. The law requires and consumers expect that vehicles offered for sale are safe to be on the road. The Bill does not create a new offence or impose onerous restrictions on the trade, but, as was recommended in the North report, through the amendment of section 75 of the Road Traffic Act 1988, the law, and the rights and exceptions of consumers, will be strengthened and made more effective.

Trading standards officers are responsible for consumer safety in almost everything from disposable napkins to funerals, yet, because cars are exempt from the provisions of the Consumer Protection Act 1987, the customer buying a car—probably one of the most expensive undertakings after home buying—enjoys much less protection. The Bill therefore proposes to give trading standards officers powers to inspect used cars for sale on garage forecourts to check that they are roadworthy. If a vehicle offered for sale is not roadworthy, the dealer must indicate this on the vehicle's windscreen and documentation.

These steps would mean that the motor trade and the sale of used cars would be covered by laws similar to those already operating for other goods under the Consumer Protection Act. Too often, consumers are sold cars that are potential death traps to both owners and other road users.

The provisions of the Bill will also apply to hire vehicles. In a survey of 12 hire companies in Mid Glamorgan trading standards officers found that 13 of the 16 vans and tipper trucks examined, including vans used for furniture removal and waste disposal trucks, were unroadworthy. They were so unsafe that they were banned from the county's roads. Only one vehicle had no faults at all. Companies that use hire facilities may well be unwittingly putting their employees at risk.

The Bill also tackles another problem, the sale of so-called insurance write-offs. An old horse racing practice consisted of switching two identical horses immediately before the start of the race to beat the bookies and punters. It was called "ringing". The ringing of cars is now big business, and its success depends upon the present unsatisfactory arrangements for dealing with write-offs.

When a severely damaged car is sold, the vehicle registration documents go with it. If the wreck is purchased by a criminal he will then steal a car of the same year, model and colour, switch the wreck's registration, chassis and engine numbers to the stolen car and openly sell his stolen vehicle for the full market price with a "clean" registration document. That is today's ringing.

The car thief makes thousands of pounds for a few hours' work. The insurers pay out on the wreck and on the stolen car. The consumers' car insurance premiums must reflect the scale of this type of crime. The Bill proposes that when a car is assessed by insurers as a write-off the registration document is surrendered to the driver and vehicle licensing centre. This simple and basic measure, as advocated by the ACPO report of the working party on police examination of relicensed, total loss motor vehicles and the 16 consumer organisations, under the chairmanship of Sir Gordon Borrie at the Office of Fair Trading, will virtually eliminate ringing.

The Bill will also require insurers to inform the DVLC of a write-off and the reason for the write-off. At present this is a voluntary arrangement and not all insurers comply. The DVLC receives notification of well over 280,000 written-off cars a year. The Automobile Association and the Institute of Trading Standards Administration estimate that around half of these go back on the road. They will be more or less seriously damaged cars, repaired or rebuilt more or less properly. They will have had no safety check, and the purchasers will buy at full market price without knowing that, a short time ago, the cars were more or less wrecks. An AA survey in 1985 found that one in eight accident-damaged and repaired vehicles was immediately unsafe and 50 per cent. still had defects. In a Royal Automobile Club survey 3 per cent. of all the cars examined had had post-accident repairs, and 20 per cent. of the repairs had been done badly.

The DVLC computer already marks the records of cars notified as write-offs. At present this information is used by the police to check relicensed cars, although checks are minimal because of the scale of reregistrations and the lack of police manpower. The Bill proposes that a write-off will be relicensed by the DVLC only after the rebuilt vehicle has satisfactorily passed a safety test, and that the new registration document will be marked to indicate that the car has been a write-off. These proposed measures would meet both the interests of consumer safety and the right of consumers to know that the cars had been written off.

The Bill will therefore meet a fourfold consumer interest in write-offs: it will reduce theft and resale of stolen cars, protect insurance premium levels, improve car safety and allow consumers to know what they are buying.

The Bill will also give the Secretary of State powers to make laws to prevent the "clocking" of cars, where the number of miles is put back. This practice is one of the major sources of fraud, amounting to £100 million a year. One in five of the second-hand cars sold each year is likely to have had its recorded mileage doctored,. Every 1,000 miles reduced on the car clock adds £30 to the value. Unscrupulous dealers have been known to make up to £1,000 on a car sale from this business. Every year since 1980, between one in two and one in four of all convictions under the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 have been related to clocking.

[Mr. Gareth Wardell]

The simplest means of preventing such fraud is for a record of the mileage to be made when the car tax is due every six or 12 months and by buyer and seller when the car changes ownership. The Office of Fair Trading has suggested that this scheme could be made to be self-financing. However, the Bill leaves the Secretary of State free to choose to adopt whichever scheme he thinks appropriate and most able to protect the public from this massive fraud.

The proposals in the Bill are supported by many organisations, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Gareth Wardell, Mr. Tom Clarke, Mr. Stephen Day, Mr. Nigel Griffiths, Mr. Iain Mills, Mr. Barry Sheerman and Mr. Gary Waller.

MOTOR TRADE (CONSUMER PROTECTION)

Mr. Gareth Wardell accordingly presented a Bill to amend the law relating to the supply of unroadworthy motor vehicles and trailers and the alteration of vehicles so as to rend them unroadworthy; to regulate the manner and circumstances in which vehicles may be supplied, repaired and serviced; to regulate the way in which mileage information relating to motor vehicles is recorded; and for connected purposes; And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 23 February and to be printed. [Bill 68.]

Agriculture

[Relevant documents: European Community Documents Nos. SEC (89) 2097 on the agricultural situation in the Community in 1989, 8076/89 on set-aside, 10912/89 on definition of lambs fattened as heavy carcases, 7548/89 on monitoring of export refunds, 7549/89 and 10850/89 on scrutiny of European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (Guarantee Section) expenditure, 7566/89 on physical inventory checks for intervention stocks, and the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 22nd September 1989 on the sheepmeat regime; Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee on European Legislation on Thursday 1st February 1990 (HC 188—i.]

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I should announce to the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken). In view of the large number of hon. Members who wish to take part in the debate, Mr. Speaker intends to impose a 10-minute limit on speeches from 7 o'clock.

4.50 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Gummer): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. COM. (89) 660 relating to prices for agricultural products and related measures for 1990-91, 7010/89 relating to adjustment of agricultural structures, 8309/89 and 8877/89 relating to the quota system in a milk sector, the Court of Auditors' Special Report No. 1/89 on the agrimonetary system, the proposals described in the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food relating to 16th January on use of agricultural commodities in the non-food sector and of the Government's intention to negotiate an outcome on the price proposals which takes account of the interests of United Kingdom producers and consumers and of the need to maintain the progress made in reforming the European Community's Common Agricultural Policy.

This is a good time for us to be discussing these matters, not least because we are now beginning the price-fixing negotiations in the European Community. I am most interested to hear hon. Members' views and, as I suspect that many hon. Members will support the Government's policy, I hope to be able to use their comments in our debates in the European Council. This is also a most convenient date for the debate, because we published today the 1989 edition of "Agriculture in the United Kingdom", which is an improved version, copies of which are available—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where are they, then?"] Copies are available; if there are none in the Vote Office I apologise.

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister has said that the document is available, but it is not. It is not available in the Vote Office, and we have been informed that we cannot get it unless we submit a green form and wait for it to be sent by post. In view of that fact, I suggest that we should not debate the document today.

Mr. Gummer: I should be quite happy not to debate the document today. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman should have found it unavailable, although he had only to ask, and I would have put matters right. I will supply him with a copy—[HON. MEMBERS: "What about us?"] And any other hon. Member who needs the document. I note

that we are having a ritual beginning to this debate, because there is not much that divides us in the issues themselves.

Hon. Members: Yes, there is.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister is admitting contempt of the House. That is what he is doing, and I want you to rule on this. More often than not, when we are told that reports are in the Vote Office, we can go and get them, albeit late, but in this case, the Minister stood there at the Dispatch Box and said that copies were available when they were not available. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) has one, but I do not know where he got it.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): No.

Mr. Haynes: The Minister has not sent Opposition Members a copy of the report. He wants to come off it; he is a fly-by-night.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that this matter has now been dealt with, and that we can get on with the debate.

Mr. Gummer: The document is not a command document: it is available in the way in which it has always been available. Opposition Members are merely trying to score points. Previous editions have always been available in this form and the Opposition have never complained before. If hon. Gentlemen wish to make a complaint, I am quite happy to answer it, and to ensure that they have what they need.

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): What about hon. Ladies?

Mr. Gummer: Yes, and hon. Ladies. I would not dream of excluding the hon. Lady.

There is no problem between the two sides of the House. I am quite happy to consider whether the system that we have always operated for the circulation of such documents should be revised, but I do not see how I could possibly be accused of contempt of the House.

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): The Minister usually is.

Mr. Gummer: If the hon. Member wishes to continue making sedentary remarks, I have no doubt that we shall all listen with our usual interest.

In 1989, there was an increase in farm incomes of about £200 million, or 16 per cent., on the low figure for 1988, but I would not put too much emphasis on that. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] For a reason that hon. Members know is perfectly right: farming is not one business but a whole range of businesses. Although that aggregate figure may show an increase it does not help the farmer who has had a poor year to be told that other farmers in other parts of the business have had a rather better year.

The figure that I have cited is useful only in making a comparison with previous years and it is fair to say that, in general, this year has been better than the previous year. I lay no more emphasis on it than that. The figure is largely based on improvements in the intensive livestock, potato and dairy sectors and in my other sectors, such as the arable sector, things have been more difficult.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): My right hon. Friend has referred to the dairying sector. Farmers are fair-minded people and they cannot see anything fair about receiving 19·5 per cent. less than other people because of the green pound rate. I know that my right hon. Friend is fighting hard, but will he tell the Community that the farmers of this country will simply not tolerate a mere one-third devaluation? They want the whole thing—not in 1992 but now.

Mr. Gummer: I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) has raised that matter, as I was about to move on to what seems to be the most important point in the negotiations that we are having at the moment—the green pound. I know that my hon. Friend will accept the point that I have to make to her.

The concept of dealing with farmers at a time of surplus is itself a difficult one. When supply exceeds demand, farmers lack confidence in the future because they do not have the security of market that they do when there is a shortage. Moreover, they are concerned that competition should be fair competition. There is no doubt that times of surplus are difficult times, and the one thing that makes a difficult time impossible to bear is the fact that someone else is not bearing the same burden. That is why the devaluation of the green pound is essential, and why it ought to be a substantial devaluation.

My hon. Friend asked me for a specific commitment. I remind her that I am engaged in negotiations in which the United Kingdom is on one side and all the other member states are on the other, because no other country has an interest in the change in the green pound. I hope that my hon. Friend will agree that while those negotiations are in progress, which are bound to go on at least until the end of March and at perhaps even into the first fortnight of April, it would be better if I was not too forthcoming about my negotiating tactics. It is nevertheless important to try to achieve an end, and I shall try to describe what I believe that end should be.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gummer: I shall give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Gill: My right hon. Friend pointed out that we are one against 11. Does he agree that the other 11 countries have a big vested interest in maintaining the status quo, which is to their great advantage and to our great disadvantage?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend has put his finger on it. Anyone who thinks that the negotiations will be easy or that the Commission's proposals will be automatically accepted by the Council does not understand the negotiating process.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Leigh: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gummer: I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), when I have finished this point.

Hon. Members: What about Opposition Members?

Mr. Gummer: I thought that, when I gave way last time, I was giving way to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle, but my hon. Friend the Member for [illegible]dlow (Mr. Gill) thought that I was giving way to him. It is perhaps only fair to give way first to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle; then I shall give way to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman).

The House should recognise that, in itself, a change in the green pound will not increase the incomes of farmers: it will merely remove the decrease in the incomes of farmers that would otherwise be there. [HON. MEMBERS: "What?"] I shall explain, although if hon. Members do not understand, they cannot have been listening to the farming lobby. The farmers understand what the green pound means, which is that British farmers get less for their products than farmers in other parts of the Community.

By putting that right, one would only be putting the returns of British farmers on a level with those of other farmers; one would not be giving British farmers a price increase or an advantage. The trouble with the negotiations is that our colleagues in the European Community tend to suggest that, somehow, a change in the level of the green pound is a gift to the British farmer. I want to make it clear that that is not how the Government see the situation. The Government see this quite clearly as removing a disadvantage rather than as giving the British farmer an advantage.

I have agreed to give way to hon. Members in order, and I now give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle, after which I shall give way to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow.

Mr. Leigh: My right hon. Friend has outlined the problem very well. Does he agree that, as the president of the Country Landowners Association said to him in a recent letter, the association accepts that market forces will have to play a larger part in farming in the future? My right hon. Friend ought to accept that. Will he please make it absolutely clear that he is talking about giving our farmers—as a Member for a Lincolnshire constituency I represent some of the most efficient farmers in the world—a fair competitive position, a level playing field? Our farmers simply want a chance to compete. Can my right hon. Friend assure the House that he will fight his corner? That is what our farmers want to know.

Mr. Gummer: That is precisely why I have been trying to say that we must get out of the habit of suggesting that, somehow or other, this is a gift to farmers—something to advance them—rather than the righting of a wrong. That is the distinction that many of our friends in the European Community find it difficult to follow. They—very often pushed by their own farming organisations—feel that farmers in Britain are being given an advantage, rather than having a disadvantage removed.

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central) *rose*——

Mr. Gummer: I promised the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow that I would give way to him next, and it would be unfair of me not to do so.

Dr. Godman: Clearly the Minister must press for fair treatment for farmers in the United Kingdom. Surely, however, he must acknowledge that in these negotiations he has responsibilities that extend beyond the shores of the United Kingdom. Among the people concerned are the cane sugar producers in the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. No doubt they would welcome an assurance concerning their interests. My constituents working in one of the refineries here would welcome an assurance that the interests of the cane sugar producers of the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries too will be looked after.

Mr. Gummer: I would have come to a specific reference to that matter, as I did in my evidence to the Select Committee on European Legislation.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): I hope that my hon. Friend will not mind taking a little longer on the central point of the green pound. His efforts in Brussels on behalf of the entire farming industry of this country are greatly appreciated. Will he, however, say loudly and clearly, in this House today and in the Agriculture Council in Brussels, that there is no possible reason—in economics, in equity, or in logic—for farmers being unable to sell their products within the Community at prices expressed in terms of real currencies rather than in terms of the artificially administered currency of the green pound? Every other business deals in real currency.

Mr. Gummer: I have said again and again that I do not believe that a system that results in the farmers of one country getting an inferior price merely because of the arrangements between currencies is acceptable. I am absolutely committed to the total dismantling of such a system. I am appalled that there are in the Community some people who do no accept the statements of the Court of Auditors that it would be impossible to have such a system after 1992.

I am committed to ensuring that we get a proper deal for the British farmer. However, I adopt that attitude in a situation in which we have a large number of friends but few immediate allies. I hope, therefore, that my hon. Friend will allow me to leave the terms of negotiations to one side. It must be a matter of getting the best that I can in the context of those negotiations, which will go on for some time.

Mr. Lord *rose*——

Mr. Gummer: I really must move on. I will give my hon. Friend a chance later.

Mr. Lord *rose*——

Mr. Gummer: Very well: I give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Lord: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend.

I make no apology for speaking about the same point, because it is the most important one that we have to consider. There has been talk about the incomes of farmers generally. My right hon. Friend must be well aware of the position of cereal farmers, whose profitability is now in real danger. There is great concern about this matter. Even if the people in Europe with whom we negotiate are not as concerned about our farmers as we are, surely they must be concerned about our opinion of their fairness. It is absolutely crucial, as hon. Members on this side of the House have said, that my right hon. Friend go to Europe with the firmest possible resolve to get the fairest possible deal for our farmers, so that they may see that Europe is fair.

Mr. Gummer: I say again that I am totally committed to the concept that the European common agricultural policy cannot be run on the basis of a principle that results

in some farmers getting a substantially lower price than others do because of the way that the agrimonetary system works. However strongly one is opposed to the CAP system, that cannot be right.

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian) *rose*——

Mr. Gummer: I really am going to get on now. I hope that the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) will be interested in what I am about to say. He may wish later to interrupt on this point.

Mr. Eadie: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I realise that the Minister is doing his best to explain, and that he is giving way. However, he must realise that he is responsible to the whole House. It is his right to decide whether to give way, and it is our privilege when he does, but he must give way to Members on both sides. Otherwise he will leave himself open to being known as the most unfair Minister of Agriculture we have ever had.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The whole House knows that it is a matter for the Minister whether or not to give way. In fairness, I should point out that he has given way already to hon. Members on both sides.

Mr. Gummer: I have tried to give way to hon. Members interested in a very wide range of different problems. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) *rose*——

Mr. Gummer: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will contain himself for a moment.

In particular areas of agriculture, there are very special problems that are even more sharp this year than they were last year. I mentioned the overall figure—and increase in farming incomes—and I hope that hon. Members will feel that, in not laying too much emphasis on that, I was being fair. In one area in particular there was a decrease in farming incomes. In that regard, I was particularly concerned, even outwith our negotiations on the green pound, to give some special help. That is why, last week, I announced an increase in the hill livestock compensatory allowances for the ewes of hardy breeds. That represents £5·2 million extra money going into that very difficult area of agriculture.

Perhaps the House will agree that when, in our discussions in the European Community, we come to the question of the best way of helping our farmers to look after the land and to produce the food that we need, we must first of all ensure that there is fairness as between farmers. Secondly, we must look in particular at those areas where farming is very difficult and where farming practices are of particular importance in the context of the environment. The fact is that, in our highlands, the kind of countryside that we have grown to expect and accept can survive only if it is properly farmed. Therefore, the retention of sheep on those hills is a crucial part of any sensible environmental policy.

However, I still believe that we have not quite got the balance entirely right. That is why we were willing to press the Commission to allow us to introduce into the HLCA concept a rather greater element of conservation. We shall be looking, over the coming months, at the best way of doing that. Hon. Members on both sides of the House will probably agree that it is right that we should do so.

Mr. Salmond: I thank the Minister for giving way eventually; in the absence of a Scottish Office Minister, it is important that he gives way to Scottish Members.

On marginal farming, does not the Minister accept the cumulative disadvantage because of the green pound differential? Will he remind the House what the cumulative disadvantage has been over the last 10 years? As the Government came to power, if I remember correctly, on a pledge to eliminate the green pound differential, is there not a strong case for proceeding faster on eliminating the green pound differential than either the Commission or the Government propose?

Mr Gummer: It is difficult to accept that it could be faster than the Government propose. The Government propose that I should use my best endeavours in the negotiations to get the best deal. I find it an odd concept that the hon. Gentleman assumes that I should propose something when I have said specifically that we will negotiate. If we are negotiating, we have to negotiate, we should not start by saying to the people with whom we are negotiating, "That is the bottom line," or we would not get the best answer. I do not know how much negotiating the hon. Gentleman has done but I am sure, whatever he has done, that he will agree that that is a reasonable basis.

As for the hon. Gentleman's other comments, we are committed to the eradication of the green pound and its replacement by a system which does not disadvantage farmers as they have been disadvantaged in the past. I remind him that there have been periods in which farmers have had advantage from the green pound, but that does not help much when they are at a disadvantage.

If the hon. Gentleman wants to consider the period in which farmers were hardest hit by the green pound, he should take the period when John Silkin was Minister of Agriculture. At that time, the Labour party insisted upon the green pound gap getting bigger and bigger, so that it might have a counter-inflationary effect. The incoming Conservative Government stripped that away, having given an election pledge which was opposed by the Labour party. When my hon. Friends hear, as no doubt they will, pressure from the Labour party to reduce or eradicate the green pound gap, I hope they will remember what happened when Labour was in power. The Labour Government steadfastly refused to eradicate the difference between Britain and other countries, and steadfastly insisted that farmers bore the burden of their anti-inflationary policy.

On prices, we ought to support strongly the Commission's proposal for a price freeze. Although the stabiliser regime has had significant advantages, it has been operating at the same time as harvest conditions have helped to reduce the mountains and dry up the lakes. I believe that over-production in British and European farming does considerable harm not only to the taxpayer's pocket but also to the reputation of the farmer. It is not helpful to the farmer to be thought of as the producer of food that nobody wants to eat.

Therefore, the stabiliser regime is of great importance if the farmer is to regain the reputation in society which he deserves and which he lost to some extent during the early period of surpluses. So I support the price freeze, and I strongly support the maintenance of stabilisers; and I oppose those in the Community who have sought to weaken stabilisers.

[Mr Gummer]

About a fortnight ago, I had the pleasure of addressing an audience of farmers and Ministers of Agriculture in Berlin. I had to listen to a speech on behalf of German farmers, given by the leader of the German farming unions. He sought the abolition of stabilisers and the removal of all those things that put into the common agricultual policy a sensible measure of restraint, in order, he thought, to advance the farmer's cause. I believe that that would disadvantage the farmer. It would do grave damage to the farmer if we changed the hard-fought system which we have got. That means that we ought to go further.

It is outrageous that we should subsidise the increased growth of tobacco in the Community when most member states are seeking to reduce the consumption of tobacco. So that the House may understand how serious it is, may I point out that the marginal cost to FEOGA of supporting the growth of wheat, a crop which produces the staff of life, is £400 per hectare in rough translation. The marginal cost of supporting the growth of tobacco, much of which is not a health risk only because it is unsmokable, is £3,000 per hectare. That is unacceptable, particularly as it has resulted in an increase in growth of the very kinds of tobacco which appear to be most damaging and dangerous, and which should not be put increasingly into intervention because they cannot be used.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East) *rose*——

Mr. Gummer: I must get on, because there is a 10-minute limit on speeches later.

I suggest that the same is true of the production of rice. Rice is about eight times as damaging to global warming as any similar product. Therefore, there is a particular reason for us to say that we do not wish to produce rice of a kind that we are unlikely to use. The japonica rice which we grow in the European Community has a limited market. Indica rice is more widely used.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow asked earlier about cane sugar producers. It is a curious view of developing countries which suggests that the European Community should increase, through subsidised competition, production of products which they can grow —perhaps their only product. So I shall seek a similar stabiliser regime for rice, and also for cotton, another product whose subsidised production within the Community does countries with much poorer populations out of markets.

I agree with the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow that we must continue to help cane sugar producers. I think it is reasonable, as we have cut the sums being offered to beet sugar producers within the Community, that we should offer them a similar deal. The arrangement is that we offer them the same price for the amounts which they are allowed to export into the Community as we offer Community farmers. It is not unreasonable that we should keep to that. They have benefited from increases even though they may not have had increases in their own production costs. It is reasonable to keep to that when we are making a cut.

I welcome the Commission's approach on prices, and on Mediterranean regimes. There is great pressure to increase the amount of money for regimes on Mediterranean products. I shall resist the weakening of those packages.

I am worried about the Community's proposals on the rural world, because the modulation, as it is called, in favour of small farms is for very uneconomic small farms, with very few of them being in the United Kingdom and very few offering full-time support to a family in the countries in which they are located. It does farming no good to increase the support for such farms when it is wholly contrary to any sensible economic regime.

We ought to examine much more carefully those regimes in which we have a co-responsibility levy. I do not think it right for us to continue a system whereby we tax a farmer and reduce his price without reducing the price to the purchaser in the market. If we reduced the price to the purchaser, there would be a chance of increasing demand. We must move from co-responsibility levies to action on prices. It is much better for the farmer, must better for the market and must more likely to increase demand.

I believe that we have to look very carefully at the intervention prices with regard to milk. There is no doubt that substantial surpluses persist and are bound to increase, because the Community, contrary to the United Kingdom's wishes, has increased the quota by 1 per cent. It would be quite wrong of me not to allow our farmers to have that 1 per cent. if the farmers in every other country have it, but it would also be quite wrong of me to say that I consider it a sensible policy, in view of the increased amount of milk producton which is bound to ensue. I hope very much that I shall be able to announce the suggested revision of 1 per cent. very soon, but, of course, it is something that has to be agreed with the Commission under the regulation as passed.

With regard to beef, there needs to be a much greater cut in the guide price, particularly given our responsibilities in the general agreement on tariffs and trade round. Some of the suggestions for the use of the European Community carcass classification grid are an unnecessary burden on the industry. If it is necessary to improve the terms of trade and if it does not bring unnecessary burdens, that is one thing; but if it is merely a matter of harmonisation and neatness, I believe the United Kingdom should oppose it. So we are looking very carefully at the detailed proposals in that connection.

It now seems to be generally accepted that the sheep regime, which is a general one covering the whole of Europe, is good news for us, because it means that we have got rid of the differences which have been the cause of so much difficulty in our export markets. The basic price freeze is sensible, and there has been a notable improvement in the maximum guaranteed quantity arrangements.

Turning to the structures problems, I have no doubt that it was quite wrong of the Community not to accept the United Kingdom's case for no headage limits on the reimbursement for the compensatory amounts. There is no sense in suggesting that because it has been necessary for economic reasons to have a large flock in Scotland, for example, for some reason to do with the mathematical minds of those from other countries, there should be a headage limit—not because the farmer is rich but because he happens to live in a particularly poor area where a large number of sheep are needed to make any kind of sense and any kind of living.

We fought that battle very hard, and we got a response and a change which most people in this country said was much better than they had expected. Indeed, it was much better than the House had thought it would be from our discussions beforehand. But it was not as good as I wanted, because I did not and do not believe that this kind of headage limit is a proper way of dealing with these problems. It is discriminatory, albeit accidentally so, against the United Kingdom.

I have been able to announce that, when we come to review the figures next time, we shall not automatically carry through the HLCA levels fixed by the FEOGA proposals. We shall do as we have done in the past and look at the state of the industry and decide the levels of HLCAs on that basis, not on the basis of the artificial proposals which have now been agreed in the Council.

With regard to milk quotas, I have said that I hope that it will soon be possible to announce the allocation. That will depend upon how quickly the Commission is prepared to discuss the proposals which we have put to it, which are complex and seek to meet a wide range of problems that we feel can now be met.

With regard to the non-food use of agricultural products, I am always concerned when it is suggested that there is an automatic and easy answer to the problems of over-production. There are those on both sides of the House who have their own magic answer to the problem of surplus agricultural products. I look with a fairly leary eye on those who suggest that, if only we grew this or that for one or other purpose, we would meet the real problems.

We have to look very carefully at these propositions. I am keen on some of the proposals for the use of straw, for willow cultivation, and the like, but these have to be seen as marginal and must stand up. We cannot accept the proposition that has been put to us that, if we subsidise them totally and give them to industry free, they ought then to be turned into a competitive fuel. That does not seem to be sensible, and I do not think that any hon. Member would want it. I am therefore very careful about some of the proposals for non-food use of agricultural products, and we shall be looking with great care at the Commission's report and proposal, which will be linked to set-aside. The principle of new uses is acceptable, but I have doubts about it being tied to set-aside.

The discussions in the House are the prelude to some very tough bargaining. I am wholly committed to the principle of ensuring that British farmers shall compete with other farmers in the Community on a fair basis. I also believe that we have taken very large strides indeed in improving the common agricultural policy through the stabiliser regimes and the policies of Her Majesty's Government.

I know that some of my hon. Friends want us to go further, and have some very tough words to say about some of the things that still happen or are still budgeted for in the Community. I agree with much of what they say. I want to go much further down the road of ensuring that food is not destroyed; although that is a minor part of the budget, it is still too great. I want to go much further down the road of making sure that we do not grow food for which there is no market, and of dealing with some of the Mediterranean products, in particular where there is an indefensible amount of wastage.

To that can be added the question of fraud, which is widespread. That is why we have taken the toughest measures in support of the Commission and have refused to support the watering-down proposals that have been presented by other people. I believe that fraud must be prosecuted wherever it occurs, whether abroad or at home. I shall be as tough on the fraud that takes place in this country—we have reported some items of that—as on the fraud that takes place elsewhere. I am suspicious that Greece has announced that there is no fraud in that country at all.

I believe that we can at least claim that the Government have presided over the largest reform there has been in the common agricultural policy, and very much greater reform than anybody thought was possible. There is no doubt that most other countries in the Community have now come to accept what was a United Kingdom initiative—that is, a common agricultural policy increasingly designed to meet supply with demand rather than supply with surplus. We must keep on with this. We are pleased that the Commission is proposing measures which in large part support those changes.

I ask my hon. Friends, and indeed many hon. Members in all parts of the House, to give me the opportunity of saying that we have complete support in the battle to make sure that our farmers have a fair deal.

5.28 pm

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): I found the Minister's speech disappointing. I suspect that hon. Members, when they go back to their constituencies, will find that their constituents found it somewhat disappointing.

Today, we are debating agriculture in Europe against a rapidly changing political background. The Communist parties of eastern Europe are calling for multi-party states. Apartheid is perhaps beginning to crumble in South Africa. The Minister has just come back from Berlin and I am sure that he viewed with great pleasure the crumbling of the Berlin wall. I am sure that many hon. Members share my view that, against all these momentous changes, the iniquitous structure of the common agricultural policy probably remains the last great untouched folly in the world. It is certainly of that seriousness.

Before we discuss the various aspects of agriculture, I shall briefly remind the House, yet again—it is important to do so—of the effect of the CAP on the British people. In spite of the progress that I concede has been made, the CAP is a costly folly. I checked the figures for the end of the year. The price of butter in the EC is almost double the world price. We pay 50 per cent. more than we should for beef and sugar, and 40 per cent. more for skimmed milk —at a time when even the most widely respected opinions believe that world prices will fall again and, therefore, the differential will increase.

In 1988, the Treasury estimated that the average household of four in the United Kingdom spent over £10·50 a week more than they should have done on purchasing food. The semi-official National Consumer Council estimated that the figure had gone up to £13·50 and the most recent survey by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development that I have seen puts the subsidy that the British consumer has to pay for food at no less than £17·50 a week. That is far too much. Therefore, we go along with the Minister and support him in his endeavours to ensure that the Commission's proposals for price freezing are upheld.

[Dr. David Clark]

That is absolutely vital. Equally, the maintenance of stabilisers is essential. On those issues the Minister has our support.

The key factor in the common agricultural policy and the reason why I describe it as crazy is that it is not only the consumer who loses but the farmer. For every £1 that goes to the farmer, about £2 goes for intervention and dumping on the world market. How can that possibly be justified? Export refunds have reached astronomical levels. In spite of the efforts of the Commission, export refunds for dairy products alone last year were only marginally below the figure for 1988, the worst year ever.

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): The hon. Gentleman talks about his concern for farmers and he knows of my close association with the land. Will he say what his party intends to do if it ever comes to power? Will it nationalise land? How will it pay for it? Will it pay for it through junk bonds or when resources allow?

Dr. Clark: As a farmer, the hon. Gentleman knows that he has thrown out a canard. The Labour party has no intention of nationalising farmland and that has not been in a Labour party manifesto since the war. I wish that the hon. Gentleman would stop trying to spread that rumour and cause alarm. We know why he does it: we have noted the dramatic fall in support for the Conservative party among the farming industry and the growth in its support for the Labour party.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): It is appropriate to make the point that a few days ago the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) seemed to be queueing up to have his land taken over for opencast mining. My hon. Friend talks about the cost of intervention and the fact that much of the vast sum spent does not go to the farmer. My hon. Friend will be aware that throughout Europe there has been grave anxiety about the amount of fraud and corruption in the intervention processes, and that anxiety is relevant to the United Kingdom. As the Minister knows, in Britain fraud and criminal action have been the subject of confession on television and no one has been prosecuted in such cases.

Dr. Clark: My hon. Friend raises the point I was coming to later. It is a serious one, and I shall certainly press the Minister on it, but I shall come to that in my own time.

I note in the documents that we are discussing—there is a huge pile—little about specific action to reduce export refunds. In the Treasury's public expenditure paper last week, there was provision for a 40 per cent. increase in intervention buying in the United Kingdom, from £1,102 million in 1988-89 to £1,540 million in 1992-93. That is a staggering figure. Will the Minister explain why he is planning for such a vast increase in intervention buying which will be paid for by the British consumer and taxpayer?

We have a right to know why that increase is being budgeted for when we are told that the surpluses are going. The surpluses may well be going, but they are going to other countries—often wrecking Third-world markets—with huge subsidies paid for by the British and European taxpayers. Is that why the budget has been increased?

Mr. Teddy Taylor: Does not the hon. Gentleman accept that the main reason for these increases is simply that we have transferred spending from the Common Market to national Governments such as Britain's as a means of cutting Common Market spending?

Dr. Clark: As I am sure the hon. Gentleman would agree, this is wasteful expenditure which does not help anyone, and the sooner we can eradicate it, the better. We seem to have a consensus on that.

Mr. Gummer: Surely, one advantage of transferring a wasteful expenditure such as this to national Governments is that some national Governments, who do not contribute to the European Community common agricultural fund because they are net gainers from it, will begin to be more aware of exactly what the hon. Gentleman says, with which I agree. Therefore, it is not a disadvantage but an advantage, because we are aware of the expenditure, as we contribute significantly to the funds. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that that is part of our battle against what we both agree is an unacceptable fact.

Dr. Clark: I accept the right hon. Gentleman's valid point. I am sure that he agrees that we must tackle the problem. I am disappointed that we are expecting a 40 per cent. increase in expenditure in this country when we were already spending quite a lot on intervention buying.

Apart from the general CAP, this country's farmers suffer enormously from the Government's economic policies. We have heard from hon. Members on both sides of the House the overriding public concern of farmers; getting the devaluation of the green pound. However, that is only part of the problem; the other part involves inflation and high interest rates which are affecting our economy. The farming industry, often at the exhortations of Conservative farming Ministers, invested heavily in the early years of the last decade. They are now having to bear the price of that policy and the Government's one-club approach to the economy: high interest rates.

Last year, British agriculture had to pay about £1,000 million in debt repayments alone—an increase of almost one third over the previous year. I stress that the high interest economy which the Government pursue is shoving farming up to its neck in debts. The sooner we get away from such an approach, the better.

Mr. Paul Marland (Gloucestershire, West): While the hon. Gentleman expresses concern for the increase in farmers' costs—I accept the answer that he gave to my hon. friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart)—will he reflect a little on the extra costs that some Socialist-controlled local authorities are considering: rating agricultural land? Is that to be part of a future Labour Government's policy? Would a future Labour Government rate agricultural land and add further to the costs borne by farmers?

Dr. Clark: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's intervention. I thought that the Government's policy was to abolish the rating system and go over to the poll tax. We conducted a little exercise and found out that the poll tax will be particularly hard on farming. We checked a farm in Copeland where rates are currently about £200 a year. As the hon. Gentleman knows, farmers pay rates on their domestic houses. Under the new situation, instead of paying £200, the three adults living on that farm, judging

by the probable level of poll tax, will pay £1,000 a year. That is my riposte to the hon. Gentleman. The poll tax will not help farmers.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) asked a direct question. Does the hon. Gentleman now publicly state that the Labour party, if ever returned to office, would not rate agricultural land?

Dr. Clark: Let us be blunt—I can say categorically to the Minister that that was not in the Labour party's manifesto at the last election, and will not be in the Labour party manifesto at the next election. Let us get that quite clear. I do not think that I have fudged that issue.

It is interesting that many farmers share the views of Mr. Bill Chrystal, the chairman of the Durham and North Yorkshire branch of the National Farmers Union, who wrote an open letter to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to complain about the continuing failure of the Government to tackle the problems of British agriculture, their failure to devalue the green pound and about high interest rates. In that open letter, he went on to say that the Government

"contributes to the ruin of many farmers . . . if British farmers were able to enjoy French interest rates"

the situation would be greatly improved.

Unfortunately for Mr. Chrystal and for British farmers we do not have the benefit of a Socialist Government, as the French have, but I say, "Take heart, Mr. Chrystal—it won't be long before we have a Labour Government"—and then British farmers will have a fair deal, as they have always had from a Labour Government.

When we press the Minister on all the points and difficulties with Europe, he always says that he cannot get agreement with the Council of Agriculture Ministers. Of course we understand that, but does not the Minister appreciate that this repeated failure to protect the interests of consumers and farmers in negotiations does not help anyone?

The Minister's offensive attitude towards food from other countries causes a great deal of difficulty with his overseas counterparts. British food is of a high quality, but so is that of our competitors. I usually choose British food, but there are occasions when I do not. For example, if I am faced with a choice in a shop of a British apple, or a New Zealand apple, I normally choose the New Zealand apple, for the simple reason that I know that the latter will not have been treated with alar—the carcinogenic pesticide. Other countries often produce food of the same standard that we produce.

Mr. Gummer: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that I shall spend a great deal of time pointing out to British farmers that he has now made a statement contrary to scientific advice. He has undermined the position of farmers in this country and shown that farmers would get from a Labour Government a Minister who would bash Britain to push the views of food faddists, on no scientific grounds at all. That would lead to a disruption of British industry and the British industrial base—farming in this country—and the hon. Gentleman must understand that he has now said that he would back the food faddists against the British farmer.

Dr. Clark: I thought that the Minister might respond in his usual hysterical fashion. I chose my words very carefully, and *Hansard* will record what I have actually said, and not what the Minister said that I said. I can assure British consumers that from the Labour party and a Labour Government they will get alar-free apples.

Does not the Minister understand that when he makes his histrionic and jingoistic speeches at formal functions, denigrating the quality of food from our European neighbours, he causes great offence? The House might not understand what I mean by that. I remind hon. Members that the Minister has a habit of going to functions, and berating his hosts in his after-dinner, or after-lunch comments, for daring to provide, for example, New Zealand butter with the soup rolls. Then he reaches down and produces a white polythene bag. Out of the bag he produces European food products, bought at a nearby supermarket by his hapless political assistant. I point out that the Minister cannot buy them, because he is attending the synod.

There is a moral in this. As each item of foreign food is drawn out of the bag, it is accompanied by extravagant and unusually derogatory comments by the Minister, with the unending message that the food is inferior to that produced in Britain. Of course, that is the Minister's opinion, and he has every right to say that, but does he not understand that those gratuitous insults cause offence and are heard by foreign agricultural attachés, who speedily relay the Minister's attitude back to their governments?

In all seriousness, I sincerely counsel the Minister that that is not the most effective way to make friends and influence people, and that is important for the interests of British consumers and farmers when he goes to negotiations. I hope that he will bear that in mind.

Mr. Gummer: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that it is better to have a Minister who stands up for British products and who says that he does not believe in buying British unless it is best, but when it is best we must stand up for it and fight for it.

One of our problems is that too many people think that something that comes from abroad is better than goods we produce at home. Britain produces the best apples. They are entirely safe, and the fact that the hon. Gentleman will not eat them shows that he does not have any taste, and that he would not make a Minister of Agriculture.

Dr. Clark: I agree with the Minister. When British food is best, we should buy it and eat it.

Mr. Gill: Before the hon. Gentleman throws any more gratuitous insults at the Minister, would he care to consider the damage that he has already done in this debate to the British apple industry? Does he imagine that he will have any friends left in that industry?

Dr. Clark: I humbly suggest to the hon. Gentleman that it is the Minister who has done the damage, by not banning alar.

Perhaps we can now move on to another aspect of the subject, and develop the reasons why the Minister has failed yet again. In the past two weeks we have seen other instances when the Minister failed to carry his ministerial colleagues in Europe with him—the banning of the imports of British cattle for six months, due to bovine spongiform encephalopathy, and the Minister's failure to persuade the West German Government to lift the ban on imported beef. Those are two recent examples of the Minister's failure.

[Dr. Clark]

The impact of the EC ban on imports is important, because once we have lost the business it will be virtually impossible to regain it. We believe that more action is likely to follow, as the Danes will want to ban all cattle imports, and Spain is reported to be considering banning all imports of British beef. The problem is going to get worse.

That brings me to the Government's handling of BSE—mad cow disease. If the green pound is the spoken agenda of British farmers, I think that if hon. Members on both sides of the House were honest, they would admit that when one talks to farmers, the matter that concerns them more than anything else—the hidden agenda of farming today—is BSE.

I fully realise the implications of what might be said in the Chamber, and I thought deep and hard before deciding to raise the matter. It seems to me to be important that the problem of BSE, which I believe is potentially the greatest single threat to British agriculture since the war, is debated in the House, and that hon. Members on both sides of the House impress on the Minister our desire for further action.

Let me remind the House of the crucial fact that the disease is unique to Britain: it exists nowhere else, except in a few cases in which cows have been exported from this country. Naturally, other countries do not want to take any risks, for—understandably—they do not want their herds to be infected.

In view of all the facts, it is not surprising that BSE has occurred in the United Kingdom. I charge the Government with direct responsibility, and I shall try to support that charge. The most probable cause of the disease in cattle is the scrapie-contaminated sheepmeat with which they are fed. As the practice is almost universal, why has BSE arisen only in the United Kingdom? The key must lie in the only element of difference—the rendering industries that process the cattle feed.

In its final years, 1978 and 1979, the last Labour Government realised that the rendering industry needed tightening up, and presented detailed proposals for consideration and comment. It is strange to think of a political philosophy relating to such a mundane process as the rendering of animal waste, but there is a relationship. One school of thought, favoured by Opposition Members and by most EC Governments, supports the production of detailed regulations on such matters as temperature control and the length of the rendering process. The approach favoured by the Conservative Government, however, has been to ensure that the final product is fit for its required purpose.

Small wonder that the rendering industry was not happy with the proposals of the Labour Government. The chairman of the United Kingdom renderers said:

"The original proposals were very expensive, but there was a distinct change of heart when the Conservatives came into office. They were happy to drop the idea of a code and settle for random testing."

The weakened regulations were accompanied, in the early 1980s, by a technological change from wet to dry steaming. Mr. Field, of the United Kingdom Renderers Association, has said:

"This was partly as a result of changes in animal feed techniques but the basic motive was profit."

Luckily for the European Community, the changes in British practice were not adopted so widely by renderers in other EC countries.

In my view, the Government's obsession with what might be called, in White Paper terms, "lifting the burdens" on industry has led to impure cattle feed emerging from the renderers. That is why Britain is the only country where BSE exists, and the Government have a direct responsibility. I believe that they knew that they had a responsibility, and that when the problem first appeared they did what they could to hide it.

In 1985—we have this on tape—a vet reported a scrapie-like illness in cattle; the following year Francis Anthony, the eminent chairman of the farm animals committee of the British Veterinary Association, submitted a scientific paper on the matter, and the Ministry of Agriculture sought to suppress the information.

All along, the Government have been less than frank—or, to use the words of one of their senior officials, "economical with the truth"—and that obsession with secrecy continues to this day. They have consistently done too little, too late, It took them 18 months to make BSE a notifiable disease, 20 months to introduce compulsory slaughter and two and half years to announce a ban on cattle offal; having announced the ban, they took five months to bring it into effect.

Mr. Lord: The hon. Gentleman clearly appreciates that this is a serious matter. If his thesis is to be proved, however, he must show that rendering in countries without BSE is carried out more carefully and hygienically than it is here; otherwise the whole idea will fall flat. Is that the case, and can the hon. Gentleman prove it?

Dr. Clark: I take the hon. Gentleman's point: the sombre mood in which the House has heard what I have to say reflects the worry that we all feel. Work is in progress along the lines that he has suggested.

Mr. Lord *rose*——

Dr. Clark: May I develop the point?

In tentative studies—at this stage we can only study this country—we have found that when renderers have used the traditional wet-steaming technique there has been less incidence of BSE than when they have used dry-steaming. The researchers have managed roughly to marry the techniques and the incidence of the disease.

Mr. Gummer: I agree that we are dealing with a serious matter. I feel that the hon. Gentleman may be barking up the wrong tree—although, as he will appreciate, I am looking at all the possibilities.

The rules applied to rendering, requiring the end product to be fit for use, obtain in most European countries; the other system, which he recommended, is rarely employed. Socialist France is one of the countries that takes our view, so I do not think that the hon. Gentleman can take a party-political line.

Has it occurred to the hon. Gentleman that it must be true that most other European countries have a much lower proportion of sheep offal than we do, simply because of the nature and number of the sheep involved? The work that we are doing in that direction may be more likely to find the answer that the hon. Gentleman seeks.

Dr. Clark: I know that the Minister takes the point seriously, because I know that his officials are examining the thesis that I have advocated. I made that point to the hon. Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord).

As the Minister and others will know, the Germans, for example, have now adopted specific conditions to apply to any material exported from this country.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): The French and the Israelis have done that.

Dr. Clark: I thank my hon. Friend. The conditions relate to temperatures, and to the length for which they are maintained.

May I be more positive, and make some suggestions to the Minister that I think will be supported by Conservative Members? Will he concede a point, and pay 100 per cent. compensation to farmers with suspect cows? I know that that would be making an exception, but I think that such an approach would meet with a consensus on both sides of the House. Given the current doubt, some farmers may well send cattle that they are not sure about into the auction or the slaughterhouse, and I should like the Minister to deal with that possible loophole. According to an NFU official,

"It is common knowledge in the industry that infected animals have gone into the food chain."

Mr. Spearing: My hon. Friend has revealed a sequence of events that may not have been so public before. As many of us are relatively ignorant about the subject, can he tell us whether the compensation paid for BSE-infected cows differs from that paid for foot-and-mouth infection? Would not everyone now support the payment of 100 per cent. compensation, and agree that logically it should have been paid from the beginning? Without it, there is a financial incentive to circumvent the regulations, leading to the spread of this and other diseases.

Dr. Clark: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. I understand that 100 per cent. compensation is paid for foot-and-mouth infection, and I cannot see why the same does not apply to BSE, which is a terrifying disease.

The Minister knows that animals are slipping through the net. Some are being caught at the slaughterhouses and livestock markets, but, with the best will in the world, trading standards officers, environmental health officers and vets see only a minority, and many animals with BSE enter the food chain. So can we have some action?

As there is a possibility that BSE can be transmitted from mother to calf, will the Minister not order the culling of all calves of BSE-infected cattle? Let us give the consumer the benefit of the doubt. In the name of completeness, when the Minister bans the sale of designated cattle offal, will he include cattle under six months old? I know that the disease is not apparent at that age, but there are people who think otherwise. The eminent neuropathologist, Helen Grant, questions that point, so just for once why do not the Government take a cautionary approach and put a potential public health risk before money?

Mr. Gummer: One of the problems that arise on this issue is that we have taken a cautionary approach. We have gone further than the scientists have suggested. The difficulty is that we can become increasingly cautionary and do more than the scientists tell us is necessary. I wonder where the hon. Gentleman would suggest we should stop? If I can say absolutely surely that there is no danger to public health, we have taken the most cautionary approach possible.

Dr. Clark: Advisers advise, but Ministers take decisions. It is not purely a scientific decision; it involves political and social judgments. The Minister and I know how much is at stake. There is a potential risk to our herds and there is a remote possibility of transmission to humans. It is so serious that we should be ultra-cautious.

The Minister rightly said that various bonemeal and meatmeal from offal cannot be fed to ruminants in Britain, but the export of those products is permitted. Therefore, we are exporting material that we consider dangerous to feed to our own cattle.

Yesterday, in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies), it was announced that, according to the latest figures available, we exported just over 13,000 tonnes in 1988. In a number of countries to which we export, such as France, Belgium and Germany, there are restrictions and conditions attached to those exports. I find it strange that when we export to Liberia, Nigeria, Kenya, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, or other non-European countries, no conditions are attached.

I suggest to the Minister that we should ban the export of those materials or at least warn the receiving countries through a prior informed consent scheme that those products carry a potential risk, no matter how small. That suggestion would certainly receive support from all Opposition Members, and probably from many Conservative Members.

Why do not the Government seek to reassure public opinion and give us more information? Why do they not seek to gauge the extent of that terrible disease in our national herd by following the advice of the Tyrrell committee and introducing random sampling at slaughterhouses? Why does the Minister not have a certain percentage of cattle herds at slaughterhouses examined at random so that we can gain a clearer idea of the extent of the disease in our national herds?

Mr. Gill: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Clark: I have given way a great deal, and I wish to conclude as quickly as I can. I have given way to the hon. Gentleman once and I feel that I cannot do so again.

Before I leave the subject of public health, may I raise a further failure by the Ministry in the European context?

Mr. Gill: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Clark: I prefer not to. I have given way once to the hon. Gentleman. I have given way very generously and I am not prepared to do so again.

The Minister has taken steps against salmonella in British poultry flocks, yet he allows eggs from Holland, for example, some of which are contaminated with salmonella, to enter the country. The Ministry tests those imported eggs at ports and finds evidence of salmonella enteritidis and typhimurium. Yet by the time the tests of those eggs are available four days later, the remainder of the eggs have been released and are on sale to the British consumer.

That is bad enough, but last week a survey by the Dutch national health inspectorate showed that 90 per cent. of Dutch poultry farms had salmonella and thus pose a potential threat to British public health. Therefore, the

[Dr. Clark]

Minister is allowing one rule for the British egg producer and much more lax regulations for foreign producers. That cannot be right.

Mr. Gill: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Clark: No.

The Minister says that he cannot do anything about that. Of course he can. Why does he refuse to invoke article 36 of the EC treaty which allows him in the name of public health to stop contaminated foodstuff entering the country? Why does not he invoke that and hold up the eggs until they are found to be clean? In doing that, he would have the support of the British people.

My final point was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) and the Minister also touched on it. In the corresponding debate last year, I raised the issue of fraud which exists in the CAP at an alarming level. Estimates vary between 10 and 20 per cent. of the total EC budget being lost through fraud. I remind the House that the EC budget is roughly £20 billion. We are talking about a great deal of money.

In particular, I raised the statement by the head of the British Serious Fraud Office, who asserted that major fraud was being investigated in the United Kingdom, implying that prosecutions were imminent. After the debate, the then Parliamentary Secretary wrote to me informing me that I was correct and that action was likely to be taken soon. Can the Minister inform the House whether any action has been taken on the two serious cases that were raised in last year's debate? They are not just run-of-the-mill fraud. As the Minister knows, they involve large amounts of money.

I understand that the latest figures of fraud by member states reported to the EC had increased to 352 cases in the first nine months of 1989. How many of those cases were British? I noticed the glee of some Conservative Members when the Minister referred to the Greek situation. Speaking from memory, I think that Britain had the third worst record of EC countries last year.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: We have better records.

Dr. Clark: The hon. Lady says that we have better records. That is a perverse logic.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: We record these things much more consistently than other countries. The Greeks and the Italians scarcely record them at all.

Dr. Clark: The hon. Lady has a certain amount of perverse logic. She said that we have a better method of recording and reporting fraud. If that is the case, why do two other countries have worse records than we do? The House has a right to know. We often hear the Minister saying that he is campaigning against fraud. We should like to know what results he has obtained and how much fraud there is in the United Kingdom.

We welcome some of the points that the Minister made today. We hope that he will stand firm on the price freeze and we wish him success on the stabilisers. We freely concede that the Minister has difficulties in Europe because the system is not ideally suited to the structure of British agriculture or to the interests of the British consumer. Before the Minister makes jingoistic speeches in this country, he should ponder the fact that it is not wise to insult one's potential allies. By so doing, one loses the battle, which is one explanation why he has been so unsuccessful in Brussels in fighting for the British consumer and farmer.

6.9 pm

Mr. Paul Marland (Gloucestershire, West): I appreciate being called early in the debate, because it gives me the opportunity to be the first to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on his excellent speech, in which he gave us a wide-ranging view of the position in Europe. Many Conservative Members agree with him about the appalling subsidies of the European tobacco growers and the tremendous cost of storing surplus wheat.

British farmers recognise that they now work in a changed and changing marketplace. The farmgate mentality has gone, which used to represent the fact that they had to grow produce and get it to the farm gate, after which it was someone else's responsibility. They recognise that they no longer have a divine right to produce food that cannot be eaten at home or sold abroad.

Farmers and their families have been turning their entrepreneurial skills to earning income on or off the farm. Some have gone into deer farming: many have found ways of exporting their produce; and others now offer farm holidays. Most farmers have tried to add value to what they are producing. Those who visited the food and farming exhibition in Hyde park last summer saw fine examples of how farmers are trying to add value to their produce. Many farmers and their wives are beginning to take part-time work away from the farm.

The menu of grants that are now available, and the general discussion with advisers on how to generate extra income on farms has helped farmers to firm up their ideas. That positive lead was given by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Like other hon. Members, I was pleased to welcome the increases in hill livestock compensatory allowances that were announced last week. It is important that we protect our breed stock, from which the commercial flocks are bred. The commercial flocks stand us and our farmers in good stead.

It has always been this Government's policy to seek to help rural communities to earn their living in the countryside. Notwithstanding the current problems, the Government should be congratulated on the way in which they have sought to present the alternatives.

There has been a substantial change of attitude among farmers since 1983. I remember as parliamentary private secretary to my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), visiting the three counties show in Malvern. As we approached in the car, a light aircraft flew overhead trailing a banner saying

"Jopling turns the milk sour."

It was alarming to have a police escort—I had always thought that farmers were friendly—but the fact that we had to have one to visit a show was quite a revelation.

We then went to Ross-on-Wye, where we were barricaded in the town hall by furious farmers. As if that were not enough, when we visited Dyfed, milk was poured in front of the Minister's car. We got the message—that farmers did not want milk quotas. God help the Minister who tried to remove a milk quota from a farmer today. Some farmers now say that the only profitable activities are those to which quotas apply. Many of them would like

quotas to apply to all agricultural produce. We know that that is not possible, and unfortunately Ministers will not agree even to talk about it.

Farmers crave a level playing field and fair competition. The green pound differences are creating gigantic differences in producer returns. For example, the difference on cereals is 18·2 per cent., on sheep 19·4 per cent., on beef 13·6 per cent., on butter 17·3 per cent. and on pigs 10 per cent. Those gaps place United Kingdom farmers at a huge disadvantage and undermine their confidence. As other hon. Members have said, they put them at a competitive disadvantage within the EC.

Farmers must have the confidence to invest in the future if we are to take advantage of the opportunities that will be offered by 1992 for exports to the European Community. How can agriculture in this country compete fairly with one hand tied so securely behind its back, and without being able to invest in the future? All industries want a level playing field, and agriculture is no exception.

We must respond now to the challenges and opportunities of 1992, and a message needs to be sent from this debate that that is precisely what we shall do.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): Having been present today in Perth at the opening of the most advanced market in Britain, where I spoke to the European Commissioner for Agriculture, and as farm incomes are now about 60 per cent. lower than 10 years ago, would it not be a good idea if the Government proposed that agriculture, if nothing else, should creep towards the European monetary system and that the maximum band of the green pound should be only 6 per cent.?

Mr. Marland: My hon. and learned Friend makes his own point in a very fair way.

Before 1983, British farmers were urged to do what they could to reduce the serious balance of payments deficit left by the last Labour Government by producing more of the food that was consumed in this country.

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): Food from our own resources.

Mr. Marland: Exactly. Our farmers responded manfully to that, in a way that would shame most other industries. Today, although the game has changed, the principles remain the same—that imported food costs money and that we must all do what we can to keep it to a minimum.

I accept that last year there was a small increase in agricultural incomes, but overall the trend is downwards. In 1992, the Government will be committed to the complete elimination of the green pound gaps. Today, the Commission proposes a one-third devaluation, but the Government propose a 50 per cent. devaluation. For the reasons that I have set out, I urge my right hon. Friend the Minister to consider without delay a 100 per cent. devaluation, to give us a level playing field and to offer British farmers an equal chance in Europe.

I accept that this may lead to a fractional increase in the cost of shopping, but British housewives are turning increasingly to British produce because they know what they are getting——

Mr. Andy Stewart: Quality.

Mr. Marland: Quality, and a renowned standard. Housewives may accept fractional increases without so much as a murmur.

My right hon. Friend the Minister may be interested to learn that, to substantiate that, some farmers from Gloucestershire and I will, with permission, carry out a little market research of our own. We shall visit the Asda supermarket just outside High Wycombe—which we thought a suitable place, because it is not a rural area and because many of the shoppers come from urban areas and have no connection with farming. We shall ask them whether they think that it is fair to ask them to pay a little more to ensure a continuing and steady supply of British foodstuffs. I shall take great delight in giving my right hon. Friend the Minister the results of our survey.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: Will my hon. Friend ask those people what they feel about our spending £173 a week per person on dumping and destroying food?

Mr. Marland: I am sure that they will not like that any more than my hon. Friend, but it is fair to say that surpluses have been reduced substantially, and my right hon. Friend the Minister deserves much of the credit for that.

As we are discussing EC matters, I want to turn, as the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) did, to food safety and bovine spongiform encephalopathy, the scourge of British agriculture. The hon. Member for South Shields was right to mention that matter.

It is important not to overreact. Overreaction is causing a great deal of soul-searching and heartache in agriculture. I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Minister and the Government—for not only the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food was involved—have allocated an extra £12 million to research on BSE to find out its cause. Although the hon. Member for South Shields may believe that he has outlined its cause, nobody knows for sure. However, I join him in saying that we should consider seriously increasing the compensation paid from 50 per cent. to 100 per cent.

The lower rate of compensation puts beef producers and those who own dairy cows in a difficult position. They realise that they could sell a beast in the market for £400, whereas they will receive only £200 in compensation. I know of farmers who, with the very best intentions, have sent cows that look dodgy to the market. When the cows reach the market, the stress is too much for them and they are then discovered to have been infected with BSE.

Mr. Spearing: I agree that the matter should not be subject to great exaggeration. However, can the hon. Gentleman explain to his satisfaction why, until now the Government did not give 100 per cent. compensation for this virulent and conceivably dangerous disease? Surely all taxpayers, whatever their views on politics or taxation, would have been only too pleased for compensation to be 100 per cent. If the hon. Gentleman does not know the answer, does he agree that the Minister should tell us later?

Mr. Marland: That is precisely why I made that point. I hope that my hon. Friend will reflect on it when winding up the debate. I did not say that I was satisfied with 50 per cent. I was joining the hon. Member for South Shields on your Front Bench in suggesting——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. It is not my Front Bench.

Mr. Marland: I beg your pardon, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope that I have made the point.

How many hon. Members realise that BSE affects only old cows, in so far as current research has established? The youngest cow that has ever been diagnosed as infected with BSE was two years and nine months old—I checked that fact this morning. There is also no proven connection between BSE and human beings. The only part of the old cow that is susceptible to BSE is part of the offal, and my right hon. Friend has banned the sale of such offal. I commend him for that. Steaks and beef joints are taken from young cattle which have, so far, never been found to carry BSE.

To add insult to injury, the Germans have now banned all United Kingdom beef exports, which is not very communautaire, especially as those exports are worth £50 million to beef producers in this country. It is sad that we have to take the Germans to court for the matter to be sorted out.

I am sorry to shadow the hon. Member for South Shields to such an extent, but I want to turn to salmonella in eggs. The steps being taken to eradicate salmonella from laying flocks are all very laudable but, as my experience in my own constituency shows, the restrictions seem to be bearing down unfairly heavily on small producers. So far, more than 1 million chickens have been slaughtered. I cannot help but wonder whether the large producers are being quite as rigorous as they should be in the tests, for, despite the measures that are being taken by all egg producers, according to the latest issue of *UKEPRA News*, which is the journal of the egg producing industry, the number of salmonella-related food poisoning incidents is increasing rapidly. If there is a hint of salmonella in a small man's flock, the flock is wiped out. Are the small producers being made scapegoats?

As the hon. Member for South Sheilds reminded the House, 20 per cent. of eggs consumed in this country are now imported. Many are subsequently repacked and relabelled "packed in England" to try to reassure British housewives. I know that we carry out random tests, but as has already been said, the results take some time to come to fruition and by the time the test has been developed, the eggs have probably been relabelled and repackaged, and have found their way into somebody's refrigerator. We should not hold up imports, but in the name of fairness, we should try to hold up odd loads while the tests come to fruition.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Is my hon. Friend aware that the European Community bans the marking of individual eggs, and that only certain containers of eggs can be marked as coming from this country? Does my hon. Friend favour, as I do, the return of the old lion mark on each egg to reassure the British housewife that, if she buys British eggs, she is buying the best product available and one that has been tested?

Mr. Marland: I am sure that such markings would reassure British housewives, whether we had the old lion or thought of a new symbol. My hon. Friend makes her point in her own way.

I have tried to make three points in my speech. First, we should have a meaningful devaluation of the green pound to keep British farming solvent and competitive. We should give British farming the fairness of a level playing field. Secondly, we should have 100 per cent. compensation for animals infected with BSE and that should be introduced without delay. Thirdly, we should ensure justice over salmonella. We should ensure that the same rules apply throughout the Community as to our egg producers. Agriculture asks for a level playing field and fair competition. I hope that my hon. Friend will reflect on that in his summing up.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr. Speaker has said that he intends to impose a 10-minute limit on speeches between 7 pm and 9 pm. It is an obligation on hon. Members who are fortunate enough to be called before 7 pm to try to make brief speeches.

6.26 pm

Mr. Geraint Howells (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): British agriculture is facing a major financial crisis, which is one of the worst since the war. As a part-time farmer, I am pleased that you have called me so early in this important debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The situation is so serious that we have gone beyond attempting to make a political point today; instead, we are trying to persuade the Minister to do his utmost on our behalf. Many of the leaders of our great agricultural sector are keeping a watchful eye on us this afternoon and listening to our contributions. They have come here to urge Members to Parliament to bring pressure to bear on the Minister, so that he in turn can go to his counterparts in Europe and persuade them that they must listen to and heed what our Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is saying on behalf of British agriculture.

The Minister can be in no doubt today about the message that he must carry to Brussels on behalf of British farmers and of those hon. Members who believe that agriculture should be rescued from its present state of low morale. Real farm incomes have been falling steadily over the past few years. Farmers are suffering badly, as are many other business people, from the Government's policy of maintaining cripplingly high interest rates. It has been calculated that in 1989, the interest bill paid by farmers rose by about £250 million, a staggering rise of 37 per cent. Not surprisingly, investment in farming is falling. Over the five years to 1988, annual investment in fixed capital was down by 40 per cent. which shows clearly that resources are just not available.

I had the privilege this morning of having breakfast with one of Britain's major cereal growers. He said that he had not made a penny profit for the last two years and, worst of all, had not been able to invest in new machinery. He said that, unless something came his way within the next two years, he would have a major problem on his hands in regard to investing in machinery.

I know that the Minister is not in a position to bring down high interest rates at present, but I am sure that, on behalf of everyone in the industry, he will urge the

But what makes life even more difficult and heightens the sense of injustice in the industry is the spectre of the green pound that hovers over us, completely distorting the market, making support prices in Britain lower than those of all other member states of the EC apart from Spain and

Greece. Can anyone honestly agree that it is fair to maintain a system that taxes our exports and at the same time gives a subsidy, through MCAs, to imports into this country?

A Scottish farmer who is a correspondent of mine writes:

"It is absolutely crazy to be subsidising Irish beef into this country and charging the same equivalent on our exports through the MCAs".

He points out that, in his area in the north of Scotland, local producers are getting £120 per head on average, less than in November 1989, and he reports that one of the bigger fatteners in that area is looking at a loss of £70,000 on his buying bill since autumn 1989. That will obviously have a knock-on effect on hill-weaned calf sales this autumn.

Areas such as Scotland and Wales, where the industry is mainly concentrated on livestock, are particularly at a disadvantage, and it is that sector that the Minister must move to protect. It is essential for the future of our rural areas that a satisfactory level of farm income is maintained.

I have received many letters, like all my colleagues from Scotland, England and Wales, about the plight of the industry at the present time; we can only pass that view on to the Minister in the hope that he will take heed of the requests of all farmers in Britain.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Does my hon. Friend agree with me that there must now be grave concern about the future of farming because it is so unattractive and difficult for able young people to enter? With that in mind, does he fear for the future of agriculture unless the Government take dramatic steps to at least provide survival incomes for hill farmers?

Mr. Howells: I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend for raising that important matter. As the Minister is sitting and listening to his comments, I am sure that he will take heed of what my hon. and learned Friend has just said. Something must be done to help young farmers before it is too late.

The point has been made again and again that, while other industries gain export advantages at a time when sterling is low, agriculture suffers as a result of a fixed green rate. Farming at the moment is losing about £600 million in extra costs. If the gap were closed now, it would mean an increase in support payments for sheep of about £2·60 a ewe, in suckler cow premium by about £6·40 and in beef special premium by about £3·82.

The present EC proposal to close the green pound gap by one third is simply not enough at this stage. The industry needs action to close the gap completely and immediately. That is the only way to restore confidence and to ensure that our farmers are allowed to compete on an equal footing with their counterparts in Europe.

I take heed of what Mr. Deputy Speaker said earlier. One could speak on many issues such as the environment and other topics that are relevant to agriculture, but I shall go down the same avenue as some other Members and refer to BSE.

Another cause of great worry to farmers, particularly in view of the uncertain livestock market, is the inadequate compensation for BSE cases. The export ban imposed by West Germany is bad enough, and it is likely to cost the industry at least £10 million. I am pleased that the Minister is dealing with the issue in his usual forthright manner, but there is a strong case for fully compensating the farmer for his losses. Not only will that encourage more vigilance and promote more confidence in the industry, but it would reassure the consumer that no suspect meat is being allowed into the food chain.

The term "mad cows" has been used for a short period in this country, but people who understand cattle and have seen this disease are aware that the cows do not go mad. The disease affects the nervous system and the cow just collapses. It is a great pity that many people, including politicians, are frightening many of our consumers so that they will not eat beef. I admire the Minister's stand. He has to be firm during the crisis. He has expressed the views of the top veterinary officers in this country. There is no more that he can do except stand up for the industry and make sure that this disease will be eradicated.

The hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) said that BSE has come about during the past five or 10 years, but I have been about for many more years than the hon. Gentleman, and I would say that it has been prevalent in Britain for the past 50 or 60 years, and I have seen plenty of cases in various markets throughout Wales. It is nothing new. The only reason why we have more cows with this disease today is that dairy farmers are feeding more concentrates to the dairy cattle than they did 20 or 30 years ago.

Dr. David Clark: I find that quite revealing. Did I understand the hon. Gentleman to say that he was aware of BSE many, many years ago?

Mr. Howells: Of course. It is well-known in the agricultural industry that the disease has been in Britain for 40 or 50 years, and the previous Labour Government knew about it, just like the present Government. Anyone who disputes that does not know much about cattle.

It is worth making the point that research into the control and eradication of such diseases should be a top priority and that the Government should reconsider their policy of ruthlessly cutting down research establishments. It would also reassure farmers to know that the Government would consider full compensation for those 1,500 small farmers whose businesses have been practically wiped out by the lead contamination scare and the consequent restrictions.

Finally, there are two important issues if we are to safeguard the structure of British agriculture in the 1990s and into the next century. Many people, some perhaps within the House, and leaders of industry, believe that we should do away with the Milk Marketing Board. But it would be a great mistake to change the statutory powers of the Milk Marketing Board. Producers have been well served by the board over the years. It is unnecessary to change an institution that has been a strong support to the small family farm for more than 50 years and has ensured their survival in difficult and changing times.

The Minister and the Government made a mistake last year when they did away with the financial agreement for the British Wool Marketing Board, of which I had the privilege of being vice-chairman for 11 years. The British Wool Marketing Board is facing a crisis. Everything was going well when the board could sell wool at a high price a year or two ago, but trade has now collapsed. I criticised the Government for doing away with the financial agreement which has been the backbone of the sheep

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producers over the past 50 years. They decided to do so, but perhaps they will think more seriously before they upset the statutory powers of the Milk Marketing Board.

Let me give politicians in the House one piece of advice, whatever it is worth, about the sheep industry. A quota system operates in the dairy industry. Dairy farmers were not very pleased when it was introduced in 1983, but the majority of those farmers today are probably in favour of a quota system because it is worth more than the farm itself.

Just imagine the effect of the introduction of sheep quotas in the 1990s in the mountainous areas of Scotland, Wales and England. If those quotas were worth the same as the milk quotas, farmers of my age living in the hills and in the less favoured areas could be offered a large sum of money for their quota by farmers from the lowland areas, and then they would sell. There is no alternative to sheep farming on the mountains of Britain, other than to grow trees.

My advice to whoever is in charge of Britain's sheep sector for the next 10 years is to be careful not to introduce quotas, or we shall for the first time see vast depopulation in those areas. We have seen it happen before, and we do not want to see a repeat performance in the late 1990s.

I hope that other hon. Members who take part in the debate will discuss seriously the short-term issues facing the industry at present. There is no point today in debating whether we should be a member of the Community. The important issue is today's survival. I hope that, when the Minister next goes to Brussels, and on each occasion in the next year or two, he will take with him the Secretary of State for Wales, because he has full responsibility for agriculture in Wales. The Secretary of State for Scotland should also go.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): And the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Howells: Yes, indeed.

The matter is so serious that all Ministers with responsibility for agriculture should go to Brussels with the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I wish the Minister and his colleagues the best in their deliberations in Brussels to safeguard the interests of agriculture.

6.44 pm

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): The saddest thing to me about the debate is, looking round the House, to realise how few, if any, of our colleagues on either side of the House who do not represent an agriculture constituency apparently realise the importance of a healthy income structure in the agriculture industry to other industries in Britain—the manufacturing industry, the chemical industry and the textile industry. Agriculture does not exist in a vacuum, and when agriculture is depressed the effects are not confined to agriculture; they spread through the country.

There are many examples of that. Look at the decline of the agricultural machinery industry in Britain over the past 10 years and the declining demand for many of the products of the petrochemical industry. If the leaders of those industries are asked whether they care about the income of our agriculture industry, they leave one in no doubt at all about their perception of the interconnection. It is sad to me that those who want to speak in the debate are so clearly almost entirely confined to those who represent agricultural areas.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: No, I will not, because we have been asked to limit our speeches to 10 minutes.

It is right that Ministers going into negotiations on the continent should be encouraged to do everything within their power to get rid of the green pound gap. The Commission reads the official reports of agriculture debates in Britain and in other countries, so it is important that it should know that Ministers are speaking for the House of Commons, not to the House of Commons, and that when they speak abroad they come with the anger as well as the interests of those whom they represent.

For many years now I have been disturbed by how many people in our agriculture industry think that 1992 means 1 January, rather than 31 December. Many people who should have been better informed have said that at least the agony will end on 1 January 1992. It will not. The level playing field, as it is referred to, will come into being on 31 December 1992, if those who oppose it do not find some way of blocking it. Hopeful as I am, my hope is not matched by my confidence because in many other aspects, particularly in the financial services industry which employs more than 3 million people in Britain, it is clear that there will not be equality of trading conditions—to coin a more appropriate phase—even by 31 December 1992.

I support what the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) said about the importance of the Milk Marketing Board to producers. It has been subjected to some unfair criticism in that it has been necessary for it to import milk at times of minimum output in Britain so that it can sustain the regular market for its own manufactured products. We cannot turn off and on established patterns of trade. If we want British butter to be sold in British shops, we cannot leave the retail and wholesale outlets bereft of it at certain times of the year.

In some respects, we have been unenterprising. For example, in many areas people who want unsalted butter must buy foreign because there is no British unsalted butter on the market. The English Milk Marketing Board, unlike its Scottish counterparts, has not given enough attention to seeing that the growing market in unsalted butter—growing because people have anxieties about the interrelationship between salt and heart disease—is met by home production by promoting the sale of unsalted English butter and ensuring that when people visit their supermarkets, they see British unsalted butter at eye level on the shelves.

I support the plea for 100 per cent. restitution in respect of cattle which are, rightly, destroyed when found to be suffering from BSE. There is strong opinion in the veterinary profession—those who read the *Veterinary Record* know this to be the case—that the present 50 per cent. compensation rate is not adequate to give the necessary degree of confidence.

The claim for 100 per cent. restitution can be even more justified on the ground that the Government consented to lowering the boiling point in the rendering industry. The Treasury should accept some responsibility in the matter

and agree to a compensation level of 100 per cent. The public would perceive that as being in their interest as well as in the interest of farmers. I do not know any farmers who would not rather have their cattle and sheep free of disease than have to claim subsidy of that type.

In examining the industry, we need to concentrate not on any one feature. For example, although as the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North said, rightly, high interest rates produce problems for farmers, if the rates were brought down now we would probably increase the green pound gap, because that is related to interest rates. In other words, we should never recommend one course of action which undercuts a different course of action that is also being recommended. In any event, when we get rid of the green pound system completely, the problem will no longer exist.

I am anxious not to overrun the time for speeches that Mr. Speaker has recommended, so I will comment only briefly on the devastating consequences of the gales, and they have been devastating in many ways. For example, consider the plight of farmers who are paying the community charge and who are in some cases paying the charge for their employees, too.

A hideous cost will fall on county councils in repairing damage to buildings caused by the gales. It has been said in relation to the Bellwin formula that the Government will pay 75 per cent. of the cost above a penny rate. That is not the case in respect of damaged buildings, a distinction which the Minister did not make clear.

Some counties pay enormous insurance premiums for the buildings that they own, and that cost must be added to the community charge. Over the years, Devon has found it better to have balances. Some ignorant people —including some ignorant Members—criticise balances but, taken over a period of time, they result in lower costs to the ratepayer, now the community charge payer, than paying insurance premiums. After all, insurance companies are in business to make a profit. Sometimes they get their calculations wrong, but their intention when they set their premiums is to make a profit.

Considering that the Minister speaks not just for his Department but for the Government, I urge him to tell the Secretary of State for the Environment that if the Bellwin formula does not embrace the cost of damage to buildings, an intolerable burden will be placed on those who live in areas of dispersed population, our rural areas, which are also our agricultural areas.

Had time permitted, I would have covered many other points, but I always try to honour the requests made for short speeches.

6.55 pm

Mr. Ted Garrett (Wallsend): I was interested to hear the hon. Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) say that there were not many farmers present for tonight's debate. Some older hon. Members will recall that in the past when we debated agriculture, the Conservative Benches were well filled with farmers or landowners.

It is also interesting to reflect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you, the hon. Member for Tiverton and I are former engineers. That is not to say that we are ignorant of farming problems. I live in the constituency represented by the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Amos), who is in his place and who hopes to take part in the debate. Whatever one's interest, one listens, learns and acquires knowledge of the farming industry.

Hon. Members may also be interested—or perhaps bored—to learn that I was a member of the first Select Committee on Agriculture, and I believe that the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) was also a member. That Select Committee was abolished by the incoming Labour Government in 1966 because they sought the truth, and the truth about agriculture was not acceptable to the then Leader of the House, Richard Crossman, and we were fired. Those of us who were members of that Select Committee did not take kindly to the decision.

In addition to having been for 12 years a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, I am on that body's Agriculture Committee. When the Minister opened this debate, he was urbane and smooth, as always. He was quick to react when provoked, but he had nothing to say about how he sees agriculture in the future.

The Agriculture Committee of the Council of Europe is way ahead in its thinking about the potential for farming in Europe in the years to come. Today, we think of farming in Europe in terms of central, eastern and western Europe. If a fraction of the money that is spent on the CAP was diverted to help the resources of the Council of Europe, it would be money well spent. The hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor), who is not in his place, would probably agree with me about that.

We in that committee in the Council of Europe have already arranged for politicians and other speakers from Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia to become members of the committee. They already take part in some of our debates, and I assure the House that we debate not merely forestry and fishery problems affecting the whole of Europe, vast though those problems are—I had hoped that those matters would have been raised in this debate —but the whole question of food surpluses. One of the problems in the countries that have been totalitarian is food—not the shortage——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The distribution.

Mr. Garrett: Yes, the distribution. There has also been a lack of variety of food in countries such as Czechoslovakia. However the basic tenet remains. The land is there and can be cultivated, but those countries must be helped in the marketing and distribution of food when it reaches the huge cities. We are talking also about cleaning the rivers. Rivers do not stop when they reach the boundaries of the 12 European Community countries; they go on. The worst pollutants are in eastern Europe. We have to skirmish on environmental matters and the question of how water can damage agricultural products.

I should like more of the time of the House to be devoted to the various aspects of agriculture. A debate such as today's, of this duration, cannot fulfil that objective. The Agriculture Committee of the Council of Europe should be given more publicity. It has completed reports on the changes in the quantity and quality of agricultural products, as well as the problems of processing, marketing and distribution of food products.

Last Tuesday, there was an animated debate at the Council of Europe on the question of the land set-aside policy. Hon. Members will not be surprised to hear that that idea was ferociously opposed by continental farmers. I took the opportunity to explain Britain's modest

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proposals for an agricultural set-aside policy, some of the results that have been achieved, and how, in the long term, it would be foolish for the Council of Europe—or the European Economic Community—to throw aside the basic concept of set-aside land.

I know that there is hostility to that proposal in some areas of the farming community, but it is one of the first steps towards overcoming agricultural surpluses. Modest though it is, the Government deserve some credit for taking that initiative. However, I have a word of warning. The policy is established and is starting to work, but we must recognise that there has to be a system of surveillance to ensure that farmers are honouring the agreement.

The farmers receive an annual sum of money for setting aside their land for five years and for honouring the obligation to cultivate the land and to keep it and its surroundings in good condition. At the back of my mind is the fear that not all farmers will live up to the responsibility that has been imposed upon them, and for which they are receiving financial reward. When the Minister replies, he should give that matter serious consideration and, if necessary, produce a report on the success of surveillance.

I am also conscious that we are on a time schedule, so I conclude by saying that I welcome this debate and the wide contributions that have been made to it. I think that the quality of debate in the House on agricultural matters is much better than it was some years ago.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House that we are now into the period of rationed time.

7.4 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me so early in the debate. I am sorry that my right hon. Friend the Minister is not in his place to hear me praise his robust and responsible speech. I am sure that the message that he gave the House this afternoon will be well received by farmers and by those in the countryside generally.

Mr. Andy Stewart: I concur, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucestershire, West, (Mr. Marland), with my hon. Friend in congratulating my right hon. Friend the Minister on his excellent speech. I care about agriculture. Soon the Leader of the Opposition will speak at the National Farmers Union annual dinner, but he has not given a speech on agriculture for 15 years. Who does my hon. Friend think should write his speech?

Mr. Gill: A number of names occur to me but, sadly, they do not include the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark). He made a poor contribution to this afternoon's debate because he missed no opportunity to undermine the confidence that the British public have in British agricultural products. He took a swipe at British apples, British beef and British eggs. He had a wonderful opportunity to say that, after all the regulations that have been brought in by the Government recently, British eggs are the safest in the world. He missed that opportunity and that is distressing.

Dr. David Clark: Did not the hon. Gentleman understand what I was saying? I was making the point that British eggs are tested to a higher quality than Dutch eggs and therefore we should—in words that are much used in the House—ensure that the British poultry producers have a level playing field. I am sorry that that point did not get through.

Mr. Gill: I am sorry, but that point did not get through at all. Many outside the House will be critical of what the hon. Gentleman did say. That is in complete contrast to my right hon. Friend the Minister, whose grasp of the subject and understanding of the problems is complete. He left the House in no doubt that he would tackle the problems.

Today two Ministers have made commitments to eliminate the green currencies. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made her declaration on that subject during Prime Minister's questions, and later in the day my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said that green currencies would be eliminated as soon as practicable. My concern is about what will happen in the meantime.

Farmers' returns are inadequate for the increased costs that they bear. Their products have scarcely risen in value during the past seven or eight years, whereas during the same period a 100-horsepower tractor has increased in cost by about 35 per cent., from £18,500 to £25,000. In addition, farmers have inadequate earnings to service debt. It is interesting to note that this year the interest bill in agriculture has gone up by no less than 38 per cent., to nearly £1 billion. The returns are inadequate for the investment that farmers must make for the future—there has been a 40 per cent. reduction in investment in the five years to 1988. Of course, their inadequate returns have also led to a fall in rural employment—about 23,000 full-time jobs have been lost in agriculture since 1982. That is not to mention the incomes or earnings of the farmers themselves.

I have two concerns—first, for the future of this great industry and, secondly, for the countryside. My concern for the industry is that it is not reinvesting at the level that it should be; it is not reinvesting at the level that it should be; it is not reducing indebtedness—quite the reverse—and it is not generating the cash resources that it will need to tide it over until 1993. It is currently suffering from a crisis of confidence—not in its own ability, but in the sheer impossibility of competing against unfair monetary compensatory amounts.

At this point, I allude to the comments of the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett), who introduced into the debate a note of caution about eastern Europe. There is no doubt that, once eastern European people who work on the land taste the enterprise culture and are given motivation and incentive for increased agricultural production, the competition and scope for agricultural surpluses in Europe will be increased immeasurably. We dare not under-estimate the effects of that. I plead unto the Minister to argue our case, as I know he will, very strongly in Brussels. The total elimination of monetary compensatory amounts would cost about 45 million ecu, or about £35 million, in a full year. The net cost to the United Kingdom would be approximately £120 million, not as a continuing cost but as a one-off cost. The effect on the retail price index would be between 0·25 per cent. and 0·5 per cent.

British agriculture is by anyone's reckoning a major industry and the envy of many of our European partners. They do not want us to get rid of MCAs, because the

longer they can keep them the better their competitive advantage and the greater their chance of reducing the United Kingdom's ability to compete in the future. Although agriculture is the second biggest industry in the United Kingdom, second only to oil, it is the biggest industry in rural areas with inputs of about £7 billion a year in capital and other purchases and £2 billion in the annual wage bill, and with the lion's share of all agricultural spending going into the rural economy. That is very important because there is no doubt that, without a thriving, prosperous and vibrant agriculture, the whole rural economy is greatly prejudiced.

Our Minister must break the logjam. We cannot accept that he must wait for three years before we get a complete amelioration of the problems besetting us today. Three years in any industry is a very long time, especially for cash flows to be so seriously undermined. The elimination of MCAs will not release a torrent of cash, a windfall, that will boost farm profits, but it will give agriculture its just deserts. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be 100 per cent. successful when he goes to Brussels to argue for the complete elimination of MCAs here and now.

7.12 pm

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): This is a debate on United Kingdom agriculture and the Minister is responsible in Brussels for the whole of the United Kingdom, even though in the Northern Ireland Office we have a Minister and an Under-Secretary responsible for Northern Ireland agriculture. We never have the opportunity of debating Ulster agriculture here, so that Under-Secretary is not answerable either to the people of Northern Ireland or to this Parliament, and I am sorry that once again the Northern Ireland Office is failing to show its interest in agriculture in Northern Ireland and is absent from the debate.

I thank the Secretary of State for the way in which he began his speech, because, although he mentioned the significant increase in farm incomes last year, he went out of his way to say that he was not going to use that to his advantage because it varied depending on which sector one looked at. There are some regions in the United Kingdom, such as Northern Ireland, which are particularly based on one sector—grass: 60 per cent. of Ulster agriculture is in either beef or milk production.

This morning in Northern Ireland it was announced that the price of milk had been reduced yet again by the Northern Ireland Milk Marketing Board, to 17p per litre. It was 20p last October, so in the space of four months we have had a 15 per cent. reduction in the price of milk. In January, we had an intervention system for butter which was operated in different ways in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. In the Republic, intervention applied below 96 per cent. of the intervention limit, but in the United Kingdom one had to go below 94 per cent. That gave an unfair advantage to milk producers in the Republic.

I ask the Secretary of State always to watch these things when they apply to the Republic of Ireland as well as the United Kingdom, because the United Kingdom has only one foreign country on its borders, the Republic of Ireland, and a disparity like this works to the disadvantage of United Kingdom producers in Northern Ireland.

Now that we have managed to reduce the milk surplus in the European Community, the Community should take in hand the complete abolition of the co-responsibility levy in the milk industry.

Mention has been made of the future of the five milk marketing boards in the United Kingdom. With the decline in milk production, rationalisation is now taking place in the milk industry, and that has brought about the combination of various milk operations in Northern Ireland. Several co-operatives have recently decided to become limited companies, and then one has taken over the other. In particular, I refer to the recent takeover bid by Leckpatrick Co-op for Killyman Co-op, both in the county of Tyrone. The Northern Ireland Milk Marketing Board also made a bid for the Killyman Co-op which was higher than that of Leckpatrick, yet Leckpatrick won the takeover battle because the Northern Ireland Milk Marketing Board, which was created by the Ulster Unionist Government at Stormont, has now reached the point when people are uncertain of its survival. So although it was offering more money to the milk producers, the private company won the battle.

I ask the Secretary of State to make a statement about the future of our milk marketing board in Northern Ireland. The producers need to know whether they can place their confidence in the board in the years ahead. it was because of lack of confidence in Northern Ireland in recent weeks that the takeover of Killyman was carried out by a firm offering less than the milk marketing board: people were not sure whether, if they sold to the board, it would still be there in a few years.

The Secretary of State and his Department are well aware of beef prices in Northern Ireland which have been influenced by various general factors, such as the new restrictions on intervention and the abolition of the variable premium, and, more recently, by the decline in sterling and the problem created by the green currencies, something mentioned by many speakers in the debate. Here again, the problem is exaggerated by the border; once again we have unfair competition with the Republic. We in Northern Ireland stress the necessity of getting rid of the green currencies as soon as possible. The present proposal is for a reduction of 33·3 per cent. We seek a reduction of 100 per cent.

I want to make special reference to the pigmeat industry, because it is one of the major intensive sectors in Northern Ireland. It is subject to great market fluctuations and always has been—that has always been one of its characteristics. I appeal to the Minister to seek a mechanism for stabilising the pig meat market in the United Kingdom.

The debate has also seen an attack on British apples. I want to defend the British apples grown in Northern Ireland, especially the Bramley, of which we have 10,000 acres. The hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) joined me five years ago in defending the Bramley in Europe to the European Parliament and the Commission. I ask the Department to fight for apples once again and to make sure that there is no reduction in the buying-in price for apples in May this year.

Cereals are a problem for us in Northern Ireland because we are a deficit-producing country. We produce only 18 per cent. of the cereals that we require. We know that cereals have been doing badly elsewhere. I would ask that the co-responsibility level on cereals be removed as

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soon as possible, because the damage that is being done to the industry in Northern Ireland is dramatic—especially in that small part of our industry which is the specialist part.

I wish to refer to the campaign to introduce a common time zone throughout the European Community. We in the Ulster Unionist party consulted not only agriculture and the fishing industry but the building and construction industry and business and trade generally. I wish to make it clear that the parliamentary Ulster Unionist party will oppose any suggestion that time should be uniform throughout Europe. The one-hour differential must remain.

I join the hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) in asking about the threat from eastern Europe. Of course we want eastern Europe to advance to freedom and a market economy and we want to assist the countries financially, but we do not want them to cease to be self-supporting in agriculture and start exporting cheap agricultural products into the European Community, the further to undermine our farmers' position.

The former Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), visited Northern Ireland in his capacity as the Minister responsible for agriculture matters for the whole of the United Kingdom. I hope that the present Minister will find an opportunity to come to Northern Ireland as soon as possible to see what the problems are—especially in the beef and milk industries—and take on board the specific problems that arise because of competition from a neighbouring EEC country—the Republic of Ireland. I invite him to come to Northern Ireland at the earliest possible opportunity.

7.21 pm

Mr. Malcom Moss (Cambridgeshire, North-East): This is one of the most important agriculture debates that we have had for a long time. It comes at a critical time for some—I emphasise "some"—sectors of agriculture. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on a most positive and helpful speech and voice my disappointment at Opposition Members' contributions—particularly the speech from the Opposition Front Bench by the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) which was long on words and short on substance, with veiled promises of more handouts by a future Labour Government. I found the hon. Gentleman's comments on BSE most unhelpful and I know that they will be considered as such by beef producers in east Anglia.

The sector of agriculture that is most under pressure at present is the cereal growing sector, and that is the principal enterprise of the fens in my constituency. Those with root crops—sugar beet and potatoes—are surviving, but morale among pure cereal growers is at rock bottom. I am sure that my right hon. Friend has been apprised of the situation, but I must nevertheless convey to him in the strongest possible terms the feelings of farmers in my constituency.

The reasons for low morale are clear. The farmers are suffering falling incomes and falling profitability, a low price and high interest rate squeeze, pressure from environmentalists and food faddists, some of it quite outrageous in its disinformation, the aftermath of the salmonella and eggs issue and now, of course BSE, and tighter controls and regulations on the use of pesticides and the training that has to go with them.

The final straw is the ban on straw burning. Some farmers on heavy land in my constituency who use only a wheat and oilseed rape rotation cannot see how they can continue to cultivate, given the ban on burning. My right hon. Friend's unequivocal statement on the green pound—that he was "absolutely committed" to its "total dismantling"—will not only reassure my constituents of his complete commitment to the farming cause but will help them to understand that he has their best interests at heart in his negotiations on the pricing mechanism.

Cereal farmers' problems start with interest rates. Nationwide, the industry's bill rose 38 per cent. last year and now stands at a staggering £949 million, compared with £1,400 million of farming incomes. The gearing of borrowings in this industry is larger than farming's gross product, whereas the norm for other industries is about 33 per cent. Bankers are now asking farmers in my constituency whether they think that they really ought to go ahead and drill next year. It has come to that.

The second problem is investment. Nationally, in the five years to 1988, annual investment in fixed capital dropped by 40 per cent. and last year there was a further cut of 7 per cent. At this rate, 1992 may never come for some of my cereal farmers. Even if it does, many of them will not have the necessary new capital investment in machinery to compete on a level playing field with their European counterparts.

The most serious problem is falling incomes. Although statistics show that real farm income is set to rise by 8 per cent. in 1989, after a fall of about 27 per cent. the previous year, they hide regional variations and variations between different farming enterprises in the same region. The cereal farmers had two disastrous years in 1987 and 1988, and 1989 looks as though it will prove to have been equally bad.

The chief culprits are the green pound and the co-responsibility levy. The green pound penalises my fen farmers at a rate of £20 per tonne for their wheat. For a reasonable farmer on a reasonably sized farm, that can total between £20,000 and £30,000 of lost income over the year. As a business man myself, I would not contemplate going into such an unprofitable business. Only recently I was shown two statements from a local grain merchant. In November 1989, a farmer in my constituency obtained £112 a tonne for wheat, less the co-responsibility levy of £3·66 and netted the handsome total of £108·34. The November 1980 statement showed the figure of £107 per tonne for wheat. That means that in real terms income from cereals has decreased to about 15 per cent. of what it was in 1983.

My farmers are also puzzled by the new definition of income from farming that the Ministry has employed. They understand what farm income is, but they are somewhat perplexed to learn that the assessment under the new terms concludes that farmers earn only 60 per cent. of their income from farming. That figure is not accurate when applied to farmers in the fens of Cambridgeshire. The fens are the grain basket of the United Kingdom. All the land in my constituency is grade 1 or grade 2 land; we have no inferior land, and historically we have the highest agricultural land values in the country.

What are the options available to us? First, there is diversification. We have a flat and featureless landscape.

With all due respect to my beloved constituency, it is not the kind of landscape that one would want to put on the front of a chocolate box. The opportunities for tourism are obviously limited. It is a sparsely populated area. We have no country houses and estates. No yuppies from the City come up to the fens to buy estates and act as absentee landlords.

The farmers in the fens are worker farmers and they have been since they started to farm the land after drainage. Ours is a unique area. If we did not drain the fens, they would soon disappear under several feet of water. I am quite prepared to lose my constituency at an election; that might be regarded as a misfortune. To lose it under 8 ft of water could look like carelessness. My farmers also have to contribute to the drainage of the land. That is an additional item of expenditure that they have to bear.

Woodland is not an alternative, because one is not allowed to plant woodland in the fens, where all dikes and drainage courses must be free of obstructions so that they can be cleaned out. We cannot change to grasslands because we do not have enough rain, and set-aside rates are just not high enough to make the position viable. I ask my right hon. Friend the Minister why the additional payments for set-aside, agreed under FEOGA—the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund—and taken up by the French and German Governments were not allowed in this country. That is certainly a question that my farmers have put to me.

Fen farmers now have to worry about rhizomania, of which there have been two outbreaks—one in Suffolk and one in Norfolk. If rhizomania takes a hold, the sugar beet crop in the fens will disappear in consequence. As many hon. Members have said, the root cause of this country's problems in agriculture—cereal growing, in particular—arises from the prices of commodities, and the problems are exacerbated by the green pound and the co-responsibility levy. I welcome my right hon. Friend's commitment to negotiations on the green pound, but the logic is that, if it is to come off in 1992 because it is unfair and unreasonable, it ought to come off this year. Why is that not going to happen? I urge my right hon. Friend to stand firm in his negotiations, and I wish him luck. Certainly he has the support of my constituents.

Much has been said about level playing fields. I remember the days when I played rugby in Redruth in Cornwall, which is famous for a pitch that slopes about 30 ft from one end to the other. I remember that when I was playing at the bottom end the wind was always in my face, and the rain driving horizontally. But, of course, at half time we changed round. The message from my constituents to my right hon. Friend is: "Bring out the oranges; the half-time whistle has just gone."

7.31 pm

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South-West): I have been told by the Minister in the past that the devaluation of the green pound that has already been obtained represents a substantial step towards the elimination of monetary compensatory amounts by 1992. But the farm business survey shows that the underlying economic condition has been declining steadily for all farming sectors, although, in the case of milk, there has only recently been a modest increase. For the last 10 years, the trend has been inexorably downward, while outstanding debt has been going up. It ought to be of concern to the Government that, as other Members have pointed out, investment in United Kingdom agriculture has fallen by 40 per cent. in the last five years. But it does not seem to bother them in the case of other sectors, so I do not suppose that it will bother them in the case of farming.

The number of people in full-time employment has also fallen, with the loss of 60,000 jobs in the same five years. In a constituency such as mine, the great majority of jobs in rural parts are connected, directly or indirectly, with farming. Unless the trend is reversed, the fabric of the countryside will be in real danger. The complete and immediate elimination of the monetary compensatory amounts would be a real help to the farmers who come to my surgeries weekly, many of whom are struggling with all the other ills that, lately, have been inflicted on small businesses as a result of this Government's policies.

High interest rates, VAT on electricity, the poll tax and the uniform business rate, and price increases well above the rate of inflation on a whole string of farming supplies—all these take their toll. Add to these ills the problems of the exporting of beef cattle—or, rather, the ban on the exporting of beef cattle—to western Europe, thanks to BSE and to the unwillingness of the Government to recognise the extent of the problem by paying full-price compensation for infected cattle, and we have a recipe for disaster.

Incidentally, I have great respect for the farming knowledge of the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells)—unfortunately, he is not in his place at the moment—but if he knew of the existence of BSE in cattle over 60 years ago, I wish he had told previous Governments. If he had, we might not have the present BSE problems. It is likely that BSE is really caused by the Government's policy of putting profit before safety in the rendering industry. I rather suspect that that is the real reason for the massive increase in BSE.

We in north Wales have further difficulties—this time, imposed directly by the Government. The Minister's right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales is apparently considering closure of at least one veterinary investigation centre—Bryn Adda in Bangor. That would leave north Wales covered—if "covered" is the word—by Aberystwyth, Shrewsbury and Preston. This would be totally impractical for most farmers who have to take their animals to these centres.

Just recently, the Secretary of State announced plans to close the Welsh Office agriculture office in Ruthin—or rather, downgrade the office by reducing the number of staff from 55 to 18. Effectively, that would amount to closure in at least one area of service. I might add that that decision was taken without consultation, and in such haste that staff at the office were asked to decide between moving to Caernarvon and taking a redundancy payment—a payment not yet agreed by the Treasury—within a matter of weeks. At least one 25-year-old was offered early retirement.

Effectively, this change will mean the grants and subsidies on which many of the marginal hill farmers in my constituency depend to eke out a living being dealt with by Caernarvon. The farmers of Clwyd will no longer be able to resolve their problems face to face without a long and expensive journey to Caernarvon or long and expensive phone calls. In short, it may well be the last straw for some farmers who are working long hours for little reward, on very marginal but scenic land. It will certainly be the last

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straw for the employees of the office, who have provided an excellent service for agriculture in very sub-standard conditions. Will the Minister ask his right hon. Friend to reconsider this closure decision, and will he himself make a commitment to immediate and complete devaluation of the green pound?

7.36 pm

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): I begin by thanking all the Agriculture Ministers in this Government for the exceptional work that they have been doing over the past few years, especially the past 12 months, for the farming industry. Much of the Minister's speech was encouraging, especially what he said about the future and about the strength of the argument that he is going to take to Europe. I hope that no Minister will overreact to the scares that arise almost weekly concerning food. Often, the problems have been resolved without too much difficulty.

I want to say three things with which I think all hon. Members will agree. First, I say, "Well done," to Ian Grant, who, during the last month of his presidency of the Scottish National Farmers Union, made an outstanding contribution to farming. Secondly, like the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor), I believe most strongly that we must not tinker with summertime and go on to continental time. We must make as strongly as possible the case for farming, for which a change would cause enormous damage. Thirdly, I hope that we will do all that we can to retain the marketing boards. The milk marketing boards have done exceptionally good work. I hope that it will be possible to find a little more quota to help the manufacturing industry in the not too distant future. We must give credit also to the Wool Marketing Board and the Potato Marketing Board for all that they have achieved over many years.

I shall refer to two main issues: first, the current economic problems and the loss of confidence in agriculture; secondly, the future and environmentally friendly farming. As the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) said, the value of this debate is to show the Minister what farmers in our constituencies are feeling and enable him to use the evidence in his argument when he goes to Europe.

The economic facts are irrefutable. The industry has suffered a major loss of income over recent years. Let us look at the Scottish figures. If the figure was 100 in 1978, it went down to 59 in 1979 because of bad weather. In 1982, it was 74, in 1984, it was 90—that was a better year —in 1985, it went down to 15 because the weather was dreadful, and in 1988 it was 65. The graph trend is steadily downward, and we must try to change that. Whatever the statistics say, the situation is very serious.

We must highlight how employment in Scotland over the last five years dropped by no less than 23 per cent. —from 19,000 to 14,000. That represents a big loss to rural areas. The resources are no longer available to re-equip with new machinery, to invest in livestock or to think, as many people believe we should, in terms of alternative land use. Almost every alternative land use costs a great deal of capital if it is to be successful. As we all know, the high interest rates that are necessary to contain inflation have a serious impact on farming.

The fall in farm incomes makes it much harder for farmers to pay the wages which farm workers undoubtedly deserve. I believe that many farmers pay considerably more than the minimum wage set by the wages board, but it would be easier for them to be generous to the workers if their incomes were higher.

Farmers are entitled to a fair return on their capital in exchange for providing high quality food. At the centre is the common agricultural policy. The price proposals will be before us shortly. I welcome what the Government have done on the hill livestock compensatory allowance. I welcome particularly what my right hon. Friend said today about fighting very hard to retain the HLCA in 1991, I hope at a rate at least as high as this year. If there is any difficulty with Europe, I hope that the Treasury will make up the difference.

The Minister should consider again the headage payment on finished cattle. The premium is payable on 90 cattle. The Minister should consider whether it could be paid on farm to the producer, particularly for calves. There are technical difficulties, but the Minister should make a real effort to overcome the problem.

My right hon. Friend accepted the need to deal with the green pound. I support the 1990 campaign of the National Farmers Union of Scotland to devalue the green pound, certainly well before the end of the three-year period which is to be used as a sliding scale. If it could be devalued this year, it would be of enormous benefit to agriculture. Other hon. Members have given the devaluation percentages—arable at 17 per cent., dairy at 17 per cent., beef at 13 per cent. and so on. There is a big difference. The Minister said that he would do what he could to help. He was backed up this afternoon by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who understands the position on the green pound. I do not think that phasing it out over three years is acceptable.

Much of the common agricultural policy is not sensitive to the environment or to the rural economy. The HLCA, the suckler cow subsidy and the beef premium are important if farming is to be profitable and if people are to remain in the countryside, particularly in hill areas. We must consider how to bring more jobs into the villages and small towns that we all represent. If we do not have people there, everything begins to disintegrate—schools, churches, halls and the community spirit. All in all, keeping up profitability in the less-favoured areas is very important.

As a Government we began, through the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, to find ways to help using management agreements. The Government have helped by promoting environmentally sensitive areas. We must keep income in the hills without increasing grazing pressure by adding to the stock of hill cows and sheep.

Set-aside schemes almost invariably cost jobs. If a farmer sets aside part of his farm by letting it lie fallow, or worse, he will shed labour—something that we do not want to see in rural areas.

I have been watching closely what has been happening to woodlands and forestry. We must reconsider the fiscal decisions made two years ago, because maintenance is important in woodlands. If we take away the tax incentive on maintenance that we have had for many years, the forestry ecology will not remain as it is.

On alternative land use, there must be a more realistic approach to planning by local authorities which turn down many good ideas for no good reason. Much more could be said about the environment. I have a vision of a

well-farmed countryside, with greater diversity of wildlife and habitat. I believe that many of the Government's policies show clearly that that is the road down which they are going.

7.45 pm

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I was concerned about being attacked by the Minister as a food fascist. I am sorry that he is not in his place; he must have gone off to savage one or two diplomats. Fascism is much more the creed of the Minister than of myself. When he made his famous speech on food fascism, I wonder if he was referring to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie), who exterminated 10 per cent. of the laying flock and created the largest food scare that we have ever known.

I might well be accused of being a food fascist, because I am concerned about Government policy on the EEC and on food poisoning. Over the last decade, food poisoning cases have increased from 10,000 to 30,000. It seems that 1990 may be a record year for food poisoning. That is the background to my speech.

There is still a problem with eggs and salmonella. There is much confusion in the industry. People do not believe that the slaughter policy is working. I am not convinced that it is working, and I have been a member of the Select Committee. However, the slaughter policy underpins confidence in British eggs. Hon. Members can say that British eggs are better than Dutch eggs: there is no doubt about that. Already, concern has been expressed about the Government's reluctance to ban the importation of eggs from parts of Europe which are contaminated by salmonella. I am thinking especially about the Dutch. There is a belief that the Government would not ban the importation of rats from Holland even if they had bubonic plague, on the grounds that everything that comes from Holland is irradiated anyway.

The German Government do not take the same attitude. The Germans are saying to us, "We understand that we cannot prove that there is a problem with bovine spongiform encephalopathy but we're not having your beef, and that's the end of it." Our Government cannot do anything about it. The Germans are probably right to take that line. They are losing nothing, but they are protecting their population—something that the British Government fail to do time after time.

It is said that BSE originated from feeding cattle with sheep offal which was contaminated with scrapie, yet we appear to be doing nothing about scrapie. That worries me. The argument is that scrapie has been known about for 200 years and that there is no link between scrapie and humans. I do not accept that. I think that some of the cases of Creutzfeld-Jakob disease could have been caused by scrapie. If BSE is transmitted to man, I think that it will only be in small numbers.

It is said that there are only 50 victims a year of the human form of BSE. That is probably an under-estimate. Some cases may not be diagnosed, but I do not think that BSE or scrapie will create a major epidemic. We should not frighten the public, but we should protect them. I asked the Minister if he would stop contaminated sheep going into the food chain. The written reply that I got today was no.

If a sheep came to the slaughterhouse suspected of having scrapie, the animal would be slaughtered and dressed in the usual way, but it would be processed apart from other animals. If inspection of the offal revealed that there was no other sign of the disease, the head would be removed and condemned but the carcase would be passed fit for human consumption. In other words, where a sheep is known to have scrapie, we cut the head off, stain it and throw it into the bin, and send the other part to the butcher.

I asked the Minister today if he would stop that exercise, and the answer was no. I ask him again to come to the Dispatch Box tonight and change his mind, because it is important that we protect our consumers, even if there is only a very slight risk, and I accept that it is only a very sight risk.

On another point—the Minister should listen to this, because his whole political career may depend upon it—if that sheep I was talking about was made into hotpot and was to be served to the Prime Minister, would the Minister allow her to eat it? I know that I would, but I am not sympathetic to the Prime Minister. I think he had better be careful what he replies.

Coming to BSE, I am glad to see that the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) is in his place, because at the Dispatch Box recently he told the House that there was no chance of BSE-contaminated beef getting into the food chain. He said that he had belt and braces, but if my investigation of what goes on with his belt and braces is correct, the Minister's trousers will be round his ankles before much longer.

I went to a local auction mart—the Bordway at Carlisle, which is an excellent one and the largest in the country. Inspection there was carried out by the trading standards officer. It was voluntary; there was no legislation that said it had to be carried out. The county council will soon be in great difficulty because of cuts imposed by the Government, and it may not be able to continue to carry out inspection of that sort.

I looked around the largest auction mart in Britain to see if there were any notices from MAFF saying "Beware of BSE" and telling people about the problems and the penalties, because it is illegal knowingly to send BSE-contaminated cattle to market. There was not one notice in that auction mart. The managing director of the mart had rung MAFF and had been told that there were no notices to be put up in the auction mart. I therefore do not believe the Government are doing the job very well. Furthermore, the instructions that have been given to the environmental health inspectors at the abattoir contradict what is laid down by the Government as to how animals of this sort should be treated.

The thing that I find really strange is that all sorts of people say that only 50 per cent. compensation is being paid. That is not strictly true. If a farmer notifies MAFF that the beef on the farm has BSE, he will get 50 per cent.; and if BSE is found at the auction mart, he will get 50 per cent. But if an animal gets right through the system and is killed at the abattoir, 100 per cent. compensation is paid. In most cases, that 100 per cent. compensation does not go to the farmers—we have had many complaints on their behalf today—but goes to the butchers.

From the puzzled look on the Minister's face, I suspect that he is not aware of this, but it is in MAFF instructions. There is no doubt about that.

In order to protect the industry, we should give 100 per cent. compensation to everybody. We should have a policy of trying to eradicate this generation of cattle from our fields as soon as possible. The sooner we can get rid of

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cattle that have eaten that contaminated feed, the better. I would go so far as to say that we should have a voluntary slaughter policy. Anybody who wants to get rid of beef of that age should be allowed to do so, and should get 100 per cent. compensation. The sooner we are again able to tell Europe that we have the cleanest herd in the world the better.

There is a certain irony in our dealings with the European Community. Is it not sad that we are today debating a situation in which other countries of Europe are refusing to take our cattle, alive or dead, although it appears from EC regulations that we are to start re-exporting live horses to Europe? That is the anomaly of the EC at the present time.

I hope that Ministers will take the warning from the House tonight and get together with those concerned—farmers, MAFF and the veterinarians—and make sure that our flocks, herds, pigs and poultry are pure and clean and ready to put on the table. That is the problem at the moment: people in Europe do not trust the food produced in this country.

7.55 pm

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): I am pleased to be able to contribute briefly to this wide-ranging debate as the representative of a rural constituency with a very important milk sector. Naturally, I reflect the fact that that part of the industry, which has now settled down to quotas, is probably more profitable and settled than other parts.

I very much welcome the fact that the Minister may be looking at the prospect of loaning some percentage quota to young entrants to the agricultural industry. The great problem, however, is in defining a new entrant. No farmer or producer in my constituency would want to see an incentive given to some yuppie farmer or somebody who has sold a business and is investing as a new entrant to agriculture.

All hon. Members present who represent rural constituencies will agree with me that the agriculture industry as a whole is the backbone of the rural economy and that farmers are the only true custodians of the countryside—a countryside which is admired, enjoyed and appreciated by vast numbers of British people and tourists and which has virtually been created by the farming community with its good husbandry over the years.

The industry has always responded to incentives provided by central Government and indeed, the EC. In these difficult days, when there is overproduction of food, it will respond with equal vigour to the emerging priority to get supply and demand into better balance and to focus on the marketplace in meeting change and the requirements of the consumer.

It should be said that there is no great divide between the farmer and the consumer. Farmers are consumers and so are their families; they shop in the same supermarkets and corner shops as the rest of us.

There is today an excellent range of home-produced food—helping, incidentally, our balance of payments—at modest prices. Let us not forget that the return to the producer is a small part of the cost in the shops, most of which is made up by processing, packaging and transportation costs. But it is equally true that the industry faces a severe crisis of confidence in its future, with average farming incomes dropping by about 9 per cent. each year, extremely low profitability and, as a result, very low investment. These problems are further exacerbated by the high interest rates which are being used as the sole weapon in the fight against inflation.

The theme that has run through the many and varied contributions to the debate is that the current green pound gap must be eliminated. It is a discriminatory currency mechanism and, in the best interests of Britain and its farming community, must be removed, and as a matter of urgency. Indeed, 1992 is so far ahead that some farming businesses will not last until then, and the Commission proposal of an initial reduction of one third is totally unacceptable. Of course we all realise that the Minister will be batting against 11 European Agriculture Ministers, who have a vested interest in retaining the green pound disadvantage to this country. I hope that the Minister will take away from the debate a message from both sides of the House, distilled into the simple call that this country demands fair play and action now—nothing less than the total removal of the green pound gap will do.

Agriculture needs to be profitable, to reinvest to face the challenges and opportunities of the 1990s and to be competitive. It has never turned its face away from a challenge but it cannot compete with one hand and one leg tied behind its back. The Minister should be in no doubt that the industry's future depends on the forthcoming negotiations; much is at stake and everyone who is involved with or concerned for this country's rural environment will wish him well in those negotiations.

8 pm

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): During this welcome debate, tremendous concern has been shown about the future of the rural economy, in which agriculture plays such a major part. I welcome many comments from both sides of the House about the importance of maintaining a good base for the economy in rural areas to sustain the rural way of life. The debate has to be seen in that context because in most rural constituencies, agriculture is the most important industry, not only because of the direct employment it creates—self-employed farmers and those working on farms—but because of the ancillary industries which depend on it. Those who supply the feed to the farmers, distribute milk to our doorsteps, work in food processing plants and supply farmers with feedingstuffs are as dependent as the farmers on the maintenance of a viable agricultural industry.

I want to widen the debate and talk about the link between the economic future of rural areas, and social cohesion. The economy in our rural areas must be maintained and supported if we are to retain the social fabric of our rural districts. Every family that leaves the land leaves the rural community more exposed—as we have already heard—to rural depopulation and destruction. I hope that the Minister will listen to my remarks about this, because he has responsibility not only for the economic future of rural areas, but for their social, cultural and—in Wales—linguistic future.

Ministers have a great responsibility for the future of the Welsh language, because the future of the language in

our rural areas depends on a viable agricultural base. Many of our farmers maintain the language through their cultural links.

There is a tremendous lack of confidence in agriculture that manifests itself in a variety of ways. I am sure that all Members, particularly those in rural constituencies with agricultural interests, have been lobbied today by farmers from their constituencies about the problems bedevilling the industry. Is it not right, therefore, that we should place on record their views on issues such as high interest rates so that the Minister can take them to the deliberations with the European Commission? I am told that in the current year farmers will pay £1 billion in interest alone—that is not the total cost of borrowing, but the interest on the loan. Coupled with that is the rate of inflation, now at 7 per cent., and the lack of investment in agriculture, which is a particular problem.

During the past few weeks, I have been invited to visit a number of farms in my constituency. The point put to me time and again was that farmers are failing to invest in the industry's future because they lack confidence in how the Government are handling agriculture on a range of issues. I visited a farm where the farmer has put in the foundations of a new building to house his cattle and sheep, but was not prepared to complete that building because he was not sure that the Government would support agriculture in future. That is a mark of a lack of confidence shown by one farmer that is repeated time and again all over rural Wales and other parts of the United Kingdom.

Investment in the industry has been 40 per cent. lower in the past years. That figure speaks for itself. Recently, I carried out a survey of the number of students now attending agricultural colleges. From a reply to a parliamentary question that I asked some weeks ago, it is clear that there are fewer students attending colleges of agriculture than there were a few years ago. That is because farming is a family concern and farmers are not sending their sons to agriculture colleges. They are advising them not to go into agriculture because they do not see a future in it. The reduction in the number of farming students is a good indicator of the current lack of confidence in the industry. My colleagues in the Scottish National party agree with my sentiments.

Farming is a family business and there are few entrants from outside the industry coming in. Therefore, we should look at the signals coming from the agriculture community. We must ask ourselves why there is such a lack of confidence in the industry. It is due to the underlying, long-term decline in the industry's profitability. Some of the figures were given to me by farmers in my constituency. Many people who have voted for this Government now tell me that they will not support them again if the long-term decline in the profitability of agriculture continues.

It is in this context, and having looked at all the problems, that the industry now demands the complete elimination of the green pound disparity. It was put to me that the elimination of that disparity would not substantially increase farmers' incomes overnight, but would be a benchmark against which to measure the Government's commitment to agriculture. If the Government committed themselves to the complete elimination of that disparity they would send an enormous signal to the industry that they were serious about restoring confidence in it.

This debate is about sending signals to the European Commission, to tell our European counterparts that we are serious about ensuring a level playing field for farmers in the counties of Britain. It is also about sending a signal to agriculture at home. It is about the Government ensuring a restoration of the confidence which is sadly lacking to ensure that farmers invest in our future, and the social fabric of our rural communities is maintained.

8.8 pm

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): I beg to move, at the end of the *Question*, to add

'but regrets the expenditure in 1990 of £9,000,000,000 on the disposal or destruction of surplus production despite the multitude of costly reform plans in recent years; regrets the massive additional cost to the average household budget of the Common Agricultural policy; regrets the damage to third world economies of the disruption of world food markets caused by European Economic Community food dumping; and regrets in particular, the decision of Her Majesty's Government not to vote against the proposal to disregard for monetary compensatory amount purposes, cereal production above the stabiliser limit, despite previous pledges that the stabiliser mechanism would be automatic and legally binding.'.

It is a great pleasure and privilege to move the amendment and, I hope, to persuade the Government to accept these very simple and basic changes.

We have heard a great deal of discussion of a happy nature today. It seems that we have general agreement that the green pound differential should be removed. We have not had much discussion on which way it should move—whether European prices should come down to British ones, or British prices rise to the European level—but it seems to be agreed that we want a substantial increase in British prices, which will of course have a substantial effect on food prices at home.

There has been a demand from the Welsh National party, and from some Conservative Members, for level playing fields. Many other industries in Britain would welcome level playing fields. They ask why agriculture should be the only industry that does not pay rates on buildings, when every other industry in Britain is facing major problems with rating relief. Those other industries might say, "Why can't we have level playing fields?", and they might ask why they cannot have the same protection as agriculture. There are protection levels of 40 per cent., 50 per cent. and, in one case, 90 per cent. for agricultural products. What other industry in Britain has that?

Very few businesses, even in Wales—if the Welsh nationalists have any consistency—have the right to access to vast sums of money to dump abroad at crazy prices surplus products which simply cannot be disposed of. To have a demand from the agricultural community for level playing fields is a distortion, and a pure hypocrisy, as every single person taking part in the debate must know.

I hope that the Government will accept that the common agricultural policy is a foul protectionist device which is totally opposed to everything that the Conservative party stands for, and totally opposed to all justice and reason, if we have any concern for the world as a whole.

If the Government accepted this amendment, they would at least be accepting that we should stop kidding ourselves with the almost annual hope that things are being resolved, that our problems are being sorted out, and that if we can only keep going on the present course, those problems will somehow fade away.

[Mr. Teddy Taylor]

If Ministers had the honesty and integrity to look at things as they are—as I am sure they have—they would see how time and time again in debates on this issue we have been presented with new hope that somehow things are going to change.

I remember that optimism was expressed when the Prime Minister came back to the House saying that we now had budgetary control and that the CAP was under control. We saw for ourselves how that pledge was kept—the Common Market simply had a metric year of 10 months, with 12 months' worth of money coming in, and 10 months' worth going out. That was the success in that year.

Then we had the quota scheme. Everyone said that that was a grand idea which would revolutionise agriculture and bring stability. We know what happened—we paid a vast sum of money to buy out farmers from producing milk, and they simply switched the land to produce other things that were already in chronic surplus. Sadly, despite all the massive pay-outs, we now have a substantial surplus of milk production.

Then there was the set-aside proposal. That seemed to be logical. Instead of paying farmers to produce stuff that we had to pay a fortune to dump, we paid them for basically doing nothing—although the Government have insisted that they are not doing nothing but are putting a green cover on their land. In a very short time, no less than 400,000 hectares of land in Europe were covered by those payments for doing nothing except putting a so-called green cover on the land. That hardly affected surplus production, because usually inadequate land was used for that purpose.

More recently, we had another hopeful sign—the hunt for fraud. It was suggested that fraud was costing too much money, and that sharp people were taking good people's money to waste it on agriculture. I think we all know exactly what has happened—we have set up a department for fraud in the EEC. Everyone must know, if they consider the issue honestly, that it is impossible to avoid fraud in the crazy situation where one pays vast sums of money for dumping food abroad.

Another device to try to reduce the cost of the CAP—and a very effective one—was simply to transfer the spending costs from the EEC to member states. The Minister will be aware, from the previous point that he made, that that was declared unlawful by the Court of Auditors, but it was nevertheless done, and the Court of Auditors' report was never discussed.

Now, on the basis of the Government's motion, we have one of the most hopeful signs that we have had for a long time—the elimination of food mountains. The Government have said today, and on previous occasions, that this was the result of Conservative-initiated reforms. I appeal to the Government to consider what really happened. For example, there was a dramatic reduction in the butter mountain, from 1,007,620 tonnes to only 162,928 tonnes, and that was applauded by all the farming representatives as a triumph. The mountains were fading away, because of the Conservative-initiated reforms. However, we all know what happened, and I wish that people would admit it. We simply had a fire clearance sale, and sold 887,105 tonnes of butter at ludicrous prices—as low as 1·75p per pound. It was simply a device to sell things off, it was not a reform. If we think that it was a reform, we are kidding ourselves.

Now we have the latest proposal—stabilisers. We are told that stabilisers will work unlike all the previous reforms, which did not work. Despite all the horrible people in the Commission, it was automatic and legally binding. In this amendment we have expressed disappointment that when it came to the co-responsibility levy the Common Market decided to ignore the stabiliser level, which was the quite substantial sum of £40 million. That meant £40 million down the drain and the automatic, legally binding stabiliser simply disappeared.

In those circumstances, we would be kidding ourselves if we passed this motion and simply said that more should be done for the agricultural community. The Government must know that previous reforms have not achieved success and that the basic structural problems remain. If anyone doubts that, I ask him to look at the figures which have been published in *Hansard* recently. Now that the food mountains are almost gone, should we not have very little spending on food dumping and food destruction?

We all know what the figures are. This year, despite the elimination or near-elimination of all the mountains, the Community will spend £9,000 million simply on dumping and destroying food. That is £173 million every week. In 1980, the figure was £89 million a week, in 1985 it was £134 million a week, and now it is £173 million. The Government may try to say that that is an improvement, and it is down on last year. They know exactly why it is down on last year. It is because we had the fire clearance sale to eliminate the mountains.

I am sure that the Welsh Nationalists would like us to spend more money, probably on the Welsh language, using Common Market agricultural subsidies. But £173 million a week could do a lot to help the poor, to help those people who need help, to help people who need more housing, or to help the schools that we are always talking about. That is shameful misuse of money.

What is the impact of those measures on production? We all know that we have now become the highest exporters of sugar in the world—that is unforgiveable. We know that, according to the last fair estimate, the average family in Britain—including poor families—spend £13 a week extra on their food. Should we not give some thought to what we are doing to the world?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The hon. Member will understand that I have to impose the Standing Order.

8.18 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Do not worry, Madam Deputy Speaker: what I have in my hands is not the speech that I am about to deliver but the documents with which the debate is expected, technically, to deal. I realise that we are not going to go through them individually, as we are engaged in a discussion of principle rather like a Second Reading debate.

Some 43 documents are involved, many containing multiple items. They deal with issues that we should be scrutinising so that we can advise the Minister before the Council of Ministers makes its decisions. The rather problematical position in which we find ourselves has often been mentioned before.

The Minister has not only presented his case in the Chamber today, but has been questioned in the Select Committee on European Legislation. As a member of the Committee, I have had an opportunity to hear his arguments. The hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) talked about fair play, and the Minister has claimed on several occasions that he stands for "fair dos" for Britain and British agriculture. He has often resorted to tautology, especially when discussing the European monetary system; he says that if we join at the right time and in the right conditions everything will be all right, whereas if we join at the wrong time and in the wrong conditions everything will be all wrong. He has also pointed out that he is outnumbered by 11 to one.

That is sometimes rather a luxury in negotiations, as it enables the outnumbered person to be high on principle and extremely low on achievement, and to go down in history as the victim of a revolutionary defeat. On the other hand, the Minister may view himself as a Henry Fonda on jury duty, trying to persuade fellow jury members through both the logic of his case and the art of persuasion. In that case, he should take on board some of what my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) said earlier about the need to avoid alienating one's fellow debaters: the art of persuasion often involves taking account of their problems.

I fear that the Minister will turn out to be neither a defeated man of principle nor a Henry Fonda, pulling such policies as the abolition of the green pound out of the bag through a superior effort of will. He may prove to be more like a demoralised goalkeeper whose team has been trounced 11-1. We do not know yet what the final decision of the Council of Ministers will be, and, despite our expectations, a gradual third-by-third move away from the green pound may not emerge from the negotiations.

The problems that we face have arisen largely as a result of the vast and antisocial nature of the common agricultural policy. Stabilisers and the phasing out of the green pound cannot remove that reality. They can alter and adjust, as transitional payments can alter and adjust the poll tax, but our continuous budgetary problem, like the poll tax, will remain as long as the arrangement itself remains.

The Minister spoke of the problems of over-supply and lack of demand in the European Community, but there are still poorly fed people in the United Kingdom, as well as waves of starvation from other countries—from Ethiopia to Poland—which the agricultural policies under which we operate do little to assist. It is not lack of demand from which the country suffers, but lack of a demand backed by enough cash to enable people to look after themselves. The Government's economic and social policies are on the line this evening.

In tackling the injustices of the CAP, we must consider a number of interests. I do not under-estimate the needs of farmers, but they are not the only people affected by the green pound, the 1990-91 budget and Britain's high interest rates. Other producers are involved, but their interests are fairly well represented. The Dairy Trade Federation, the British Poultry Federation, the Food and Drink Federation, the Association of Meat Producers, the Milk Marketing Board and many others have made representations to the Government.

We must also consider the wider consumer interests. The Minister prides himself on meeting bodies such as the National Consumer Council, which represents their interests, but ultimately they are not well organised. Members of Parliament therefore have a special responsibility to represent them. G. D. H. Cole, in his "guild Socialist" phase, wanted to change the House of Commons into a House of Consumers and the House of Lords into a House of Producers. That might have been quite interesting; certainly the suggestion illustrates the fact that consumer interests were to the fore among our elected representatives.

We were right to consider the problems of BSE and salmonella in eggs, and the general price problems. Price problems involve not only what farmers receive, but what consumers pay. Although farmers are also consumers, not all consumers are farmers; far from it. However, I want to highlight the problems of agricultural labourers, whom the Minister does not consult with any effectiveness. In his evidence to the Select Committee, he said that his personal preference was to try to talk to individual agricultural labourers as he went about the country, rather than consulting their representatives, who were only a small group. No group, however, is as small as the isolated individual who is not organised; at least a number of agricultural labourers have joined forces.

Agricultural labourers face many massive problems. The National Farmers Union has suggested that those living in tied cottages should not receive amounts equivalent to the rates that have been paid in the past, and that individual workers should pick up the poll tax bill. Those workers are not consulted about the budget we are discussing, although there are 37,000 of them in the Transport and General Workers Union agricultural group and 5,000 in other unions such as the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union. Some 20 per cent. of agricultural workers are organised, but that is an under-estimate of the number who are represented, because up to 50 per cent. of farms are family holdings in which self-employment and contract work is extensive.

Agricultural workers need the kind of representation and consideration that operates in the National Farmers Union; the Ministry recently regionalised its training boards on the basis of the structure in the NFU. They can, of course, draw on the general prosperity of farming, but a move towards that will, in the short run, involve the abolition of the green pound and the ending of the problem of high interest rates. In the long run, it will require a pan-European movement to democratic Socialism. There is the answer to the CAP question. With a set-up like that, we would no longer operate on the basis of such a stupid policy.

8.29 pm

Mr. Alan Amos (Hexham): In the limited time available, I shall restrict my remarks to sheep and cattle farmers in the hill and upland areas which form the backbone of the agricultural community in my constituency and, I believe, the British farming community. In so doing, I shall concentrate on the agricultural structures policy. I intend to make three general points: first, the need to extend objective 5b to Northumberland and apply objective 5a more comprehensively; secondly, the need to shift the emphasis of agricultural support away from intervention price support and towards direct payments to farmers on the headage of the animals; and, thirdly, the need to ensure that the United Kingdom receives its fair and proper share of EEC resources and assistance.

[Mr. Alan Amos]

The section on rural development in the 1989 report states that the

"European Community approach to rural development entails adjusting all the existing policies in order to keep abreast of the needs and development priorities of the regions."

The FEOGA guidance section on reform focuses EEC action on, first, common horizontal measures—that is objective 5a—applicable throughout the Community designed to speed up the adjustment of agricultural structures within the context of CAP reform and, secondly, two regional objectives which are jointly agreed by the Commission and the national regional and local authorities. Objective 1 refers to promoting the development and structural adjustment of the regions whose development is lagging behind. More importantly, objective 5b refers to

"promoting development of rural areas in difficulty with a view to reform CAP."

The 1989 report states that the continuing aims of the CAP include a better balance between producers and the markets—that is supply and demand—implementation of the reform of the structural funds and completion of the single agricultural market, but it reaffirms its principal objectives as budgetary discipline to give farmers effective support and, significantly, a greater effort to promote and develop activities in rural areas.

The European Community accepts the need to narrow the gap between the regions of the Community, and it also accepts that agriculture is undergoing fundamental changes. It is therefore incredible that, although structural measures eligible for EEC funding are targeted on agricultural and rural development, Northumberland gets no assistance under objective 5b although parts of western Scotland, Wales, Devon and Cornwall do. Only 2·6 per cent. of the United Kingdom population is covered by objective 5b compared with 7·4 per cent. in Germany and 10 per cent. in France.

The percentage of the United Kingdom population covered by objectives 1 and 5b still amounts to only one fifth of the EEC average. Even under objective 1, in rural regions, European regional development fund and European social fund moneys, plus FEOGA intervention funds, extend to all areas of activity and infrastructure development. Surely a more reasonable application of such criteria would include parts of Northumberland, some remote areas of which do not even have mains electricity.

I firmly believe that Northumberland's right to more targeted assistance under objective 5a deserves new and sympathetic consideration. The United Kingdom has already had an extension in its less-favoured areas so that 53 per cent. of usable agricultural land is now covered. I welcome the further application for an extension which was submitted on 21 June last year.

I am not suggesting blanket subsidies but rather the provision of an adequate income to maintain demographic, economic and ecological balance in vast areas of Northumberland. The balanced development and survival of entire communities depend on the viability of hill farmers. Objective 5a must provide for the encouragement of the existing competitive agriculture in the form of British sheep and cattle farmers, assistance for marginal farmers to diversify and the furtherance of non-agricultural factors such as environmental protection and the need to improve the living and working conditions of farmers.

Objective 5a certainly covers aid for young farmers setting up and facilitating the occupational integration of young people. There is increasing concern that young people cannot get jobs in farming, especially in the dairy sector where the milk quota scheme, although popular, lacks flexibility. They then drift to towns and conurbations, leading to the destruction of the social fabric of rural areas. If farmers go, so does rural life. The farming population is aging. It needs more young people who are able and willing to take up the challenges and opportunities of change. There is a need to keep family farms going and to maintain the demographic balance to preserve vibrant communities. Those needs can also be met by another aspect of objective 5a—inducement for early retirement. Again, that will help the demographic balance and bring a dynamic enterprise into the industry.

Objective 5a also includes assistance for diversification —although in some parts of my constituency the situation is so lean that that is not possible—into tourism, crafts, leisure and recreation, the manufacture and sale on the farm of farm produce, and environmental protection and enhancement, for example the maintenance of stone walls. The best stone wall in the world—Hadrian's wall—is in my constituency and farmers have used it to build houses for generations.

The abandonment of farms is very bad for the countryside, but a reasonable system of grants or loans at favourable rates of interest which can be more effective in some areas should discriminate between the less-favoured areas and the non less-favoured areas and between the uplands and the lowlands. Early retirement and help for young farmers to set up are also eligible for support under objective 5b. That reinforces the need for that designation to apply to Northumberland.

The processing and marketing of agricultural products, adding value to farms, also apply under objective 5b and the report acknowledges that they are often an essential prerequisite for economic diversification and the development of rural areas. I accept that there is a cost involved, but it is frankly insignificant. We are talking about the 1990 draft EC budget of £30·7 billion, of which only £1·3 billion goes on the guidance section of FEOGA and only £294 million on structural policies.

We should bring about a shift from intervention price support to direct payments and headage payments. This year, MAFF is expected to have spent about £2 billion, but due to the vagaries of the operation of the CAP, most of my farmers will not receive much, if any, of that. Most of it will go on the cost of storage of surplus products, export subsidies and other costs of disposal. Consumers do not benefit, as they have to pay higher prices than necessary. Farmers do not benefit, because they do not receive much of the money. Therefore, the Government are right to move towards greater reliance on market forces which would benefit consumers by lower prices, reduce the costs of the CAP through reduced export subsidies, for example, and then channel the money directly to the farmers, as income or via headage payments on their stock.

The average net farm income of livestock producers in hill and upland areas is forecast to fall in 1989-90, and a particular worry is the reduction in the incomes of specialist sheep producers in hill areas where the

opportunities to diversify are limited. For example, hill livestock compensatory allowances are paid on breeding cattle and sheep in LFAs with the aim of ensuring the continuation of livestock farming in hill and upland areas, thereby helping to maintain a viable rural population and to conserve the countryside.

The recent increase of 75p per hardy breed ewe in the severely disadvantaged areas is warmly welcomed. The extra £5·2 million of HLCA payments goes directly to the farmers. The total amount of HLCAs—about £125 million a year—is direct and effective. For example, the ewe premium goes directly to the farmers, as does the suckler cow premium. I welcome the increase in the Community-funded element of that together with the increase in the amount of national top-up now paid to the EEC maximum, meaning an increase of 42 per cent. Again, £57 million in total goes directly to the producers and is particularly helpful in LFAs where 70 per cent. of specialist beef producers are situated.

In discussions on the reform of the beef regime, we should support the Government's policy of pressing for reduced intervention support and increased direct payments to producers which can be achieved by concentrating more support on the suckler cow.

Finally, we must ensure that the rest of the EEC does not discriminate against the interests of United Kingdom farmers by imposing discriminatory headage limits. We must resist that at all costs.

8.39 pm

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): My hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) referred to bovine spongiform encephalopathy as potentially the greatest single threat to British agriculture since the war. I would add that it may also be—I put it no higher than this—a threat to public health.

We do not know whether BSE can be transmitted to people who eat the meat of infected cattle; we do not know whether there is any connection between BSE and Creutzfeld-Jakob disease; we do not know whether the incidence of Creutzfeld-Jakob disease has increased in recent years, although some evidence in the medical press suggests a noticeable increase in it; and, above all, we do not, and cannot, know how many people will develop Creutzfeld-Jakob disease in the future.

We do know that it takes a long time for Creutzfeld-Jakob disease to develop; and we know that there is a great similarity between this disease and BSE in cattle. As the hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) said, it is true that there is no proven connection, which is why the Department of Health is undertaking and sponsoring research into it. We will not know whether there is any connection until that research is completed.

What should be done while we are awaiting results of that research? I find the attitude of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food dangerously complacent—almost as complacent as the attitude of the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells), who told us that he had known about the incidence of BSE in cattle in the markets of Ceredigion and Pembroke, North for 50 years. If that is true, we must assume that farmers and vets in his constituency have known about it for 50 years, yet apparently no one has reported it to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Mr. Geraint Howells: With respect, I think that the industry, farmers, vets and the Ministry have known of this disease for the past decade or two.

Mr. Davis: Now it has become the past decade or two, but earlier the hon. Gentleman said that he had known about it for 50 years, and his remarks will be on the record. However, the past decade or two is different from what we have been told by the Ministry. Only last Friday, it told the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) that BSE had been described only in 1988, which is why the Ministry had not been able to take action before. The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North should get together with the hon. Member for Truro, who seems to be taking a closer interest in the problems of the disease.

Mr. Howells: To put the record straight, I did say for the past 50 years, but if the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) wants me to go further, I can say for the past 60 years.

Mr. Davis: That is contrary to everything that has been said by the Ministry, and I am inclined to believe that it did not know about the disease until 1986. The first case was diagnosed in 1986, which led to the publication of a report in 1988 and subsequent action by the Government.

The Government are also complacent because they did not ban the use of beef brains in meat products until November 1989. Even now, answers given recently by the Parliamentary Secretary show that his constant refrain is:

"There is no evidence of a risk to human health."—[*Official Report*, 31 January 1990; Vol. 166, c. *236*.]

On the same day, the Department of Health told one of my hon. Friends that it will undertake research to determine whether there is a connection between BSE and Creutzfeld-Jakob disease. The Department would not be undertaking such research unless it were necessary.

Against that background, I join my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields in urging the Government to pay 100 per cent. compensation for all cattle that are affected, or thought to be affected, by BSE. I urge them to cull all the calves of cows that have been shown to be infected by this infectious disease. I also add a plea to ban the use of calves' brains in meat products, in addition to banning the use of beef brains.

As I have said, we will not know whether there is any link between BSE and Creutzfeld-Jakob disease until the research is completed, but what should we do while we are waiting for the results of that research? The answer is that the Government should base their food policy on the principle of being better safe than sorry.

8.44 pm

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in the debate. You, Madam Deputy Speaker, will be aware that my constituency is one of the most agricultural in Britain. My constituents are proud of their agricultural heritage and expertise, but the House will not be surprised to hear that they are less sure about the future of the industry than at any time in recent decades and are extremely anxious about their prospects for the next few years.

Ministers are aware of the gravity of the problems faced by those people and show a determined and realistic attitude in trying to tackle them, but I do not believe that the nation has grasped how serious the decline in farm

[Mr. William Hague]

incomes has been in recent years, or how serious are the implications, not only for those who live off the land, but for consumers and the country.

Agriculture is one of our most successful industries. The achievements of British farmers since the war in delivering vast increases in production and productivity at a price that is affordable and of a quality that is sought by the consumer have few equals. It is being only slightly unfair to other industries to say that, if their performance had come close to British agriculture, Britain would be about the richest nation on earth. I only wish that some hon. Members and those sections of the media who are so ready to criticise the farming community would reflect a little more on that.

The success of agriculture in this and other countries has contributed to its current problems. The ability of the developed world to produce more food than it can consume inevitably means that many agricultural sectors face difficult times. I accept that, and I think that my constituents also do so. The farming community accepts that times are hard and that it must do its bit to respond.

The farming community is entitled to expect that the market in which it competes, and in which it needs to compete ever harder, is conducted according to rules that are fair to all. No one can claim that the green currency arrangements of the European Community are fair to all. When a continental farmer can claim £20 more a tonne than a British farmer, no one can claim that it is a fair or free market.

Much effort is being expended by continental politicians to persuade us of the case for closer political and economic integration of the European Community. I hope that they realise that few things do more damage to that aspiration than the utterly inadequate performance of the Community in dealing fairly with the diverse agricultural interests that it contains, despite the best efforts of successive British Ministers. It is sickening to see other members of the Community posing as European idealists but jumping to protect their industries and favour their farmers at the expense of others in the Community.

It is vital for the future of agriculture in this country that we obtain a substantial devaluation of the green pound and ensure that its complete abolition takes place as soon as possible. I hope that Ministers will press the case for simple justice and fairness, which would mean the elimination of the current gap. I appreciate that they would need a Commission proposal and a majority in the Council of Ministers to achieve that, but I hope that the Government are prepared to say that a failure by the Community to rectify the problem will hold up progress in other aspects of the Community's work.

No one should under-estimate the importance of getting a fair deal for our farmers or the number of farm businesses that are in a poor financial condition. It is vital that they be treated fairly and properly by the European Community, and I hope that Ministers will go into the next stage of price fixing and negotiations on the green pound with all guns blazing.

We ask our Community partners to act reasonably and fairly on the green pound, but the same should apply to BSE, which has been the subject of much discussion this evening. British beef is safe, and the opportunistic action of the West German Government in seeking to ban our exports is a disgrace. I hope that we shall stand firm in our determination to take the matter to the European Court if the action is not reversed.

I must tell my right hon. Friend the Minister that there is much dissatisfaction about the level of compensation payments for BSE-infected cattle. There is a powerful case for the compensation payable on infected cattle to be increased substantially. The taxpayer may argue that a business man must bear his own risks and that the nation as a whole is not responsible for the disease. However, it is of overriding importance that the disease be identified and dealt with wherever it appears, for the sake of the producer and of the consumer, both of whom are equally innocent in the matter.

I understand the difficulties of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in increasing compensation to 100 per cent. The Ministry might look silly if farmers turned in their whole herd to claim 100 per cent. compensation, but there is a strong case for a large increase to 90 per cent., if not to 100 per cent. On the green pound and on BSE, the British farmer is simply asking for a fair deal. He is not expecting to be featherbedded against the cold winds of competition, but to be given the same chance as others to compete at all.

There is a further aspect of agricultural activity for which the farmer deserves the special support of the nation, and I was delighted to hear my right hon. Friend the Minister refer to it in his opening speech. I have the privilege of representing much of the area of the Yorkshire dales and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food represents most of the remainder. They are the most naturally attractive part of England and are visited by vast numbers of tourists, from home and from abroad.

The reason that the dales look as they do is a result of farming and in the absence of farming, they would look very different. On behalf of my constituents, I urge the rest of the nation—a predominantly urban and suburban nation—to learn to respect and support the farmers who preserve that natural environment. That means not only shutting gates and respecting property when visiting the area—although that in itself might be a considerable advance—but providing financial assistance to livestock farming in such areas, which is barely economic and from which there is little or no possibility of diversification.

In the past year, the combination of interest rates, drought and changes in the sheepmeat regime have reduced the incomes of some of the hill farmers whom I have visited to the lowest for 27 years. That is why I am delighted that the Government were able to announce last week an increase in hill livestock compensatory allowances in the less favoured areas. Equally pleasing was my right hon. Friend's statement that Britain will make its own assessment of the economic position of hill farming in determining HLCA levels in the future.

I also congratulate the Government on the success of the environmentally sensitive areas, which have done much to show how the interests of agriculture and of conservation work naturally together, rather than in opposition to each other. The Government deserve far more credit than they have hitherto received for grasping that. However, I have one complaint. The new farming and conservation grant scheme had the effect of reducing the grant payable for the maintenance of drystone walls in the Yorkshire Dales from 60 per cent. to 50 per cent. The Yorkshire dales national park tried to supplement such

grants, and has at least one such scheme for doing so, but its resources are nowhere near adequate to the task. I ask the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food or the Department of the Environment to look again at those matters and to monitor carefully the condition of an outstanding and irreplaceable aspect of our national heritage.

Running through all my comments has been a concern for the future of agriculture, for its profitability, for its investment and for its environment. We must recognise that, without the entry of a new generation into agriculture, we shall one day be very short of food.

There is a tremendous amount of agricultural expertise and interest among the young generation. Anyone who doubts that should visit the Bedale agricultural centre in my constituency and meet the young people who take courses there. I hope that we can help those people where we can. In any forthcoming revision of milk quotas, for example, I hope that we shall make some provision for new entrants. Many of those young people will abandon agriculture over the next few years without a chance or a hope unless the House succeeds in winning for them a free and fair market for their products.

8.54 pm

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): I begin by reminding my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) that the last famous Scottish reformer, George Wishart, was burnt at the stake, so my hon. Friend should be cautious about going out into the countryside this weekend.

The prosperity of British agriculture is dependent on external forces beyond farmers' control. The weather and widely fluctuating interest rates make nonsense of all attempts to work within projected budgets. Those factors are further exacerbated by inflation. If those were all our troubles, there would be room for hope, but we have still to contend with the European Commission and the manipulation of the Common Market rules against the interest of British farmers. In my constituency, farmers face another uncertainty as a result of the proposal to introduce nitrate-sensitive advisory areas, which has blighted farms and made them unsaleable. I hope that there will be an early announcement removing that blight from the area. Before we had——

Mr. Teddy Taylor: That is a shocking thing to say.

Mr. Stewart: Before we had the Green party, we had the green pound. The public could be forgiven for thinking that it was an environmental tax. It is certainly a tax, not to protect the environment, but on Britain's super-efficient farmers and it now amounts to about £650 million. That green tax, or pound, was created to protect farmers in other EC countries from fair competition. British farmers cannot afford to be indifferent to this injustice. There comes a time when we must say that enough is enough, and that time is now.

Why should we have an artificially overvalued rate of exchange? When sterling falls against other European currencies, the green pound gap widens. For other British industries, that fall in value protects their trading position. The price of competing imports rises and British exports become more competitive on foreign markets. Why should those benefits be denied to United Kingdom farmers? To prevent the benefits coming through, the green currency system is underpinned by monetary compensatory amounts. The MCAs tax our exports of agricultural produce and subsidise competing imports. There has been talk today of a level playing field. I should prefer to see the goal posts remaining in one position.

The reality of the green pound gaps for farmers is lower prices. That was reflected in farm incomes in 1988 reaching their lowest point in any post-war period and they have fallen to a point that even a certain lager cannot reach. I accept that supply and demand for agricultural commodities will be guided increasingly by the market, and the European Commission's tight policies on the CAP support prices are consistent with that approach. However, our top priority at this year's price fixing in Brussels must be to secure fair competition in Europe for British farmers. The European Commission proposes a 33 per cent. devaluation of the green pound whereas my right hon. Friend the Minister wants a 50 per cent. cut.

We British farmers not only propose but demand in the name of justice a full devaluation of the green pound. The farming industry cannot wait until 1992 for that distortion of competition to be removed.

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the green pound is a complex matter? If we were to tell the British public that farmers today are suffering to the extent of 44p per kilogramme on every lamb, £65 on every carcase and £20 on every tonne of cereal, the message would get through and justice would be secured for our farmers.

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman is right, but the general public seem to realise that the farming industry is important only when there is a food shortage.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Stewart: My time is running out.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) has already spoken and I want a go.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The 10-minute limit on speeches has now been lifted.

Mr. Stewart: I know that, if the decision was the sole responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Minister, action would be taken because he more than anyone else knows that unprofitable farmers are not in the national interests. However, his voice is only one of the 12 who will discuss the price fixing in Brussels next month. Nevertheless we know that our right hon. Friend will go there full of fight and determination, fully supported by the House to accept nothing less than a fair deal for British agriculture.

9 pm

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): I have the great good fortune to come from, live in and represent one of the loveliest farming areas in the world. My farmers do not ask for an easy ride; they never have done. What they ask for is a fair deal. They want to be paid as much for what they produce as other European farmers get—not an unreasonable request, one might think. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) is laughing, but he will soon be laughing on the other side of his face.

I remember the day when, under the late John Silkin —I was at the Berlin agricultural fair with him—British

[Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman]

farmers were paid 45 per cent. less for a pint of milk than the German farmers were getting. That was grossly unfair. My farmers said so in no uncertain terms, and I said so, too. Today, my farmers are getting 19·5 per cent. less than the proper price for their milk and 20·8 per cent. less for sheep. That is not fair, either. I was glad to hear the Prime Minister say at Question Time today that she sees that gap as quite unacceptable, and that her Ministers will fight hard to remedy that injustice in Brussels.

I was equally glad to hear my right hon. Friend the Minister tell us that he will fight hard to close the green pound gap, but I do not think that his target is high enough. The Commission's proposal to reduce the gap by one third—will the Minister kindly listen and stop talking to my hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack)?—is inadequate. That would still leave a gap of 13 per cent. for milk and 13·8 per cent. for sheep. The Minister's target of 50 per cent. is just not enough either. We want to be paid exactly the same as other European farmers. It is sheer nonsense to talk about a common agricultural policy with uncommon prices.

In my part of the world we are prepared to accept the kicks that farming inevitably brings, but we do expect the ha'pence. We expect to get as much for what we produce as our European counterparts get and we look to the Minister to fight our battle for us. I have every confidence that he will do so.

As to fraud, nothing does the European ideal so much damage as the feeling by our fellow citizens that they are being diddled. Fraud destroys people's confidence in Europe. The hon. Member for South Shields—a very civil man, if I may say so—implied that Britain has a bad record for fraud. That is simply not correct. The truth is that we make very strenuous efforts to catch fraudsters and we hand them over to be punished. We do not cover up for them; we hand them over to be dealt with as they should be. Other countries either connive in their action or cover up for them. We shall never conquer fraud until we have impartial inspectors at every level of inspection who will be operating in someone else's country and will have no compunction in reporting the fraud that they find.

I am glad that the Minister, like the Prime Minister, takes fraud seriously, as he made clear in his speech. I know that he will take steps to stamp it out so that all of us, farmers and citizens, will know that we are getting a fair deal. That is all that we ask.

9.4 pm

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): I apologise to the House for not being here earlier. I have a good excuse, which I am sure that the Opposition will appreciate. I was detained by criticising the Government's policies on television. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary may be less understanding about that.

Therefore, it gives me even greater pleasure to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for the good work that he is doing in the face of problems that I need not reiterate. Believe it or not, that is appreciated by farmers. They know perfectly well that the old CAP days are over. None of my farmers tries to argue back over that time.

I want to make a specific point of mentioning the appreciation in retrospect of many of my milk farmers for the work done by a former Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in introducing milk quotas, for which no one gave him any thanks. I do not remember anyone at the time having a good word to say for him, but where would we have been without those difficult measures? I pay tribute retrospectively to his efforts.

However—this is where we get to the "however" part of the speech—I want to begin by associating myself with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) on the green pound. In all honesty, I must recognise that this is a complicated matter, which has repercussions for the retail prices index which there is no point ignoring.

In my constituency, many small-to-medium farmers face a drop in incomes. That is not farmers' flim-flam. It is the reality. I have looked at one or two yearly accounts and in some cases there has been a catastrophic drop, for reasons that I am sure have been mentioned in the debate such as high interest rates and a combination of other circumstances. Against that background, the green pound should be looked at again carefully.

One other point that is very much on the minds of farmers in my constituency is the Government's apparent assumption that it is an easy matter to turn to alternative sources of income. That is an extremely complicated matter. Farmers frequently turn to, or in some cases are driven to seeking, alternative sources of income in ways that risk disrupting the rural environment.

For example, one or two of my farmers have tried to arrange motor cycle scrambling in order, understandably, to boost their incomes. But when my constituents approach me about motor cycle scrambling in the countryside, I find it difficult not to be sympathetic to them. There are other cases, of less environmental irritation, in which for one reason or another, local councils find it difficult to give planning permission.

The point that I am making is that it is not as easy as my right hon. Friend the Minister sometimes gives the impression of believing for farmers to drum up extra income from the diversification of activities or the diverse use of their land or buildings. They quickly run up against planning restrictions—some entirely justified on environmental grounds, some perhaps less so. That is an important point. Flexibility in agriculture is much less than my right hon. Friend sometimes seems to imply.

I stress that my farmers, and I am sure those of other hon. Members, are not such a plaintive lot as they are sometimes depicted. When my farmers grumble, as they occasionally do, there tends to be something behind it, so I tend to listen.

Farmers want the Government to state their vision for farming in the future. Small and medium tenant farmers are particularly anxious to have the answer to that question. They want to know whether the Government see developing in Britain a situation analogous, for example, to that in Germany, where family farms tend to go by the board so that, particularly close to large conubations, one member of the family runs the farm and the rest of the family have jobs in the town. If that is part of the Government's vision for the future, they should say so.

If, on the other hand, the Government believe in the advantages, which seem obvious to me—social as well as economic—resulting from traditional family farms, they should make that clear and do what they can to support such farms.

A number of farmers in my constituency have raised with me what they regard as irritating problems caused by the withdrawal or curtailment of the service of the knackerman. I gather from the nods of assent on the Opposition Benches that I have support in raising this remote subject. Because that service has been curtailed, an extra cost is placed on farmers at a time when they can ill afford it.

Farmers are also concerned with the environmental implications because it is important to dispose of dead stock quickly. It is difficult to do that on a small farm, because it is a time-consuming operation and many rules and regulations surround it. What has happened to that service? It was a small but important service to farmers and I hope the Minister will explain why it has been curtailed or withdrawn.

9.12 pm

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Like my constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden), I apologise to hon. Members for arriving late for the debate. I was detained in a Standing Committee. Not only as a farmer but occasionally as a stockman, I have to use the services of the knackerman. The one I use is in my hon. Friend's constituency, so I endorse what he said on that subject.

We have faced a period of significantly declining farm incomes. As a farmer, I can read that in my trading accounts, and the figures are readily available from the national survey of farm incomes. I have not studied the figures which were published this morning—through what in the old days was the annual review procedure—but I understand that they show a small uplift in farm incomes following a long period of dramatic and inexorable decline.

The figures for farm incomes are low and the Minister must have got the message that, however hard we work at diversification and however many schemes he introduces, they will be of benefit at the margin but cannot by themselves be guaranteed to restore farm incomes. There is no Aladdin's lamp for the environmentally sensitive areas, the HLCAs or whatever. There is no Aladdin's lamp resulting even from the promotion of British food. All such endeavours are important, but will not by themselves solve the farm income problem.

That problem is not confined to Britain. It applies to other parts of the European Community. Indeed, it is worldwide. It is two years since I visited New Zealand, where agricultural subsidies were removed—as the phrase goes—at a stroke. I appreciate that that is not the Minister's intention, and I hope that it will never be the intention of a Conservative Government in this country. After that dramatic, and in my view misguided, decision, many New Zealand farmers, have picked themselves up and reached a measure of survival, not at a high level of income—it has not been an easy or happy process—which proves that it is not always necessary to aim for the highest levels of income.

Mr. Martlew: Can the hon. Gentleman remember that, when several hon. Members, including myself, went to New Zealand, we visited a dairy farm where the gate had been left open because the farmer had gone to play golf?

Mr. Boswell: Even the hon. Gentleman must understand that one does not milk dairy cows at every hour of the day and night. They are milked in the morning and the evening and if that farmer had time to play golf in the middle he must have worked hard earlier—so good luck to him.

Mr. Gummer: Will my hon. Friend ensure that the people of New Zealand realise that the Opposition spokesman on agriculture always eats their apples in preference to British apples, in the hope that he might get some votes somewhere?

Mr. Boswell: I hope that he can get those apples all through the year, but I note the Minister's point.

It is no good bleating about farm incomes, but it is right to record that there has been a problem with them. The main reason for that problem is the existence of agricultural surpluses in Britain, Europe and worldwide. I expect my right hon. Friend the Minister—as do all hon. Members—to continue telling the truth to British and European farmers and to his colleagues in the Council of Ministers, and to remain unremittingly committed to agricultural reform.

I realise that some of my hon. Friends say that we should do more, and they doubt whether anything has been done. I can tell my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) that from the viewpoint of farm incomes and cuts in prices, there has been much pain in agriculture, and it is not easy now. The issue is where we go from here.

I do not believe that the British Government's position is credible unless they sustain pressure for agricultural reform in the European Community. Equally, the position is not credible with our own farmers unless the Minister is seen to be anxious to remove discrimination against the British farmer. British farmers, with their skills and resilience, are prepared to take hard knocks and the truth, but they are not prepared to take all the knocks in Europe and to be the only ones respecting the truth in agriculture.

Two built-in tendencies within the European Community need addressing. The first and most obvious, which was mentioned in parts of the debate that I could not attend, is the question of the green currencies. An interesting exercise, which the Minister could construct at his leisure, would be to return to our accession to the Community in 1973 and work out for how many months of that period the pound was at a premium to the green pound and how many months it was at a discount; also how many months during that time the British farmer was receiving over the odds in sterling and how many months he was short-changed against the so-called common price structure. It is clear that there has been if not a universal, a general period of under-recoupment, as there is at the moment. We are aware of the Commission's proposal to cut one third of that difference.

Many British farmers still do not understand the mechanism by which those things operate. Some of them believe that my right hon. Friend the Minister is personally in charge of the green pound and that he has only to rub his Aladdin's lamp and a decision will emerge tomorrow. Perhaps he can disabuse the House of that misconception.

Those farmers who hark back to the good old days of Tom Williams and Jim Turner, 40 years ago, probably believe that the National Farmers Union is personally responsible for the green pound. My experience of the NFU branch meetings is that the leadership gets as much stick as the Minister. Those decisions are taken in Europe

[Mr. Boswell]

and they have to be agreed by our colleagues, but they will not reach an acceptable level unless the Minister and his team go forward and fight for a necessary and appropriate realignment.

The second point, that will be touched on by some colleagues—but of which less is made nationally—is the ever-present danger of differentation or discrimination against the British farmer on the grounds of the size of his or her holding. The average farm in Britain is still four times the size of farms in most of the Community, so it is very easy to produce specious arguments on social grounds for a two-tier price structure or some relief from quota for the smaller farmer or in particular circumstances. They may not be formally presented as anti-British measures, but in almost every case they operate against British interests. I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister is aware of that, but I should like his assurance that he will fight that off as hard as he has in the past, and as hard as he possibly can.

The other area where the British farmer needs support from Ministers is that of food policy. If there was any suggestion from Opposition Members today that there was something wrong with British food, I should like the Minister to come down very hard against it. The measures which he has taken, and for which he has been bitterly attacked, on salmonella and other aspects of food safety, are positive measures, unrivalled anywhere in Europe. He is entitled to some credit for them. To say that British food is in some way unsafe or not of the highest quality is not a reflection on British food or the British farmer but it may well reveal some basic, underlying psychological or personality defect in the person who makes such a statement.

Mr. Martlew: Will the hon. Member agree that, during the present Government's period of office, the number of food poisoning victims has increased threefold—10,000 when the Government came to power, and 30,000 now? Will he explain that?

Mr. Boswell: I will explain it on another occasion. I will explain the measures that the Government have taken——

Mr. Marland: Does my hon. Friend agree with me that it has now become easier, thanks to progress in medical science, to identify salmonella, listeria and hysteria, and that this is probably why the finger is being pointed at these various diseases?

Mr. Boswell: My hon. Friend puts it better than I could myself.

I have perfect confidence in British food. I have confidence in the Ministers who protect our food. I have grave doubts whether such rigorous regimes apply in certain continental countries. I will say no more, but it needs saying occasionally, because we have allowed ourselves to get into a frame of mind in which we have, as usual, assumed that Britain is worst when it is not and that there is something wrong with us when there is not.

After a period when agriculture has been in difficulty, the time has come for the Minister to stand up and speak for agriculture and to promote its interests. I know of nobody better equipped to do so. I believe that he is committed to reform but also to the protection of British interests. With all the difficulties that we have had, there is still a structure of research and development which lays down the skills for the British farmer to use to enable him to prosper into the 1990s. It has not been easy and it will not be easy for the next few years, but I am quite sure that the Minister is the right man to take these thoughts forward to Brussels in these very difficult negotiations.

9.23 pm

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Until the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) joined us, we were having a fairly lively debate. I am sorry that he wound it down; perhaps we can now wind it up again. Certainly it was a well-informed debate, expressing the concerns of farmers and consumers from every part of the United Kingdom. I say that it was well informed because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) pointed out, the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) was so well informed about bovine spongiform encephalopathy that he knew about it 50 years before it existed. This caused some surprise on both sides of the House. If he knew about it, it would have been helpful if he had told us about it.

Mr. Geraint Howells: I stand by what I said. I would never have expected the hon. Gentleman, who is a farmer, to be so dull and ignorant of the facts.

Mr. Home Robertson: I shall enjoy re-reading what the hon. Gentleman said, but I suspect that he would be hard put to find anyone, in the veterinary profession or anywhere else, who would seriously suggest that the disease had existed for so long.

The Government have much to answer for after 10 years of the reckless pursuit of free market policies, of cuts in public expenditure and of confused tinkering with the common agricultural policy. Those 10 years of malice and incompetence have taken a heavy toll in the rural and agricultural areas of the United Kingdom, as has been fully confirmed by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

I read the correspondence columns in the farming press from time to time and I know of the increasingly harsh criticism of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and the Government and all their works, so I am not surprised that a number of Conservative Members have expressed anxiety about the industry. In particular, the hon. Members for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland), for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss), for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) and for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) seemed to urge a little caution on the Minister.

I take this opportunity gently to remind the farming industry—if it needs reminding—that it always does better under Labour Governments. We should welcome some support and participation from those involved in agriculture in our attempts to get rid of a Government who have taken their loyal rural supporters for granted and have ridden roughshod over the interests and aspirations of rural communities throughout the United Kingdom.

I must say that it is difficult to criticise the Government's agricultural policy—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—because if it exists at all, it is a closely guarded secret, rather like the annual review of agriculture, which the Minister told us in his opening remarks was published today, although unfortunately hon. Members could not get hold of copies of it.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I did.

Mr. Home Robertson: I do not know how the hon. Lady got hold of a copy. It was certainly not available in the Vote Office, so I can only assume that she has an inside line to the Ministry.

We have had four Ministers of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food since the Government were elected in 1979, and during that period we have had no White Paper on agriculture and no guidance for the future of the farming industry. The last White Paper on agriculture, entitled "Farming and the Nation", was published by the late John Silkin in 1979 under the Labour Government.

The industry has a fine record of responding to the policies of successive Governments to meet the changing needs and priorities of the nation. But since 1979, agriculture has been left completely adrift—to stagger from crisis to crisis. Today's debate amply confirms the fact that the industry is in crisis. The framework that helped the industry to respond has been weakened and disrupted—I think in particular of the destruction of the research and advisory system that supported the industry so well for many years. Now there is doubt about the future of the Milk Marketing Board, and it would help if the Minister would take the opportunity of this debate to say what the Government proposed to do about that.

Market forces have driven the industry inexorably towards increased dependence on agrochemicals and intensive practices while the common agricultural policy has continued to distort the industry and generate the costly surpluses about which the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) rightly keeps telling us.

The Government have evidently recognised the need for radical changes in the CAP, but no one is prepared to explain where those changes are leading us. Surely no one regards the notion of set-aside as a satisfactory long-term policy for farming and the countryside. We have heard a lot about level playing fields in the debate, but there is a limit to the number of golf courses that can be built round the country to take up surplus agricultural land.

Perhaps it was the previous Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, now the Secretary of State for Education and Science, who let the cat out of the bag when he suggested that farmers who were hard up should rely on the social security system. One sad by-product of the Government's neglect of and indecision about the future of British agriculture has been the collapse of public confidence in the industry and its products.

There have been some spectacular cock-ups in recent years—starting with the chaotic response to pollution from Chernobyl. We should remember from time to time that, four years on, 758 farms are still subject to restrictions as a result of that incident. Then there was salmonella in eggs, then nitrate in water, and much more recently we have had the crisis of lead contamination in cattle feed. The Minister will be able to confirm that 1,668 farms are still subject to restrictions because of the Government's failure to protect farmers from that imported junk food. Then, as has been well demonstrated during this debate, there is the question of bovine spongiform encephalopathy—a matter to which I intend to return in a few minutes. Now we have the threat to introduce bovine somatoltropin and irradiation. All this is calculated to undermine the position of our farmers and, for the consumers, their produce.

There has also been the underlying failure to steer the industry in accordance with the developing needs and aspirations of the British people, both as consumers of food and as people concerned about their countryside. It is in that context that I make my point about the Government's failure to produce a White Paper on farming—a matter that I regard as genuinely important.

Mr. Spearing: Is my hon. Friend aware that it would be difficult for the Government to produce a White Paper? Is it not a fact that most White Papers are statements of Government intent? Many of us regard it as a misfortune that the United Kingdom cannot have an agricultural policy; there is only the common agriculture policy, which is determined in Brussels. Is that not why there is no—and, alas, can be no—statement of Government policy in a White Paper?

Mr. Home Robertson: That did not prevent Labour Ministers from producing White Papers on agriculture. It is only this lot who have so signally failed to do so. It would be useful if, from time to time, Ministers and their officials were to take the trouble to consult the industry and other interested parties with a view to setting down a reviewed framework of policies and priorities, perhaps every four or five years. If they had done that, perhaps things would have worked out very differently for the industry.

Such consultation and consideration would certainly have pointed towards a slowing down in intensification many years ago and, perhaps, to gradual changes in direction, and would have prevented the panic responses to crises that the industry has been experiencing. Certainly they would have ruled out the prospect of the introduction of irradiation or BST.

Mr. Teddy Taylor *rose*——

Mr. Home Robertson: I am sorry that I cannot give way to the hon. Gentleman. His hon. Friends took up more time than they were meant to, and I want to give the Minister a reasonable time to respond to the debate.

As for BSE, it is always easy to be wise after the event, but since it was known from scientific work back in 1980 that scrapie could be transmitted orally to monkeys, surely it was rather reckless to water down the regulations covering the processing of sheep offal in that very year. I am not saying that those regulations would have prevented the disastrous development of BSE in British cattle, but they might have helped. My hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) put it to the Minister that those regulations may have been watered down as part of the Government's policy of lifting the burden from industry. Perhaps as a consequence of that decision, the Government have created a far more serious burden. I understand that farmers still have no way of establishing whether compound feeds contain animal residues. Understandably, they are interested in that subject now.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) made an important point. He has received information to the effect that full compensation is payable where BSE cattle are found in slaughterhouses. It would be helpful if the Minister explained how compensation can be available to butchers if not to farmers. The point was well made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields—indeed, by hon. Members on both sides of the House—that there is an overwhelming case for the introduction of 100 per cent.

[Mr. Home Robertson]

compensation and for urgent consideration of a slaughter policy to insure the eradication of this very dangerous disease at the earliest possible date.

Obviously we shall soon have an opportunity to debate the Government's Food Safety Bill. It seems to be a cautious step in the right direction, but I fear that it is too little, too late. For our part, we are determined to establish an independent food standard agency to take a grip on matters in the interests of consumers and producers.

As to the current plight of farming, I wonder how Conservative Members of Parliament dare show their faces in their rural constituencies in view of the Government's record in recent years. There has been bad news at every turn. My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) referred to the impact of the viciously anti-rural poll tax on farm workers in tied accommodation. There is an immediate rural housing crisis. There is the criminal under-funding of vital services such as transport, education and the Health Service. From one end to the other, as Conservative Members know, rural Britain has taken a hammering.

What about farming? Nye Bevan is supposed to have complained that the regeneration of agriculture by the 1945 Labour Government had only made it possible for farmers to pay their subscriptions to the Tory party. I wonder how many of them are still making that mistake today. I expect that many of them are saying that they cannot afford it. If they contrast the record of the post-war Labour Government on agriculture with that of the present Government, they should break the habit of generations and opt for a safer future with the Labour party.

When I was actively participating in farming back in 1978, I was running a mixed farming enterprise and, in common with other people in the industry, I was investing in improvements. That style of management is not possible today because of vicious interest rates and other aspects of Government policy.

Borrowings by agriculture have trebled from £3·4 billion in 1978, when Labour was in power, to about £10 billion in the current year. Interest payments are up more than five times in the same period, from £184 million to a crippling £948 million. That is a grim burden. It is unlikely to get better so long as the Government pursue their present policies, which have driven farmers' overdraft interest rates up to 18 per cent.

We also have the continuing effects of high inflation on input costs, while output prices are constrained by the 18 per cent. distortion of the green pound, which has been mentioned by hon. Members on all sides, but particularly by my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones). That must be rectified; I am glad that the Minister acknowledged that point.

The industry is in real trouble. That must spell danger for the rural economy, and particularly for the hills and uplands. The disadvantages far outweigh the long-delayed adjustment in hill livestock compensatory allowances for sheep which the Minister announced last week. He conveniently did not comment on his failure to increase HLCAs for cattle, which is particularly important because the cattle industry is going through a difficult time. We must maintain the diversity of grazing enterprises in the hills and uplands.

The consequences of the Government's policy have been grave for the rural economy. The hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) referred to statistics published by the National Farmers Union of Scotland about employees on farms in Scotland. In five years, the total has fallen by 23 per cent., from 19,100 to 14,771. The industry is left with a dwindling and aging work force, and inadequate training and career prospects for young people. There has been a dramatic cut in investment in maintenance, buildings and the replacement of collapsing land drainage systems. All that is hitting rural employment. It also means that agriculture will be ill prepared to compete in Europe after 1992. That distortion of our trading position must be another burden on Britain's disastrous trade balance, as we tax food exports and subsidise food imports.

Mr. Lord *rose*——

Mr. Home Robertson: No. I must be fair to the Minister. It is important that he have a proper opportunity to reply to the debate.

We are literally subsidising imports. I understand that Irish beef imports coming into Britain at present get a built-in advantage of £60 a head. That cannot make sense, but that seems to be the general policy of the Government towards our trading partners. They sell and we buy and, to add insult to injury, we have to buy eggs contaminated with salmonella from the Netherlands whether we like it or not. The Minister really should do something about that.

We see no sense in prolonging the green pound discrepancy and we welcome the Minister's assurance that he will do everything possible to eliminate it. The green pound is a mechanism that has outlived any possible usefulness and now is the time for it to go.

For our part, when we come to power in the not so distant future we will introduce economic policies to encourage investment and enterprise, which will be good for farming as well as other industries. We will adopt rural policies to regenerate the rural communities. We will introduce a green premium to encourage extensification on farms and we will establish an independent food standards agency to restore confidence in British food.

Meanwhile, we have to leave the Minister to his own limited devices, which are well illustrated in this week's edition of *Farming News*. This is what it says about the Minister:

"Nothing to do with me, said junior farm Minister David Curry, as he abdicated any MAFF responsibility for the lack of Government popularity with farmers.

Before beating a speedy retreat from his audience of Essex farmers back to the confines of Westminster, Mr. Curry pleaded for realism in judging the Ministry's efforts on the green £, co-responsibility levies, GATT talks and even strawburning.

'I don't claim that everything is under control,' he said. 'But in those areas for which we do have responsibility we are making as great an effort as we can . . .

Times are difficult for farmers and I am not here to pretend that that is not the case,' the Minister said."

Well, heaven help the farming industry, because the Minister clearly cannot.

9.41 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): I imagine that Labour Members must have been most anxious to keep their agricultural policy under wraps pending the epoch-making speech that their leader is to

make to the National Farmers Union annual dinner. It will be the first time he has ever addressed himself to agricultural questions and, if what we just heard is a curtain raiser to that, I hope that the NFU invites him to speak before the soup so that he can leave before it is served, because that will be the only thing he has to offer.

In the last 15 seconds of the speech of the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson), we heard the Labour party agricultural policy. They are going to do something about the economy and to green things generally. For most of the rest of his speech, the hon. Gentleman was complaining that my right hon. Friend does not spend his time swimming up and down the Bristol channel preventing contaminated feed from Holland arriving in the United Kingdom, and was accusing him of being responsible for the explosion of a Soviet nuclear power station in the Ukraine. My right hon. Friend has many talents and his writ runs a long way, but we regard that as something of a Socialist action and not one for which we claim responsibility.

I should have thought that in all the interventions from the Opposition there might have been a hint—a whisper, just a clue—about what farmers might expect if Labour were returned to power. But all that we were told by the hon. Gentleman was that the time had come to get rid of the green pound. We all know how well qualified he is to press for that and how good that advice is, because when the Labour party was in government and the bottom point of its inflation was almost as low as the peak of ours, it deliberately maintained the biggest green pound gap in the history of the British agricultural industry.

If that is to be the precedent, I do not think that the sort of remarks that the hon. Gentleman has made here will be considered very credible. *Farming News*, unfortunately, does not always get it right, especially since I ceased to write for it. And, of course, I did not flee to Westminster —I flew to Dengie to look at green crop industry, because we try to keep abreast of innovation. So they got their geography wrong, apart from anything else. However, I will forgive them in return for the past enjoyment of writing for that very singular newspaper.

We look forward to what the Leader of the Opposition has to say about Labour's agricultural policy when he addresses the NFU, and will examine it with the closest attention. I have no doubt that the Opposition agricultural spokesman will wish to examine it as well, because his view must differ substantially from that of his right hon. Friend or it will not make sense.

A series of themes were raised in the debate and I shall address them. No one failed to mention the green pound. The level playing field was mentioned so often that I wondered whether I had been translated to the post with responsibility for sport and recreation.

The position is simple, and my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) set it out straight. My right hon. Friend the Minister does not just pick up the telephone, ring Ray MacSharry and say, "By the way Commissioner, we would like 15 per cent. or 10 per cent. off the green pound." We cannot take unilateral action on the green pound. It would be utterly futile to demand a White Paper, because agricultural policy is determined in the Community and, increasingly, in the wider international community as the GATT talks indicate.

Dr. David Clark: Labour had one in 1979.

Mr. Curry: Not before we were a member of the European Community. The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), who follows these constitutional matters with more expertise than the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), put him straight on that.

As for the green pound, we have made it clear that we wish to reach the target of zero by 1992 to which the Community is committed. That means that we must take a substantial chunk this time round. We have recognised that the agricultural community believes that this is essential, and we share that view. The Commission has proposed a cut of one third.

No hon. Member should think that it is a doddle to get that third. We have to persuade the other Ministers in the Council of Ministers. As I am sure hon. Members know, there are only two ways in which a Commission proposal can be changed—either a compromise is put forward by the presidency which the Commission accepts as its own, or there is a unanimous vote by the Council members to compel the Commission to change its proposal. That is the constitutional arrangement and we cannot change it. We have to use persuasion and pressure to try to get the best we can out of the negotiations.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop), who made an extremely important point. He warned us not to get caught up in contradictory objectives because if interest rates were to come down and, as a consequence, the pound was to decline in the foreign exchanges, the green pound gap would open up again. Therefore, there is some complementarity between our policies, which matters to farmers.

Many Members raised the issue of the co-responsibility levy. We have made it clear from the beginning that we dislike it and we shall do all we can to get rid of it. I would not be honest if I suggested to the House that we shall find that easy. It was encouraging that when we were round the table in Brussels, a number of Ministers said that they wished to see further progress towards the dismantling of the co-responsibility levy system. We subscribe to that because we think it is a pretty silly system, which penalises farmers without benefiting the consumer. We are completely opposed to it, but here again, we are locked into a majority voting system. We shall do whatever we can every time we try to remove what we regard as a silly system.

Many hon. Members raised the subject of BSE and I shall try to deal with the principal points raised. The first concerned rendering. The temperatures needed in rendering depend on the type of machine, the size of the particles and the period in the oven. I have looked at the criteria that most EC countries apply to the process. They apply a range of different criteria, but all have the objective of making the product safe—the same rules as we apply in the United Kingdom.

I have heard hon. Members speak of the need for 100 per cent. compensation for BSE. I have great sympathy with farmers whose herds are afflicted, particularly when they find that there is more than one incident of BSE on their farms. If there is a case for adjusting compensation, it must be based on the grounds of fairness to the agricultural community. I do not accept that there is a case on the grounds of public health. We have taken an ultra-cautious approach and gone way beyond what we were recommended to do. We have had the feed and offal bans. We look at the matters on a virtually daily basis

[Mr. Curry]

because we have an obligation to do so. We can say that those products are safe for the consumer to eat. Every jot of research we have done shows that, and it has been published. There has been no secret about it.

The hon. Member for South Shields asked about the export of feed products. We have already decided that we must tackle that problem. The chief veterinary officer is writing to his opposite numbers informing them of the bans that are in force in the United Kingdom, so that there can be no suggestion that recipient countries are not aware of any restrictions placed upon the product in the United Kingdom. We are already tackling that problem.

I have checked on what the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) said, and I am confident that 100 per cent. is paid only when an animal is suspected of having bovine spongiform encephalopathy, but is subsequently found to be clean. We do not have a policy of paying 50 per cent. on animals that are found to be free from the disease.

Mr. Ron Davies: Now that the Minister has acknowledged that there is a problem with contaminated feed, can he explain why, since the Government have banned the use of contaminated feed for ruminants, he has continued, knowingly, to export some 12,000 or 13,000 tonnes of feed per year? Can he explain why, as late as yesterday, he acknowledged in a parliamentary answer to me that he has continued to allow the export of contaminated feedstuffs, particularly to the Third world, without any warnings, negotiation or discussion to indicate to those countries the dangers inherent in the products that they are importing?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman must realise that there has been extremely wide publicity for these matters in the United Kingdom, and we have taken steps to inform other countries. It is up to them to decide whether they wish to import the product and whether they judge it to be safe. We have taken all reasonable steps to inform them of the situation in the United Kingdom. I am not prepared to see exports take place on any misrepresented basis, and we have taken steps to ensure that there is no possibility that that can happen.

Several of my hon. Friends mentioned the egg industry and egg imports. It is true that the industry, with the assistance of the Government, has cleaned up its act considerably. We can now say that British eggs are safe and that we have eliminated a great deal of the risk to the consumer. It was not always thus. In the initial stages, the industry was not forthcoming or willing to apply itself and to take fairly radical measures, but we are through that stage now. However, it is still a fragmented industry, and it would help greatly if it could get its act together, and if it could be represented by fewer organisations. Frankly, that would make it an easier partner to deal with.

Many hon. Members have asked why we do not ban imported eggs. Under Community regulations, we do not have the legal power to do that. The risk to health from imported eggs is not sufficient to give us the legal means to ban them. We are not prepared to take actions which we reproach other countries for taking with other products. We regard that as wholly inconsistent and wrong. We must have Europewide regulations, and there is no point pretending that that will happen tomorrow, because we know of the delays, and the time scale of the Community.

My right hon. Friend raised that issue at the last Agriculture Council meeting, and the Commissioner said that he would expedite work on the matter and that working groups would get down to business as soon as possible. We hope to have some proposals on the table around the middle of this year.

Dr. David Clark: Does not the Minister appreciate that we have taken action against domestic egg producers because salmonella-contaminated eggs are a public health risk? If that is the case, surely salmonella-contaminated eggs from Holland are an equal public health risk. Therefore, why will the Minister not invoke article 36 of the treaty of Rome, which specifically gives him the power he needs?

Mr. Curry: The answer is very simple: our legal advice is that it cannot be used in these circumstances. If it could be used, we would not hesitate to use it. Let me also remind the hon. Gentleman that, at the height of the salmonella crisis, not a single country declined to accept eggs exported from the United Kingdom.

A number of hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton), asked why we do not stamp the British lion on our eggs. The industry has informed us that stamping the lion on individual eggs is likely to detract from the image of freshness, so it is not an open-and-shut case—although there is nothing to prevent us from stamping the packs to indicate United Kingdom origin.

Hon. Members have asked about the future of the Milk Marketing Board, which I agree is an important issue. Let me make it clear that there is no hidden Government agenda. The board has already circulated its producers a number of times on the subject of its future status and the direction of its policies, because it knows that with the advent of the single market and increased competition the present position may not be sustainable. It wishes to derive the maximum benefit from prices for its farmers, and it knows that there have been problems with milk allocation, especially in parts of the manufacturing sector.

The Milk Marketing Board has embarked on an evaluation of its position. It enjoys a statutory monopoly and a special relationship with the Dairy Trade Federation, which receives the particular protection of European legislation. If the goal posts were shifted, there would have to be a general discussion about the relationship between the two sides of the industry and the future of milk marketing in the United Kingdom. We believe that it is up to the board to take the initiative—to come up with its own ideas, and to tell us whether it needs our assistance. We have no prescription for its future direction. We recognise its importance to producers, especially in rural areas: in my constituency, and those of many other hon. Members, they need the security of a market for their products.

The hon. Member for Wallsend (Mr. Garrett) made an interesting speech, in which he broadened the horizon to include the position in eastern Europe. In a domestic context, he mentioned set-aside. Clearly, we cannot change the rules in the middle of the game, but I am reviewing the set-aside programme to see whether it can be made more environmentally effective, and whether any change is needed.

As I have told the House before, if I had absolute truth at my disposal I would have decided to go into the Church

rather than the Ministry—if I may put it that way. As things are, I am willing to admit that change and improvement are possible, and I am prepared to embark on the process; I am sure that the House will understand that that process is not always a reflection of governmental processes.

The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) mentioned pigmeat, and I know that that sector has experienced particular difficulties. We did not accept the Commission's proposals to chop the import levies: the industry had clawed its way back from a difficult position, and we were not prepared to let its feet be kicked from under it. The Commission recently took remedial action to help the industry, and we supported it in that. We advocate a reform of the pigmeat regime based on free-market principles, but I have taken to heart what the right hon. Gentleman said about the need to find stability in a marketplace—although he will no doubt agree that heavy intervention and heavy regimes will not achieve that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) had a catalogue of complaints about the effectiveness of CAP measures. We are now engaged in GATT talks, and Ministers know that there is no escape: we are locked into the process. It means what it says—a progressive and substantial reduction in farm support. We cannot tell the industry that the pressure will be off. We cannot say, "Don't worry—we have got through this patch." We all know that the dairy sector still has problems, and that it has not been stabilised effectively, despite the quotas. We know that the cereals sector needs only a decent harvest in all the major producing countries to be landed with a significant surplus problem. The pressure cannot be relaxed, but it is now being exercised through GATT as well as through the EC's own mechanisms.

I realise that my hon. Friend has an honourable record of complaint, but we have progressively taken action. He has only to go into the countryside to find out that it is hurting and it is effective. Of course we will do our best to combat fraud and to save the knackers, because we appreciate their role in rural industry.

Our policy is to defend farming and to support that which gives value for money to the farmer, to the taxpayer and to the consumer. We have to see farming in the wider context of social aspects and of the environment. Farming must become more market-orientated if it is to deserve the credibility and the justification of that continued support. We intend to defend those interests in Brussels for the Community and for the United Kingdom. We have done it successfully in the past and we intend to continue that success in future.

Mr. Speaker: I must now put the Question on the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken)——

Mr. Teddy Taylor: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I beg to ask to leave to withdraw the amendment.

Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: In that case, I am afraid that I must put the amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made:-

The House divided: Ayes 29, Noes 182.

Division No. 66] **[10 pm**

AYES

Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Beggs, Roy
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bradley, Keith
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Dalyell, Tam
Dixon, Don
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Golding, Mrs Llin
Hinchliffe, David
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
McCartney, Ian
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Meale, Alan
Pike, Peter L.
Redmond, Martin
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Spearing, Nigel
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Dennis Skinner and
Mr. Bob Cryer.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rupert
Alton, David
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Beith, A. J.
Boswell, Tim
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Durant, Tony
Emery, Sir Peter
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Franks, Cecil
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hind, Kenneth
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Major, Rt Hon John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector

Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Gerrard
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Paice, James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Salmond, Alex
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walden, George
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Warren, Kenneth
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tom Sackville and
Mr. Irvine Patnick.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. COM. (89) 660 relating to prices for agricultural products and related measures for 1990-91, 7010/89 relating to adjustment of agricultural structures, 8309/89 and 8877/89 relating to the quota system in the milk sector, the Court of Auditors' Special Report No. 1/89 on the agrimonetary system, the proposals described in the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food relating to 16th January on use of agricultural commodities in the non-food sector and of the Government's intention to negotiate an outcome on the price proposals which takes account of the interests of United Kingdom producers and consumers and of the need to maintain the progress made in reforming the European Community's Common Agricultural Policy.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

Criminal Law

That the draft Official Secrets Act 1989 (Prescription) Order 1989, which was laid before this House on 18th December, be approved.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

Public Health

That the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Contamination of Feeding Stuff) (England) Order 1990 (S.I., 1990, No. 37) dated 11th January 1990, a copy of which was laid before this House on 12th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

Public Health

That the Food Protection (Emergency Prohibitions) (Contamination of Feeding Stuff) (Wales) Order 1990 (S.I., 1990, No. 43), dated 12th January 1990, a copy of which was laid before this House on 15th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

Terms and Conditions of Employment

That the draft Employment Protection (Variation of Limits) (No. 2) Order 1989, which was laid before this House on 15th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.)

Fees and Charges

That the draft Electricity Act 1989 (Fees) Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 8th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

The House divided: Ayes 159, Noes 39.

Division No. 67] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Boswell, Tim
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Franks, Cecil
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorst, John
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hind, Kenneth
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Major, Rt Hon John

Marland, Paul
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steen, Anthony
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Warren, Kenneth
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Greg Knight and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

NOES

Alton, David
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Dalyell, Tam
Dixon, Don
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Haynes, Frank
Hinchliffe, David
Howells, Geraint
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
McCartney, Ian
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Meale, Alan
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Pike, Peter L.
Redmond, Martin
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Wallace, James
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Harry Barnes and
Mr. Bob Cryer.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to raise a point with you and to seek your guidance. There would appear to be some problem on the Opposition Benches, particularly in respect of the Bench below the Gangway and the one immediately behind that. I do not know whether the cleaners have not attended to that area recently and there are fleas there—*[Interruption.]*—but the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) seems to have gathered a lot of hon. Members around him——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members may sit where they like in the Chamber.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Very well, but this is only delaying the commencement of the Adjournment.

Mr. Leigh: The last Division, Mr. Speaker, was on the momentous issue of whether there should be power by regulation to determine that fees be paid for metered approval. I am wondering whether there is any rule by which hon. Members who force a Division should know what they are voting about. Could it be that they forced a Division not because they were interested in regulations to determine that fees be paid for metered approval, but that their action had something to do with the subsequent Adjournment motion, in which case was it not a waste of public money? I am——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is not for me to make a judgment on such matters. I imagine that it may have been because

"The Select Committee on Statutory Instruments has drawn the special attention of the House to the above Instrument".

Civil Servants (Disinformation)

Motion made, and Question proposed, that this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

10.27 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): I wish to draw the attention of the House to ministerial responsibility for disinformation about Members issued by civil servants with official authority and to urge the House to look at the constitutional issues of ministerial responsibility and the rights of Parliament which are raised by a number of cases of alleged disinformation against Members.

I shall not deal with the dismissal of Colin Wallace, which is a matter for the Calcutt inquiry, or with some of the other associated issues, such as the Kincora boys home or security policy in Northern Ireland. The issue I am raising is not a party matter. What has happened has been a problem under all Governments, and my concern goes back to 1978, when I tabled a motion for the Labour party on the conduct of the security services while still a Secretary of State. The Members about whom disinformation has been spread come from all parties, and I have notified all those Members to whom I might refer.

We must accept that tonight we are considering a House of Commons matter. The Minister of State for the Armed Forces has no departmental responsibility for the issues that I am raising, so he is in some difficulty. I have written a note to him saying that I do not expect a reply from him tonight. I ask only that he ensures that my remarks are considered by his colleagues.

I shall start with what the House already knows. I assure hon. Members that there will be no new revelations from me. Our task is to link what we know and to understand its importance. Disinformation has been authorised and used in the past and, to that extent, what Colin Wallace and Peter Wright have said has been confirmed. I refer to the statement by the Secretary of State for Defence on 1 February:

"There were practices of using disinformation to malign organisations and individuals."—*[Official Report,* 1 February 1990; Vol. 166, c. 455.]

The right hon. Gentleman admitted that, and also said that the Army was entitled to use disinformation. There is no argument about that.

Secondly, it has also been established that the Prime Minister, by writing letters, has made it clear that she could not discover the truth from the security services for which she is uniquely responsible to the House of Commons.

Thirdly, my right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees), who was severally Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and then Home Secretary, in one or two moving and impressive interventions, made it clear that he did not know what was happening when he was responsible, under a previous Government, in either capacity.

We know that the allegations by Wallace have, in the past, been denied and that the reaction to the allegations by Peter Wright was not to have them investigated but, at great public expense, to try to have them banned so that the British public could not read them. The Cabinet Secretary was sent to Australia with the rather unfortunate task of having to explain to the court that he was using the truth economically.

It is worth considering the basis of and the reasons for the allegations made by the security services. I am not, for the moment, concerned with whether they did so with or without ministerial authority. The real constitutional importance of what they did is that they made their own decision about which individuals and which organisations were the enemy. They decided who the enemy was and then took action to deal with that enemy, whereas in every other aspect of defence policy—and the security services are a part of our defence organisation—the House decides who is the enemy.

The Chief of Staff does not announce that he is going to war with someone because he has decided who that enemy might be. The policy of the security services should be determined by Parliament, not by Ministers without telling Parliament—if that is what they did—or by people lower down the line. We also know that false and damaging allegations were fabricated and distributed about those whom the security services, or Ministers—if they knew—regarded as the enemy.

I shall now cite some examples, and deal first with Colin Wallace. The Minister and I have received 39 pages of forgeries. Indeed, I sent the Speaker a similar package. They were issued on the admission of Colin Wallace, and a large number of Members of Parliament were named in them. I shall mention some to show the legitimate interest of those Members. Harold Wilson, no longer in this House, was described as vulnerable on financial, moral and political grounds; the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) on moral and political grounds; Jim Callaghan, then an hon. Member, on financial grounds; the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. I. Paisley) on financial and moral grounds; the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) on moral grounds; myself on political grounds; my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) on political grounds.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Leeds, South was to discover a forgery asserting that he was supporting the IRA. My right hon. Friends the Members for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey), and for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) and I were alleged to have written a pamphlet about world revolution—not something that could have been written by anyone who understood some of the interesting ideological discussions that go on in the party of which I am proud to be a member. But one of the characteristics of the intelligence service is its very low level of knowledge.

I remember once being refused permission by one of my civil servants to visit the Socialist International—a very distinguished body, including Willy Brandt, Francois Mitterrand and so on—because he had muddled it up with the International Socialists, an indication of the enormously low intellectual level of the intelligence service. I myself am associated, according to Colin Wallace in his earlier work, with Czech intelligence.

It is only fair to say about Colin Wallace himself—I quote from Paul Foot's book—that in 1975, I think, he saw a man from MI5. I quote Colin Wallace as quoted in Paul Foot's book:

"I told him I didn't want to go any further with Clockwork Orange"—

the disinformation campaign—

"without political clearance. He seemed surprised and suggested that I already had clearance. But I made it clear I wanted some proof that the whole programme had been seen and approved by a minister. Of course I was pretty certain

that [the man] couldn't get ministerial clearance for Clockwork Orange. I was pretty sure that no minister had a clue that Clockwork Orange even existed. But I knew I couldn't go on doing it, and I wanted to get on with other things.'"

That is at least a comment by a man of some integrity who wishes not to be used by anybody to blacken the reputation of hon. Members.

We come to Peter Wright—and we must never forget that he is still on the agenda, never discussed by the House. I quote from page 369 of his book Spycatcher where he wrote about the year 1974, at about the same time that this was happening:

"The plan was simple. In the run-up to the election which, given the level of instability in Parliament, must be due within a matter of months, MI5 would arrange for selective details of the intelligence about leading Labour Party figures, but especially Wilson, to be leaked to sympathetic pressmen. Using our contacts in the press and among union officials, word of the material contained in MI5 files, and the fact that Wilson was considered a security risk would be passed around . . . 'We'll have him out' said one of [the MI5 people], 'this time we'll have him out.' Shortly afterwards Wilson resigned. As we always used to say in the office 'Politicians may come and go, but the security service goes on'"

Then we have the case of Cathy Massiter—and I have notified the right hon. Gentleman who was Secretary of State for Defence at the time. She worked in MI5. She alleged that she was told to intercept the telephone calls at the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and she felt that that was wrong. Hon. Members, some of whom, including myself, are members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament—the former Labour leader, the present Labour leader—would feel that for the security services —or, in this case, as far as I can make out, the Secretary of State—to determine that CND, for example, was an enemy and could be treated like any other foreign enemy or terrorist, was well beyond what the House could accept.

Clive Ponting and Sarah Tisdall, who suffered imprisonment, were principled civil servants who were not prepared to do what they were asked to do.

Ministers' response to all this has been to tighten security. We now have new legislation which speaks of a lifelong obligation of confidentiality to the Crown. Who is the Crown? Did the Queen tell Peter Wright to destabilise Harold Wilson? No. Did Harold Wilson, the Queen's first Minister, tell Peter Wright to destabilise him? No. The Crown is a constitutional fiction, a state within a state, concreted in the heart of Government, surrounded with barbed wire, which has its own policies, its own enemies, and its own methods of dealing with them, and which is to be protected for ever.

I said that this was not a party matter, and it is not. Look at what Harold Wilson said about the security services. I shall quote from the shortest chapter of his book "The Government of Britain"—a chapter that is 210 words long:

"The Prime Minister has the ultimate responsibility for the National Security Authority at home and abroad . . . The Prime Minister is occasionally questioned on matters arising out of his responsibilities. His answers may be regarded as uniformly uninformative."

That is the view that Harold Wilson took as Prime Minister, and the problem has been faced with all Prime Ministers.

How did the present Prime Minister react to questions of security that arose when Callaghan was Prime Minister and she was Leader of the Opposition? I remembered the occasion very well, and I looked it up. On 28 July 1977, there were rumours going round that Harold Wilson had been telling the press that he thought that he had been bugged at No. 10. So what did the Leader of the Opposition do? At 1.30 pm, after the all-night debate on the Consolidated Fund Bill, she rose and said to Mr. Godman Irvine, who was in the Chair:

"May I seek your guidance? Has any request been received from the Government to make a statement on the matters which have previously been raised concerning allegations made against the security services? We think it vital that such a statement should be made before the Summer Recess, for the confidence and morale of the security services".

The very Prime Minister who will not make a statement demanded a statement when she was Leader of the Opposition. She went on to say something which, I must admit, is more consistent:

"It would appear that there may, on the face of it, be some infringements of the Official Secrets Act"—[*Official Report*, 28 July 1977; Vol. 936, c. 1372-3.]—

and that the Attorney-General should make a statement. She wanted Wilson to be prosecuted for saying what had happened to him when he was Prime Minister.

We should contrast all this with the American system. There are parallels. If the House will bear with me, I shall quote Senator Mondale, who later became Vice-President and who was a member of the Church committee at the time of Watergate. In a lecture at Kansas City law school in 1976, he said:

"Our investigation showed that many of the abuses of the Nixon years could be traced back to the attitudes of the Cold War. Fastened on us was the fearful myth that America could not be defended without more deceit and illegality than democracy permits—and without more cynicism and hypocrisy than our beliefs would allow. For years, the assumption was used to justify actions abroad—from subversion of freely elected governments, to assassination attempts aimed at foreign leaders. And inevitably, in Macbeth's words, the invention returned home 'to plague the inventor'."

Remember: those are not the words of a left-wing critic of the British MI5.

Mondale went on—this is perhaps more relevant still —

"Perhaps the most terrifying abuse of power during this period was what the FBI called Cointelpro. That ugly little acronym would have been at home in any police state in Eastern Europe or Latin America. It meant illegal investigations targeted against American law abiding individuals in groups—and punishment administered not by a court but by a government agency—through harassment and tactics designed to break up marriages, destroy reputations, terminate employment, sabotage political campaigns and even encourage violent retribution by falsely and anonymously labelling intended victims as Government informers."

There are lessons to be learned from the way in which the United States has handled this question. When I think that Colonel Oliver North was brought to the Congress and investigated and that ex-President Reagan has now received a subpoena to appear before a court and to have his papers examined at the trial of Admiral Poindexter, and when I contrast that with the charges made by Wallace, Wright and others, I do not think that we come out well.

The House itself must inquire into this matter, either by the privilege route or in some other way. I know that you, Mr. Speaker, are examining the matter and that therefore it is not for me to put a point to you at this stage. However, I want to examine privilege as a route open to the House.

First, when an hon. Member is elected Speaker of this House, he goes to another place and, by humble petition to Her Majesty, asks for all the

[Mr. Tony Benn]

"ancient and undoubted rights and privileges of the Commons."

Erskine May says:

"any act or omission which obstructs or impedes either House of Parliament in the performance of its functions, or which obstructs or impedes any member or officer of such House in the discharge of his duty, or which has a tendency, directly or indirectly, to produce such results, may be treated as a contempt even though there is no precedent of the offence."

The Bill of Rights, which we celebrated 18 months ago, says, in its first provision:

"the pretended Power of Suspending of Laws or the Execution of Laws by Regall Authoritie without Consent of Parlyament is illegall".

What could have been a greater suspension of rights than suspension of the right and obligation to tell the truth and to tell Parliament about matters that concerned it? One might look also at Sessional Orders and so on, but I will not go into that.

But I will make one comparison with this case. On 29 June 1938, Duncan Sandys complained that the War Office, as it then was, or the Army, had summoned him to give evidence at a court of inquiry. He raised the matter in the House on that date, and immediately the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, moved the motion to refer it to the Committee of Privileges. The Committee met that very afternoon under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister. Mr. Attlee was there, as was Mr. Churchill. The Committee met the next day also, and on that following day—the 30th—it reported that a breach of privilege had occurred. The report was published a day after that. Contrast that with what has happened now. We do not have to look across the Atlantic for precedents, for we are being invited to betray our own duty to our electors.

The other way to look into the matter is by Select Committee, but that could be done only by decision of the House, with all-party support. I have argued that this is not a matter that, in the normal sense, lies across party lines, and there is no reason why the House should not for a moment remember that it is a legislative body and not just a gathering of parties clashing about current politics. There are some issues—and this is one of them—in respect of which the legislature has a duty to rise against an Executive that will not allow Members to know what it has done in their name. If we had such a Select Committee or, for that matter, a Privileges Committee, we should want evidence from Wallace and Taylor and Broderick and Wright. We should want to have former Prime Ministers and other Ministers before us so that we might find out what they knew and what they had authorised.

There is another group we should need—the journalists who had been briefed by these men. It should not be forgotten that every bit of disinformation required a journalist to pick it up and distribute it. In the last few days, I have talked to journalists who recall very clearly what Colin Wallace says he did: called them in, told them a bit of truth, and mixed it with malicious gossip, in the hope that they would use it. If their proprietors were so inclined, they had a juicy bit to add to the political prejudice against those they wished to harm. All those against whom the disinformation was circulated should be allowed to come forward.

What we must establish quite clearly is that Ministers are in charge and are answerable; that security policy—that is, who is the enemy—is decided by Parliament, and not by officials; that the security services are there to protect us, and not to control us; that it is the truth, and not lies, that defends democracy—a consideration that we cannot ignore.

The central question facing us today is this: are the Government and their servants answerable to the House of Commons or not—not on the detailed operations, but on the basic principles on which they work? Can the electors, through their Members of Parliament, gain protection from arbitrary acts of state power? Do the elaborate safeguards that Parliament has won for itself from the Crown mean anything at all in Mr. Speaker's plea for privilege? Do the Sessional Orders mean anything, or are they rituals to mislead school children and amuse the tourists?

I say that having been brought up for 40 years to believe in this place. But when we try to test it, it does not actually work. That is what we have got to decide. When the people in eastern Europe and South Africa are struggling for democracy against state power, is our answer to them that Parliament is going to do another cover-up? Is that to be a model for their aspirations?

I cannot recall so basic a constitutional choice as the one that faces the House. I hope that we do not let down the people who elected us to this place to defend their rights.

10.50 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) on getting the Adjournment debate and raising this important matter. He has raised a number of serious allegations about the conduct of civil servants, members of the security and intelligence services and others, suggesting that they have been, or may have been, involved in the dissemination of false information about Members of Parliament and, indeed, other elected representatives.

I should like to make it quite clear at the outset that it is no part of the official duties of any Crown servant to disseminate false information about Members of Parliament in order to denigrate them in any way. This Government and, I am sure, previous Governments, as well as Members of both sides of the House, would regard any such action as unacceptable. I believe that it is clearly understood by all Government servants who are well aware of the conduct expected of them. Anyone found to have breached such codes of conduct would face severe disciplinary action and, in appropriate cases, criminal charges.

Let me draw yet again the distinction already clearly drawn. It is clear that there was in the early 1970s some disinformation which sought to denigrate the Provisional IRA by the use of disinformation in a way that would not now be allowed. The Government judge that no useful purpose would be served by an inquiry now into those matters, given that they took place many years ago, under previous Administrations, in a policy framework long since changed, and amid all the operational stresses of the early and peak years of a very difficult emergency. The Government fully accept, however, that disinformation aimed at Ministers or former Ministers would be a different and special matter. But that matter was dealt with

by the Prime Minister's 1987 statement; and no new evidence of any substance has emerged since then to put that statement in question.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North) *rose*——

Mr. Hamilton: I will not give way. I have a number of points to cover. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield talked at great length.

In the exchanges after the statement of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last Thursday, a number of hon. Members indicated that they had documents or other information to support allegations of serious wrongdoing by Government servants. If they consider that they have evidence that demonstrates that Government servants have issued disinformation about Members of Parliament, I urge them to let me see it. At present, I am aware of no substantive evidence to support allegations of that nature. If the right hon. Gentleman thinks that he has fresh evidence that documents of this kind did indeed come from Government sources, he had better send it to me to be looked at on its merits.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees), whose experience and integrity we all respect, though I have to say to him that I am puzzled by his apparent readiness to assume that the forged 1971 letter, thanking him for a non-existent donation, must have come from a Government source. If he has evidence for that assumption, I hope that he will make it available forthwith. No trace of such a letter has been found in departmental records.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield mentioned Mr. Taylor. I am aware of recent newspaper reports that Mr. Taylor would be willing to give evidence in support of allegations that Government servants issued disinformation against Members of Parliament. If Mr. Taylor believes that he has evidence of serious wrongdoing of the kind now in question by Government servants, he had better make it available direct to my Department, as his former employer. But I note that in Mr. Paul Foot's book he is quoted as saying that the contents of the Clockwork Orange file had always been removed before he inspected it. I also note that one of the documents which he is now quoting as claiming to have seen is a letter which the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) has said was dated 1971. Seeing a copy of such document is one thing; having evidence that the document was produced in Headquarters Northern Ireland is another. In any case the date on that letter is some three years earlier than the date on which Mr. Wallace has said that he began work in Headquarters Northern Ireland on material designed to denigrate Members of Parliament.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned Mr. Broderick, who is reported in Sunday's newspapers to have said that he never saw anything about Clockwork Orange. What he is now reported as knowing relates entirely to the circumstances in which Mr. Wallace left the employment of the Ministry of Defence, and that is a matter bearing upon the inquiry by Mr. Calcutt.

Mr. Wallace has claimed that he was involved in the preparation of a campaign designed to discredit Members of Parliament while he was working for the Army information service in 1974, and that his activities were part of a project called Clockwork Orange. He has stated that initially this was planned as an exercise to undermine the credibility of the Provisional IRA by exposing the personal vulnerabilities of its leaders. The papers that have recently been retrieved confirm that a plan of that name was considered at that time, but never cleared. I must emphasise that that plan related to the Provisional IRA and, most definitely, not to any Members of Parliament.

I should perhaps say a general word about disinformation. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence explained to the House last Thursday, there are times when the use of disinformation is necessary for sound security reasons. He gave a personal example. He might also have mentioned the necessity of misleading terrorists to prevent them from committing yet another atrocity.

I see no grounds for denying ourselves that option, and I make no apology to anyone for expressing the view that it is legitimate to attempt, by prudent and proper use of disinformation, to prevent terrorists from murdering and maiming. Indeed, I would hope that, in the context of attempts to prevent terrorist murders—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at three minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 7 February 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Eastern Europe

1. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further steps are being planned by the Government to assist east European countries.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. William Waldegrave): We have announced the Government's plan to extend our existing know-how fund for Poland and Hungary to the other countries of eastern Europe. This will make available substantial sums of money to finance projects aimed to help the transition to democracy and a market economy. We are also helping through the EC and other multilateral organisations.

Mr. Coombs: Given the current instability in eastern Europe, does my right hon. Friend agree that our strategic policy should be one of caution, and that in terms of individual development towards democracy and a free enterprise system, there is a great deal to be done? In that context does he recognise the power of American and German institutions, such as the National Foundation for Democracy, the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and others, to influence policy in eastern Europe? What will the Government do to bring on such institutions in Britain?

Mr. Waldegrave: I agree with my hon. Friend's overall assessment. Right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House have suggested that we might consider proposals of the type that he put forward. This is new and quite difficult territory, because the fund will be channelling support to political organisations, which is quite different from normal aid. The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) has made suggestions on this issue, which we are considering.

Mr. Alton: Has the Minister had a chance to study reports from Bucharest that suggest that up to 28 per cent. of children in the hospitals there are infected by HIV, and are AIDS victims? Has the Minister had the chance to consider the request that packs for detection of the disease, sterile needles and scientific and medical help be provided by the Government? Will he tell the House how he intends to respond to that?

Mr. Waldegrave: The whole House will have been moved by the terrible stories that have emerged in the past few days. I am delighted to say that, as a first response, the Government have decided today to send 1 million disposable syringes, and we shall respond to further requests.

Sir Peter Blaker: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the unanimous welcome that has been given by the countries concerned to the British know-how funds, and how welcome it is that those funds will be extended to other countries in eastern Europe? Is he further aware that, with the aid of the funds, BBC external services are planning this year to train 40 Polish broadcasters how to operate a free broadcasting system? Will he join me in paying tribute to the BBC external services for the fact that over these momentous months they have been broadcasting the truth to the countries of eastern Europe?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am delighted to join in that tribute and to confirm the accuracy of what my right hon. Friend said about the new role that the BBC is taking in training proper journalists in the East. Later on today I am going to a party given by the Romanian services of the BBC, and I pay particular tribute to them, but all the external services have played a crucial role in telling the truth and facilitating the changes that we have seen.

Mr. Anderson: The Minister will know that we join wholeheartedly in the broad thrust of Government policy on the know-how funds, which allow us to play to our strengths, be it in management or in our experience of parliamentary democracy. On the more general theme of relations with eastern and central Europe, does he agree that, at this time of fundamental change, it is important and in our national interest not to be left isolated and irelevant in the eyes of our American and European allies? Will he therefore persist in his efforts to synchronise the Prime Minister with history?

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made an important speech in Germany yesterday, which I think was widely welcomed. Of all the countries in Europe that are central to the processes now taking place, only Britain and France are members of all the crucial organisations—the four powers, the European Community, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, and so forth. Our position is and will remain central.

Helsinki Final Act

2. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the implications of the proposed Soviet Emigration Bill for fulfilment of the obligations imposed by the Helsinki Final Act.

Mr. Waldegrave: The draft Soviet emigration law is an improvement on present law and practice, but still places unjustified restrictions on travel abroad by Soviet citizens. We shall continue to press the Soviet authorities to bring their law into conformity with their international obligations, and to resolve the refusenik problem once and for all.

Mr. Amess: Does my right hon. Friend share my concern that the Soviet emigration law still places restrictions on the free movement of Jewish people on the grounds that they might have held sensitive state jobs or

come from what could loosely be described as broken homes? Will he please undertake to raise those concerns with his opposite number in the Soviet Union?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend puts his finger on two of the exact points that are unsatisfactory in the present draft. I raised those very points with vice-Minister Adamishin when I was in Moscow recently and we shall continue to urge for much greater clarity and a proper law to get rid of those problems once and for all.

Sir Russell Johnston: Will the Minister simultaneously make representations to the United States about the obstacles that it is now placing in the way of refugees from the Soviet Union settling there?

Mr. Waldegrave: The United States, like all other countries, undertakes its proper obligations to refugees. The right of countries to refuse access is not the same basic human right as the right to leave one's own country. That has been long established.

Mr. Budgen: Did the Russian Minister express any disagreement or annoyance about my right hon. Friend's impertinence in telling the Russians how to run their emigration laws?

Mr. Waldegrave: No, he did not, because, like all other Russian Ministers, particularly in the present climate, he rejoices in the fact that Mr. Brezhnev, surprisingly, signed the final Helsinki document. That gave us the perfect legal right to inquire into such matters.

South Africa

3. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the Government of South Africa; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): We make frequent representations to the South African Government on a wide range of issues.

Mr. Nellist: Is the Secretary of State aware that following President de Klerk's weekend announcement about the unbanning of the African National Congress and the release, after 27 years in prison, of Mr. Nelson Mandela, heads of western Governments sought to claim responsibility and ignored the white Government's retreat in the face of mounting defiance of the black workers and youth of South Africa? That is a bit like a chicken and a pig discussing an egg and bacon breakfast: for the chicken, it is a small contribution, but for the pig it is a total commitment. Are not the only negotiations that the black majority would seek, and consider worth while to enter into, ones that were about the transfer of power, a genuinely freely elected constituent assembly, the ending of segregation, laws of emergency and the Labour Act and the reinstatement of the right of black workers to bear arms for their own defence?

Mr. Hurd: I should have thought that even the hon. Gentleman could bring himself to welcome warmly the decision announced by President de Klerk. Those changes, and the way that they were announced and are to be brought about, vindicate our policy of contact rather than isolation. The South African Government have taken major steps, opening the way to negotiations, and I hope that even the hon. Gentleman will expect the ANC and others to respond positively to them. We certainly do.

Mr. Gardiner: As President de Klerk has taken such significant steps to set the stage for constructive negotiations and discussions with all sections of the community, culminating in the expected release of Nelson Mandella, will my right hon. Friend do all that he can to impress upon the leaders of the ANC that they must put the concept of the armed struggle behind them and join the representatives of other blacks in constructive negotiations?

Mr. Hurd: Indeed, I agree with my hon. Friend. When Mr. Mandela is released, we hope that the ANC and others will agree to join in negotiations in conditions of peace and that the remaining emergency restrictions will be lifted.

Mr. Winnick: The changes announced last week by the South African President are certainly welcome. It is a step in the right direction, but does not the Foreign Secretary agree that much more must be done? Will the British Government make it quite clear to the South African authorities that if the people of eastern Europe have a right to freedom and democracy, the people of South Africa —black, white and coloured—have no less a right? Does not the Foreign Secretary recognise that the policy of sanctions and disinvestment followed by the United States played an important role in forcing the South African authorities to recognise the realities of life?

Mr. Hurd: I agree with the hon. Gentleman to this extent: there is a long road still to travel. However, I am sure that he will agree that President de Klerk has shown courage and wisdom in moving further at this time than anyone had expected. If the British Government had yielded to pressure from hon. Members such as the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) and many others outside the House, and had supported the imposition of comprehensive sanctions against South Africa, the result would have been an impoverished black majority in South Africa and the virtual impossibility of the South African Government being able to take the measures that they have announced.

Mr. John Carlisle: As the Prime Minister has sensibly and bravely lifted the cultural and scientific boycotts against South Africa after President de Klerk's excellent initiatives, will my right hon. Friend consider pursuing the same policy for sporting contacts, in particular for sports which, under the Gleneagles agreement, have proved that selection is not based on race, colour or ethnic origin? May we have some carrots please, instead of all the sticks of the past?

Mr. Hurd: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made clear, we believe that that is rather further down the road. We remain committed to the Gleneagles agreement.

Mr. Kaufman: The Foreign Secretary has just referred to the dangers of an impoverished black population in South Africa. When he visits South Africa next month, will he ask to be taken to Alexandra or Soweto by the sea, or to any of the other black townships where he will see the unbelievable grinding poverty that has been imposed on the black people of South Africa by the white supremacists

in South Africa? As to what the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Carlisle) has just said, will the right hon. Gentleman explain why it is that when he and the Prime Minister say that we must not lower our guard against the Communist regimes that are toppling day by day in eastern Europe, they nevertheless want to get rid of such puny sanctions as we impose on South Africa at a time when the whole structure of apartheid remains intact? [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Yes, apartheid remains totally intact; it has not been touched in any way. Can it be that this Government's hostility to Communism, which is becoming defunct, is greater than their hostility to apartheid, which still flourishes?

Mr. Hurd: Of course, there is black poverty in South Africa, though less than in many other African states. However, that poverty would have been made much worse and the ability of blacks slowly to rise to positions of responsibility in their society would have been made impossible had we yielded to the right hon. Gentleman's policy on sanctions. He cannot say that every aspect of apartheid remains intact. He is justified in saying that there is a long way to go, and I have already said that. If, however, he talked to holidaymakers in Durban and said that apartheid remains intact, he would get a very negative response. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will take the opportunity to make it clear whether the Opposition are wholly committed to comprehensive sanctions or whether they, too, acknowledge that the sort of steps that President de Klerk has taken deserve encouragement and a response from them.

Mr. Nelson: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is about the exchanges on that question.

Mr. Speaker: No, unless it is a definite matter of order that requires my immediate attention.

Mr. Nelson: I submit that it is. The prospect of reaching another question on South Africa——

Mr. Speaker: No. There is another question relating to South Africa on the Order Paper. The hon. Gentleman may be fortunate then.

Papua New Guinea

4. **Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the United Kingdom's relations with Papua New Guinea.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Francis Maude): Our relations with Papua New Guinea are good.

Mr. Key: I am delighted to hear that. Does my hon. Friend agree that the fighting that led to the closure of the Bougainville copper mine is both a human and an economic tragedy, since 20 per cent. of the foreign exchange earnings of that country are now lost? Will Her Majesty's Government support the Government of Papua New Guinea in their application for assistance from the International Monetary Fund?

Mr. Maude: I am aware of the economic difficulties that the closure to which my hon. Friend referred has caused Papua New Guinea. We have a good record of supporting the IMF's activities, when appropriate. In this case we shall look at any applications that are made to determine whether it was a proper decision.

Mr. Dalyell: Are the Government aware that the Port Moresby Government have done their very best to introduce sustainable rain forest legislation? Do the British Government support the enlightened and sensitive speech by the Prince of Wales on rain forest matters that some of us heard at Kew last night? Will they apply the Prince's idea for an international convention on the rain forest to countries such as Papua New Guinea, where it really would be of benefit?

Mr. Maude: I have not read the Prince of Wales' speech in detail, but I am aware of its general thrust. I know of the support that he expressed for the sort of measures that we are taking and supporting in respect of Latin America. I am aware that there is anxiety about the rain forest in Papua New Guinea. I do not have a detailed analysis of the environmental impact of the logging that is going on there, but the inroads being made into the rain forest are a matter of concern to us all, and we shall look into that carefully.

South Africa

5. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans Her Majesty's Government have to ensure that South Africa implements the measures agreed by the United Nations in the declaration on South Africa at the United Nations 16th special session of the general assembly.

Mr. Hurd: The measures that President de Klerk announced on 2 February come very close to implementing the steps called for by the Commonwealth eminent persons group, with which the declaration is consistent. More is needed, but a warm welcome for the steps already taken is surely deserved.

Mr. Hughes: Will the Foreign Secretary join me today in paying tribute to the many South Africans of all races whose decades of struggle and suffering have brought President de Klerk to the position that he is in today? Will he listen to their voices, which are saying almost unanimously that the potential, the promise and the hope that President de Klerk's statement brings may well remain unfulfilled if the external arm of the struggle is abandoned or lessened? Will he say clearly that sanctions and external pressure can be dismantled only when apartheid itself is dismantled?

Mr. Hurd: I certainly join in paying tribute to all whose work has made possible the present progress; they come from all parts of South African society.

The House has argued about sanctions time and again. I believe that the statement of 2 February and the prospects now opening up for South Africa are justification for the policy of combined encouragement and persuasive pressure for which the Government have always stood. I believe that if we had followed the hon. Gentleman's sincerely given advice, South Africa would not have advanced to its present prospects.

Mr. Rathbone: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the developments in South Africa seem to have been hastened by the British Government's stand on continued commitment to fundamental change in that country, but

—it is an important proviso—that some substantial changes are still required, particularly with regard to the most sinister aspects of apartheid, before we can relax our pressure on that Government? It might be unwise for the leader of this country to go to that country before those relaxations have taken place.

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend will have noticed how my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister responded to President de Klerk's announcement. I hope that he will agree that that response has been carefully measured. It seems a reasonable and justified first step to ask the President to visit the Prime Minister at Chequers and to say that Mr. Mandela, when free, would also be welcome here.

Ms. Abbott: Does the Foreign Secretary agree that, welcome as Mr. de Klerk's speech was, there were some grave omissions? In particular, there was no reference to the Group Areas Act whereby white people still own 87 per cent. of the land in South Africa and, more significantly still, no reference to one person, one vote. Welcome though the changes in eastern Europe have been, the Government have not seen them as the signal to abandon NATO, so does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it would be premature, on the basis of one speech, to abandon sanctions?

Mr. Hurd: As part of the measured response that I described, we have removed the discouragement given to academic, cultural and scientific contacts. In the present new climate in South Africa, when Mr. Mandela is released, we hope that the ANC and others will agree to join in negotiations in conditions of peace and that the remaining emergency restrictions will be lifted. In that climate, it is logical that we should discuss with our partners in the EEC lifting the voluntary ban on new investment in South Africa.

Mr. Grylls: Although trade matters are for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, will my right hon. Friend give his views on the relaxation of trade restrictions that remain in South Africa? Would not it be good for people of all races in both countries if we could encourage trade in both directions?

Mr. Hurd: As my hon. Friend knows, there are specific trade restrictions. There is the arms embargo imposed by a Security Council resolution and there are various specific restrictions agreed by the EEC. The logical next step is to discuss with our partners lifting the voluntary ban on new investment.

Sir David Steel: The Foreign Secretary was right to give a warm welcome to the change of heart foreshadowed in President de Klerk's speech, but does he agree that we cannot discuss future democracy in South Africa while the legislative framework of apartheid is still in place—not just the Group Areas Act, but the Population Registration Act? It is inconceivable that the rest of the Community will agree to lifting measures until those measures of apartheid are lifted as well.

Mr. Hurd: The underlying importance of what President de Klerk announced is that he has done enough in the minds of most reasonable people to open the way to negotiations. I note that the right hon. Gentleman agrees with that. There is more to come and we are a long way from seeing the end of apartheid, which is our aim and his, but the next step is to have a reasoned response and the beginning of a dialogue with the ANC and other Africans, which goes along with the release of Mr. Mandela and the lifting of the remaining emergency restrictions.

Mr. Nelson: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman's point of order is to complain that he has not been called, I cannot hear it.

Mr. Nelson: My point of order is exactly the same as the previous one. The Opposition have had three calls on each——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have to be fair to everyone. If on raising a point of order of that kind an hon. Member was called immediately, there would be chaos in this place because I would have points of order all the time.

Mr. Knapman: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No, I shall deal with the hon. Gentleman's point of order later.

Hong Kong

6. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his Department's discussions with Dame Lydia Dunn.

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, met Dame Lydia Dunn and Mr. Allen Lee, the two senior members of the Office of the Members of the Legislative Council, on 23 January. They had a useful discussion, in particular about Hong Kong's constitutional development. He assured them, as I had done when I was in Hong Kong last month, that we are taking their views fully into account in making our decisions on this matter. Dame Lydia and Mr. Lee also saw my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Mrs. Gorman: Did my right hon. Friend discuss with Dame Lydia the growing move in Hong Kong towards demanding full democratic rights for the people there now —something that we are applauding all over eastern Europe—on which basis they could legitimately declare their independence and take their case to the world forum so that they have the right to remain in their own territory? Does he agree that, in the light of what is happening elsewhere in the world and the fact that two thirds of the land of Hong Kong legitimately belongs to Britain in perpetuity, they have a perfect right to do so?

Mr. Hurd: I note my hon. Friend's views in favour of independence for Hong Kong. When I was in Hong Kong I did not meet anyone who shared that view, although I do not deny that there are such people. The great majority of people in Hong Kong accept, albeit reluctantly, that their future is bound up with mainland China. Therefore, they want us to make a success of the concept of one country, two systems.

On my hon. Friend's first point, I hope that it is already clear to everyone that substantially more directly elected seats on the Legislative Council will be introduced in 1991 than was originally envisaged

Mr. Janner: The Foreign Secretary, like me, has seen the revolting conditions in which Vietnamese boat people live. Did he ensure that their plight was raised with Dame Lydia Dunn? Does he think it right that those people, who come under Hong Kong, and directly ourselves, should sleep in layers of wooden racks surrounded by open sewers? What is to be done about that unworthy, uncivilised and thoroughly disgusting system?

Mr. Hurd: The people of Hong Kong feel extremely strongly that it is because they offered the right of first asylum, and others in south Asia did not, that they are landed with that problem. They feel that the burden, which they have shouldered with the British Government, should be more widely shared. The deduction that I draw from the hon. and learned Gentleman's point is that the sooner we can find ways of returning to Vietnam those in the camps who are not refugees, the better it will be for them and the people of Hong Kong.

Mr. Adley: For the avoidance of doubt, will my right hon. Friend make it clear that the Government's commitment to the 1984 joint agreement remains constant, that Her Majesty's Government recognise that it is the only sensible basis for securing the future of Hong Kong and that they have no intention of trying to renegotiate the terms of that agreement?

Mr. Hurd: The joint declaration and agreement are the right sheet anchor for the future of Hong Kong. My hon. Friend, who follows these matters carefully, will be aware of the anxieties which events last June created in Hong Kong. I and the Government hope that the Chinese will understand that, and take it into account as the drafting of the Basic Law proceeds.

Mr. Kaufman: The right hon. Gentleman will recall that his predecessor, the present deputy Prime Minister, speaking in the House about democracy in Hong Kong, said:

"The pace of development should reflect the wishes of the whole community. The unanimous view expressed by OMELCO on 24 May was a significant step towards the establishment of a consensus in Hong Kong."—[*Official Report*, 13 July 1989; Vol. 156, c. 1170.]

I am sure that Dame Lydia Dunn and Mr. Allan Lee told Government representatives what they told me a few days ago—that the consensus of OMELCO was that there should be 20 elected members next year and 30 in 1995. If that is the consensus, is it not time, after eight months of consideration following the Tiananmen square massacre, that the Government accepted it and announced that there will be a development of democracy in Hong Kong?

Mr. Hurd: The right to say hon. Gentleman is perfectly right in his description of the consensus of OMELCO. We must take that seriously because responsible people such as Dame Lydia Dunn have stressed to him, to me and to the Prime Minister that the best answer—the right hon. Gentleman would not disagree with this, as it flows from the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley)—is an understanding with the Chinese Government that will allow direct elections to the Legislative Council to begin next year, on a substantially higher base than was proposed two years ago, and to continue through 1995 and 1997 and thereafter. We continue to have confidential discussions about that with the Chinese Government which cannot go on for ever. But we have to accept our responsibility for taking the decisions as regards 1991 and 1995. As I said in Hong Kong, I hope that we shall be able to reach at any rate the first conclusions in the next few weeks.

Mr. Sims: My right hon. Friend is right to say that in considering this matter we have to try to seek agreement between all the parties involved, but will he confirm that if that is not possible and a decision has to be taken in accordance with either the wishes of the Chinese Government or those of the people of Hong Kong, the latter will prevail?

Mr. Hurd: It will be our decision as regards, first, 1991 and then 1995. That is a decision that we must take according to our best judgment, of the interests of the people of Hong Kong, for which we are accountable to the House. No other consideration has any particular bearing on the matter.

Latin America

7. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on British and European Community policies towards Latin America.

Mr. Hurd: We wish to build up our traditional friendships in Latin America. With the rest of the European Community, we support the return and consolidation of democracy and respect for human rights.

We promote economic progress and trade liberalisation and are keen to co-operate with Latin American countries on other issues such as the environment and the fight against drugs.

Mr. Wray: Does the Secretary of State agree that the British Government have neglected Latin America over the past 10 years and have allowed the multinational corporations to exploit its people and remove its resources? Does he agree that it is a scandal that most Latin American countries have a negative gross domestic product of less than 10 per cent? What are the Government going to do about that?

Mr. Hurd: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. The fact that our friendship and co-operation with Latin American countries is not in the headlines every day does not mean that they are being neglected. In answer to the hon. Gentleman's first and second points, we were the second largest investor in many Latin American countries in 1989, after the United States. We have invested more in Colombia than has the rest of the world combined. In Brazil, the United Kingdom continued to invest while others disinvested. I am all in favour of encouraging constructive British interest of all kinds in Latin America. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will help us in that rather than whipping us into trying to stir up people in Latin America against the United States.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Does my right hon. Friend recall our historic cultural relations with Latin America? Should we not put more effort into the activities of the British Council and the related Cultura Inglesa? Should not we use Latin Americans' enthusiasm for the English language to foster closer ties with Britain rather than with the United States?

Mr. Hurd: We teach the English language better than anyone else and my right hon. Friend is therefore right.

The British Council has additional funds at its disposal this year. Spurred on by my hon. Friend, I shall look carefully at the extent to which Latin American activities can be included in its activities.

Mr. Tony Banks: The Secretary of State said that it was the policy of Her Majesty's Government to promote economic development. What economic development have Her Majesty's Government promoted in Nicaragua? What are Her Majesty's Government doing to promote democratic processes in Nicaragua? Who has Her Majesty's Government sent from this country to observe the elections there on 25 February?

Mr. Hurd: We have a keen interest in the success of the elections in Nicaragua. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will use what influence he has to make sure that, contrary to some suggestions, those elections take place in conditions of fairness and with proper facilities for the opposition. The hon. Gentleman knows that we pay our whack—our share—of EC aid to Nicaragua. We contribute 20 per cent., and in 1988 our share of that aid was £3·3 million.

Sir Richard Body: Is my right hon. Friend satisfied that the action planned to protect the rain forests in Latin America, to which this country is contributing a large sum, will protect them and will not cause a net loss of rain forest?

Mr. Hurd: I am not convinced that the efforts being made, which owe a great deal to our initiative, are yielding all the results that they should. I have a meeting in my diary before long with the agencies concerned; that will enable me to discuss the prospects and their activities with them.

El Salvador

8. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement on the visit by members of the Metropolitan police to El Salvador regarding the recent murder of six priests.

Mr. Maude: A team of three detectives from the Metropolitan police arrived in San Salvador on 6 January and returned on 27 January. During that time they assisted the Salvadorean authorities in the task of bringing to justice those responsible for the murders.

Mr. Winnick: Is it not essential that those who ordered, not necessarily those who carried out, the murders of the six priests, their cook and her young daughter, should be brought to justice? Is the Minister aware that following the ghastly murder of the six priests, Hector Oqueli, the deputy leader in El Salvador of the party affiliated to Socialist International, was also murdered? Is there not a total absence of the rule of law in that country?

Mr. Maude: I am aware of the latter part of what the hon. Gentleman said. He will recollect that we debated the matter briefly last Friday, and that that murder took place in neighbouring Guatemala. It will be for the Guatemalan authorities in the first instance to bring to justice those who were responsible for it.

Mr Speaker: Order. It is my mistake. I was distracted and I called the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) on Question No. 7 because I thought that we were dealing with his question. I got it out of order. I suppose I shall have to call him again.

Colombia

9. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary fo State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Britain's relations with Colombia.

Mr. Maude: We have excellent relations with Colombia. President Barco will be a welcome visitor when he addresses the world ministerial drugs summit here in April.

Mr. Arnold: Does my hon. Friend recall the carnage in Bogota last December in which a narco-terrorist bomb aimed at the security police went off killing 70 people , wounding 1,000 and causing immense devastation within a radius of 2 km? Has he noticed recently the disarming of a similar bomb of 500 kg in a car park beneath a building in Bogota? Is he aware that it was disarmed by British "wheelbarrow" remote control bomb disposal equipment? Is that not a practical way in which Britain can help President Barco in his fight against the narco-terrorists? Should not we be doing more?

Mr. Maude: I vividly remember the devastation and carnage to which my hon. Friend referred. He is right to note that the practical help that we have given to the Colombian authorities has been very much appreciated by them and has already had direct and measureable benefits for the people of Colombia, by helping the authorities to win their war against the narcotics dealers and traders. I shall certainly see whether we can do more. I think my hon. Friend will recognise that we were very quick to provide immediate practical assistance.

Mr. Corbyn: Does the Minister agree that in addition to the appalling terror perpetrated on the people of Colombia by the drug barons, there is also a serious problem of human rights abuses by the police and armed forces against human rights workers, peasant leaders and trade unionists? When he next meets the Government of Colombia will he press upon them the real concern of many people round the world about the fate of trade union leaders, peasant leaders and others who seek to bring genuine peace, freedom and democracy to Colombia?

Mr. Maude: There is concern about human rights abuses in Colombia. There is no reason to suppose that the Colombian Government are involved in those abuses. None the less we express concern to the Colombians whenever it is suitable.

Mr. Heffer: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. When did Question 9 come before Question 8? We were discussing No. 8. If you have made a mistake——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman was not listening. What I said was that, due to a distraction at the Chair, I called the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) on the previous question. I had not intended to do so. We were on Question 9. I now call Question 10.

Mr. Heffer: Then you called Question 9.

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman looks at the Order Paper, he will see that Questions 8 and 9 are very similar and that 9 comes after 8.

Lukanov Inquiry, Bulgaria

10. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has yet received any request to contribute any information to the Lukanov inquiry in Bulgaria.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have been asked by the Bulgarian Government to help, and will naturally do what we can.

Mr. Stern: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply. Is he aware of the persistent rumour in Bulgaria that much of the money secreted by the Zhivkov regime was laundered through London? Will he ensure that before complying with any possible request from the new Bulgarian regime he seeks out the destination of that money?

Mr. Waldegrave: As I said, we will respond positively to any sensible request that we receive from the Lukanov commission.

Mr. Faulds: Will the Minister suggest to the Bulgarian Government that their inquiry should also look into the implications of the death of Hugh Gaitskell?

Mr. Waldegrave: That had not occurred to me.

Drug Misuse

11. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contribution he or his Department expects to make to the forthcoming special session of the United Nations assembly concerned with drug misuse.

Mr. Hurd: I shall be going to the special session. The United Kingdom will work for a commitment to improving the effectiveness of the United Nations effort against drugs, and for agreement on a practical programme of international action, including ratification of the relevant United Nations conventions, measures to strengthen the monitoring of the movement of precursor chemicals, and undertakings to develop a network of agreements to trace, freeze and confiscate the proceeds of drug trafficking.

Mr. Butler: Will my right hon. Friend press for the appointment of a United Nations drugs czar to co-ordinate the present efforts?

Mr. Hurd: I am not sure about a drugs czar. If my hon. Friend means that there is a certain diffusion or scattering of United Nations effort through the different agencies in Vienna, he is on to something. That is what I meant when I referred, in Foreign Office language, to the "effectiveness of the United Nations effort". We need to ensure that our contributions to that effort go where they are needed in the prevention of drug trafficking.

Mr. Vaz: Does the Foreign Secretary share my concern that the draft programme that he has put in the Library for the United Nations conference in London has no special session covering young people and the reduction of drug demand? Does he agree that at a conference of that kind, which will attract people from all over the world, it is very important to have people with direct, relevant experience of drug-taking? With respect, long speeches by the Prime Minister and others who have not had direct, relevant experience of drug-taking will not help us solve the problems.

Mr. Hurd: I note the hon. Gentleman's suggestion. He is perfectly right: the next big date on the calendar for drug misuse is our summit meeting here in Britain from 9 to 11 April. The agenda will have two points: the reduction of demand and the specific threat from cocaine and crack. It is important that those who discuss reduction of demand should have a vivid representation before them of what they are talking about. The hon. Member will have noticed that President Bush has steered the latest version of the United States anti-drug programme to demand reduction, and he will have noticed our own major new programme recently announced in that connection.

Mr. Wells: Does my right hon. Friend agree that reduction in the supply of drugs is extremely important in dealing with drug misuse? Will he therefore make certain that at this United Nations special conference there is discussion of alternative crops in the countries where drugs are produced? In particular, will he turn his mind to the consideration of banana production, which is an alternative to drug production in Colombia and much of Latin America, and to the prevention of the deleterious effect of the enormous increase proposed in Santo Domingo's supply of bananas to the European Community?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend is subtly leading me from one subject to another—from drugs to bananas. He is perfectly right to say that where it can be shown that crop substitution is enforceable, it is right to support it—as we do, for example, in Pakistan. Enforceability is important as a great deal of money could be wasted otherwise.

Mr. Sheerman: Will the special assembly take Britain's contribution seriously if it realises that Britain is not taking on those banks which we know are heavily involved in laundering drug money and are operating freely in the City of London? Is it not time that the right hon. Gentleman talked to his colleagues to ensure that something is done about that scandal?

Mr. Hurd: The hon. Gentleman's rhetoric is about four years out of date. This Government have been the pioneers in putting the necessary legislation through Parliament, in bringing that legislation into effect, and in negotiating agreements—of which there are now 13—with countries that have followed the same route. It is not just a United Kingdom effort, but an international effort. The hon. Gentleman knows that it is continuing and is beginning to produce useful results.

Hong Kong

12. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement on representations he has received from the people of Hong Kong on proposed direct elections in the colony.

Mr. Maude: We have received many representations from a broad cross-section of the community in Hong Kong. We shall take full account of the views of the Hong Kong people in taking our decisions about the development of the territory's political system.

Mr. MacKay: Is my hon. Friend aware that many of us think that the OMELCO proposals have much to recommend them as a move towards direct elections in the colony? However, we are disappointed with the Chinese Government's response and hope that under no circumstances will their belligerent response influence my right hon. and hon. Friends' final decision.

Mr. Maude: As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said, our decision—and it is our decision—for 1991 will be taken on what is, in our judgment, in the best interests of Hong Kong. The process of arriving at that judgment will be heavily influenced by the views of Hong Kong, which have been channelled through and articulated by OMELCO.

Mr. Shore: When does the Minister expect the Chinese Government to publish their final version of the Basic Law? If he is expecting that publication in the near future, it would make sense for the British Government to announce their views and decisions on the extent of direct elections before the Chinese Government publish their view in the Basic Law, so that we are not seen to be—as many expect anyway—simply following the Chinese.

Mr. Maude: The process of evolving the Basic Law has been continuing for a little time. The right hon. Gentleman will know that special groups on particular aspects of it have been meeting in recent weeks. The plenary session of the Basic Law drafting committee meets during next week, but that is not the end of the road. There is a further stage. As my right hon. Friend said, we have been engaging in confidential discussions with the Peking Government to ensure that, as far as possible, Hong Kong opinions are taken fully into account in the formulation of the Basic Law provisions.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Does my hon. Friend agree that progress in democracy in Hong Kong is only one of three parts of the British policy of maintaining stability? The others are the essential need to give passports to the 50,000 heads of families, and the necessity to deal properly with the Vietnamese refugees. Will he confirm that the world community—perhaps with the exception of the United States—now accepts that economic refugees must return to Vietnam? What is the Government's policy for helping Vietnam?

Mr. Maude: The whole international community, including the United States, has accepted the principle of mandatory repatriation of those who are determined by the proper authorities not to be political refugees. Everyone has agreed, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United States, that economic migrants have nowhere to go except back to Vietnam. There is no dissent on that point. The continuing argument is on when that process should be resumed. The Government believe that to give Hong Kong the confidence to face its future, we need to send a clear signal that no one should come from Vietnam because there is no promised land waiting for them.

As for what we are doing to help Vietnam, we have said in the past that we are prepared to contemplate a resumption of aid to Vietnam as long as Vietnam lives up to its international obligations.

Namibia

13. **Mr. Caborn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the foreign debt incurred by the South African illegal administration in Namibia.

Mr. Waldegrave: Namibia's national debt totalled just over 716 million rand at 31 December 1989.

Mr. Caborn: I do not quibble with the figure, although I think that it is a little higher at 820 million rand. I think that the Minister will agree that those loans were illegal, both in terms of international law and in terms of United Nations Security Council resolution 435. In the light of that, will he make sure that the South Africans who loaned that money to the illegal regime in Namibia will face their responsibility? The £220 million-odd debt should not be loaded on to the new Administration in Namibia which will be undertaking total reconstruction and will therefore find it difficult to repay such an amount.

Mr. Waldegrave: The negotiations on this matter and on other aspects of the financial and commercial relationships between an independent Namibia and South Africa are now going forward. It would be unwise of us outside to lay down on what is about to be an independent Namibia its exact balance of interests. Namibia needs access to South African markets. There have been transfers—illegal transfers, one might say—from South Africa to Namibia in the past. The negotiation is complex and we must leave it to the independent Namibian Government to settle the matter.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my right hon. Friend agree that while we need to consider now what aid we can give to an independent Namibia, we should not concentrate on the negative aspects of any South African legacy, but should concentrate on the wonderful infrastructure that the South African administration has left in Namibia in the form of roads, reservoirs, welfare, education, health and industry. We should wish that country every success, prosperity, peace and happiness for when it becomes independent on 21 March.

Mr. Waldegrave: I hope that the whole House will support my hon. Friend's latter sentiment. I hope that the external supporters' club of SWAPO will note how far it is being left behind by the moderation of Mr. Nujoma and his colleagues who are very anxious to keep in Namibia many of the South African technicians and others who they realise are essential for Namibia's prosperous future.

West Bank

14. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will instruct the consul general in east Jerusalem to continue to monitor alleged breaches of the fourth Geneva convention in the occupied West Bank and Gaza.

Mr. Waldegrave: We take a close interest in Israeli human rights practices in the occupied territories, in accordance with our rights as a signatory to the fourth Geneva convention.

Mr. Ross: At the end of last year the British consul general made a number of direct interventions in connection with allegations of serious violations of

international humanitarian law and was criticised for doing so by the Israeli authorities. Will the Minister assure the House that Ivan Callan will be given every encouragement to continue these efforts towards fulfilling Britain's obligation to ensure respect for the fourth Geneva convention, especially with regard to grave breaches?

Mr. Waldegrave: Mr. Callan, whom I know very well, has done nothing without instructions from the British Government. He has done nothing outside his proper role and we support him in everything that he has done.

Mr. Temple-Morris: Does my right hon. Friend agree that what is going on in the West Bank and Gaza is a disgrace and, more importantly, a continuing disgrace? Does my right hon. Friend see that as a challenge to European political co-operation about which we hear so much, but the results of which, at the end of the day, are sometimes difficult to see? In the European context, will my right hon. Friend cause an approach to be made to the United States to get a joint effort to tell Israel to stop and to deal?

Mr. Waldegrave: We are in close touch with the United States and strongly support its efforts to start direct dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis. I cannot answer a question on this subject today without drawing to the attention of the House the terrible act of terrorism in which many Israeli and some Egyptian lives were lost. We deplore such actions by the enemies of the peace process.

Mr. Kaufman: In supporting what my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) and Conservative Members have said about breaches of human rights, may I join the Minister of State in condemning in the strongest possible terms the terrorist outrage against the Israeli tourist bus which led to the deaths of innocent Israelis and Egyptians? Does he agree that perhaps the only hopeful sign to emerge from that atrocity was the immediate condemnation of the outrage by the Palestine Liberation Organisation? Does he agree that that kind of murder and atrocity makes even more important the speeding up of the middle east peace process to avoid the loss of more innocent lives—Israeli, Palestinian or any other?

Mr. Waldegrave: Not for the first time on this subject, I wholly agree with what the right hon. Gentleman has said. The fact that a number of the extremist organisations that are locked in battle with the present leadership of the PLO have, whether rightly or wrongly, claimed responsibility for the atrocity only confirms that the central leadership of the PLO is committed to the peace process at the present time.

Mr. Tredinnick: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, with democracy sweeping through eastern Europe and through repressive regimes, the Israeli Government will be swimming against the tide if they attempt——

Hon. Members: They are swimming against the tide.

Mr. Tredinnick: Does my right hon. Friend agree that they will be continuing to swim against the tide if they refuse to grant democratic rights to people on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip?

Mr. Waldegrave: One of the ironic, perhaps even tragic, contrasts has always been that between, on the one hand, the vibrancy and legitimacy of Israeli's own democracy and its attachment to that democracy and, on the other, its unwillingness to concede similar rights to the Palestinian people.

Points of Order

3.32 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It will be known to you that a Select Committee of this House—the Select Committee on Defence—has decided, as is its right, to look at the affair of Colin Wallace. First, how, if at all, does this affect your decision when you took avizandum—if that is the right expression—on the whole question of Colin Wallace and privilege? Secondly, may I have an assurance that it will in no way inhibit what is said, hopefully to the Attorney-General, in the Adjournment debate on Monday? Thirdly, in relation to what may be Table Office difficulties relating to the rules of advice to Ministers, will we be able to probe the Minister's statement to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) in the Adjournment debate last night that no clearance—the word used was "clearance"—had been given? Is clearance advice to Ministers, or can we probe a good deal further as to what exactly what was meant by the statement that no clearance had been given for Clockwork Orange?

Mr. Speaker: As to the hon. Gentleman's last question, I shall have to see the questions that were asked yesterday before giving him a reply. So that is hypothetical. In reply to the hon. Gentleman's first question, I can say that the investigation by the Defence Select Committee will not affect any decision I may take. Secondly, the hon. Gentleman may certainly proceed with his debate without any concern.

Sir Jim Spicer (Dorset, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It may be that the combination of television coverage and Foreign Office questions is inevitably a good mix, but have you, Sir, noticed that during the course of Foreign Office questions we tended to move from questions to speeches? Would it be possible for you, particularly in relation to Foreign Office questions, to remind all hon. Members that it is Question Time and that we are not taking part in debate?

Mr. Speaker: That point of order is helpful from the point of view of the Chair. I know that we in this House take no account of television, but the truth is that it is very difficult to proceed down the Order Paper if we have long questions and long replies.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In respect of Question Time, may I put to you a point that I think affects the rights of all Back Benchers? I know that you try to achieve the impossible—being fair to all of us—and that no Member has a right to complain even though he may be disappointed at not having been called. However, a real problem arises when a major issue is being dealt with—and, arguably, South Africa is that issue today.

Sixty per cent.—six out of ten—of questions come from the Opposition. The practice that you, Sir, adopt—for reasons that one understands—is to call Government and Opposition Members alternately. If the next question on the Order Paper happens to arise on the alternate call you will move on. That results occasionally in commentary on a major issue being out of balance, as was the case today when Members on the Government side were called in a quite small proportion to comment on South Africa.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman looks carefully at *Hansard* tomorrow, he will see that that is not true. The Procedure Committee has asked me to speed up Question Time. My predecessor, Dr. Horace King——

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Do not quote him, for God's sake.

Mr. Speaker: I have started, so I shall finish. Mr. Speaker King used to get through 40 questions in an hour, whereas we got through only 14 today. The House may well agree that it would be fairer if we were to get more quickly through questions, but that inevitably means fewer supplementaries.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It was not possible today, because of the way that the questions were selected, to ask any questions on the European Economic Community. On a day when my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary returned from important meetings in Germany, that was unfortunate. Is there any possibility of you making arrangements with my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."]—to ensure that such an imbalance can be redressed?

Mr. Speaker: That matter has already been studied carefully by the Procedure Committee. There used to be a 15-minute slot in Foreign Office Question Time specifically for European questions. If the hon. Gentleman feels that we should go back to that, he should make his representations there. I judge from the comments that I hear that it might not be particularly popular.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support you this time, although I have had occasion to complain about the lack of balance and the lack of fairness towards the Opposition during Scottish Question Time. It is worth pointing out to the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson) that, if we take into account the contributions from the Treasury Benches, the Tories get the lion's share of any Question Time—about three quarters of it—so they cannot complain about lack of balance. On top of that, the Minister——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House has given the Chair the responsibility of ensuring a fair balance. I assure the House that I take this duty very seriously.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am an assiduous attender at Question Time. There is a great deal of pressure on you to call hon. Members, and I am deeply grateful that you called me this afternoon. I think that you are wonderful.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman very much, and I reciprocate.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I venture to suggest that this may be of more interest to the majority of hon. Members than the antics of Mr. Colin Wallace, that dubious Walter Mitty who was active mainly during the depressing and dismal interlude represented by the last Labour Government. We gave certain powers to the Select Committee dealing with the experiment of televising the House. Who decides how far and wide those powers go? Is it you, the Select Committee or the House?

Mr. Speaker: The Select Committee, which will bring its recommendations to the House.

Mr. Marlow: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Last week, in answer to a parliamentary question, the Select Committee made suggestions about changes in the experiment, but those suggestions were not brought before the House—they were merely introduced. I am not saying that it is outside the broadcasters' terms of reference, but should they come forward with a suggestion for something outside their terms of reference, who is to judge that situation? Is it you, the House or the Select Committee untrammelled on its own?

Mr. Speaker: This is a matter for the Select Committee. I hope that the House and the hon. Gentleman will accept that we are engaged in an experiment, and without changes we cannot experiment. We need to see whether the changes, which may themselves be varied from time to time, are beneficial, or not.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I raise a matter which I imagine will not attract the attention of many hon. Members. Yesterday, in a written answer in the House of Lords, the centrepiece of legislation which went through both Houses at inordinate length and which has been lying about for four years suddenly disappeared. I refer to the Salmon Act 1986 and, with it, the salmon dealer licensing scheme.

Is it in order, Mr. Speaker, that the central core of a measure which has gone through both Houses of Parliament should be withdrawn by press release and written answer? Many uncertainties were created by that legislation, many people were waiting for its implementation and much advice was offered against the spirit of what was contained in that legislation. Is it right that, as it were, with a snap of the fingers, the whole thing should have disappeared as the result of a written answer?

Mr. Speaker: I thought that the hon. Gentleman proposed to ask me if I had received a request for a statement on the matter. Although he has not asked that question, I will give him the answer to it, which is that I have not. He must take up with the Government Department concerned the matter that he has raised with me.

BILL PRESENTED

EDUCATION (SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES)

Mr. Jack Straw, supported by Mr. Barry Jones, Mr. Derek Fatchett, Ms. Hilary Armstrong, Mr. Andrew Smith, Mr. Win Griffiths, Mr. George Howarth and Mr. Tom Cox, presented a Bill to amend the law relating to appointments by local authorities to school governing bodies: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 9 March and to be printed. [Bill 69.]

Mr. Speaker: I understand that the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) is not able to move his ten-minute Bill today on one-parent families.

Social Security

3.40 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): I beg to move,

That the draft Social Security (Contributions)(Re-rating) Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 18th January, be approved.

I understand, Mr. Speaker, that it will be convenient also to consider the following motions:

That the draft Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 18th January, be approved.

That the draft Statutory Sick Pay (Rate of Payment) Regulations 1990, which were laid before this House on 18th January, be approved.

That the draft Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 18th January, be approved.

I imagine that the main interest of the House, and therefore the main focus of the debate, is likely to be on what is in the uprating order, and in at least one respect what is not in it. But first I should outline the purpose and content of the other three instruments.

I take first the contributions re-rating order, conscious, in the wake of having been mildly rebuked by a distinguished observer of our proceedings for a certain want of jollity during Question Time earlier this week, that the scope for bringing jollity to the discussion of national insurance contributions is limited indeed. The order is concerned with the national insurance contributions which determine people's entitlement to pensions and other important contributory benefits, and which are the source of finance for over half of what is spent in this country each year on social security.

It is rather odd that the House devotes so much less time to discussing those contributions than to matters of taxation, given that there are many people for whom national insurance contributions are larger than any tax liability they may have and that the total paid in such contributions amounts to about two thirds of the total collected in income tax.

The most notable feature of the re-rating order is that, for the seventh year in succession, it makes no increase in the main rates, the class 1 rates paid by employed people and their employers. As the House will be aware, however, there are boundaries for contribution liability, known in the jargon of the trade as the lower earnings limit—LEL—and the upper earnings limit—UEL—and those will change as usual. The LEL applies to both the employer's and employee's share of contributions; the UEL to the employee's share only. The order itself does not set those two earnings limits; that is done by a set of regulations to be laid after the benefits uprating order has been approved. But I should remind the House that the LEL, which is linked by law to the nearest pound below the retirement pension rate, will be £46 a week and that the UEL, for which there is somewhat greater flexibility, will be £350 a week.

The House will recall that in 1985 we reduced the contribution rates paid by lower paid workers and their employers to help those workers and to reduce employment costs. The reduced contribution rates will significantly cut the impact of contributions on people with lower earnings without affecting their benefit entitlement in any way. From 5 October 1989, we built on that process by further restructuring the employee's

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element of class 1 contributions, again without affecting benefit entitlement. People who earn less than the lower earnings limit will still pay no contributions but will pay an initial entry fee, as it might be called, of 2 per cent., charged on earnings at the lower earnings limit. The standard 9 per cent. is charged on that part of any earnings that exceed the lower but not the upper earnings limit.

The effect of the 1985 and October 1989 changes taken together was to reduce contributions of every contributor by just over £3 per week, which clearly was of particular help to the lower-paid. I very much welcome that, as I am sure do all right hon. and hon. Members. Although the order makes no further change to the rates, the effect of the increase in the lower earnings limit will be to reduce most employees' contributions by 21p per week, or by 15p per week if they are in contracted-out employment.

The effect of raising the upper earnings limit is that those having earnings of £350 per week or more will pay an extra £2·04 per week, or £1·60 per week if they are contracted out.

Employers' contributions, which have a somewhat different structure, were not affected by last October's changes. However, as on previous occasions, the re-rating order provides that the earnings limit below which they pay lower contribution rates will be increased roughly in line with inflation, rounded to the nearest £5. From April, employers' contributions will be at 5 per cent. in respect of employees earning between the lower earnings limit and £79·99 per week; 7 per cent. for those earning between £80 and £124·99; 9 per cent. between £125 and £174·99 per week; and 10·45 per cent. for those earning more than £175 per week.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I am trying to follow the Secretary of State, but he is reading his brief very closely and I should not be surprised if the people at the receiving end of all that information could not understand it. I cannot pretend that I do. I shall put to the right hon. Gentleman a point made to me by those representing welfare rights in Newham, who say that, although a person earning £84 per week in 1989-90 would receive £52 per week statutory sick pay, that same person claiming after April will receive only £39·25, unless he or she receives a pay rise of 49 per cent., taking their income to £125. If that is so, the new arrangement represents a real cut for people at lower income levels.

Mr. Newton: Having considerable experience of the subject myself, I sympathise with the hon. Gentleman's difficulty in understanding the complexities of national insurance contributions. However, they have relatively little to do with the point that he makes. I shall deal shortly with the Statutory Sick Pay (Rate of Payment) Regulations 1990, which are in the batch before the House this afternoon, when the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question will become clear. Meanwhile, I have little alternative but to plough on through the complexities of the Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating) Order 1990 as briefly as I can.

In 1990-91, class 1 contributions, which are the ordinary contributions that most people make, are expected to yield £32 billion. As is the case with contributions made in all classes, that revenue will be apportioned between the national insurance fund and the National Health Service. Self-employed people pay national insurance contributions in two portions—the flat-rate class 2 contribution and the profits-related class 4 contribution. We do not propose any change to the class 4 rate, which will remain at 6·3 per cent. in the coming year. The profits limit for class 4 contributions, which determine the level of profits on which contributions are payable, will increase in the normal way and broadly in line with the earnings limit for class 1 contributions, to £5,450 and £18,200 respectively.

The upper profits limit is exactly 52 times the class 1 upper earnings limit. We propose also to increase the class 2 contribution by 30p to £4.55 per week from next April. The class 2 rate is broadly linked to the class 1 lower earnings limit, and its increase reflects the proposed rise in that limit.

In somewhat different terms, the result of all this is that self-employed people with profits at or below the present lower limit of £16,900 will pay about £25 less in class 4 contributions per year. Those with profits above the proposed upper limit of £18,200 will pay about £57 more. Self-employed people are expected to contribute about £1,200 million overall in contributions in 1990-91.

Finally, certain categories of people—for example, those who are not gainfully employed or receiving contributions credits, such as people who retired before the age of 60—can pay class 3 contributions if they wish; they are voluntary contributions. We propose to increase class 3 contributions by 30p, making them £4.45 a week.

Before leaving this tangled question of national insurance, I should note that, as usual, the Government Actuary's report on the effect of our proposals on the national insurance fund has been laid with the re-rating and uprating orders. Having referred to the report at some length in my speech on Second Reading of the Social Security Bill on 22 January, I shall merely remind the House now of what I consider to be its essential points.

The expected balance of the fund in the present year, at 34 per cent., is more than twice the Government Actuary's recommended minimum. Although, in 1990-91, expenditure is likely to exceed income, the balance is expected to remain at 25 per cent., which is well above the minimum. While a problem could have been foreseen had that trend continued in subsequent years, it should be overcome by the proposals in the Social Security Bill to transfer from the national insurance fund to the Consolidated Fund payment of industrial injuries benefits, statutory sick pay and statutory maternity pay. Since none of those is a national insurance benefit in the ordinary sense, as they do not depend on a contribution record, in my view, as the House knows, that is a sensible move in any case.

I now turn to the draft Statutory Sick Pay (Rate of Payment) Regulations. Those regulations were referred to the Social Security Advisory Committee, and its report, together with my response, is also before the House. There are three main elements in the regulations. The first is to increase the lower rate of statutory sick pay by £3 a week, to £39·25, an increase of rather more than simply matching inflation would have required. That will improve the position of low-paid workers who experience short-term sickness. That has been widely welcomed, as has the knock-on effect of a modest real increase in the entitlement of more than 200,000 women receiving statutory maternity pay, since the SMP rate is the same as the lower SSP rate.

As is the way of the world, comment has tended to ignore that aspect of the proposal and to concentrate on

the other two elements of the regulations, which are the more limited increase of 40p, bringing the higher SSP rate to £52·50, and the increase from £84 to £125—that directly relates to the point that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) raised—in the weekly earnings limit, above which the higher rate is payable. The concerns that have been expressed, and which he reflected, on the latter proposal are fairly reflected in the Social Security Advisory Committee's report, but for the reasons set out in my formal response the Government do not believe that those concerns are justified and they therefore do not intend to depart from the proposals, which have been conceived as a whole. Therefore, it would have been necessary to reconsider also the position on the real increase in the lower rate of SSP and SMP, which has been generally welcomed.

In commending this order to the House and, at the same time, commenting on the point that the hon. Gentleman raised, I shall simply ask hon. Members to bear in mind three matters. First, since 91 per cent. of employees are now covered by occupational sick pay schemes, and 83 per cent. of those schemes in the private sector now top up SSP to full pay and most of the rest to at least half pay, very few employees are likely to be affected in practice in the way that the hon. Gentleman's constituents have suggested. There will be a change in the balance of what they receive—between what the State provides through SSP and what the employer provides through an occupational sick pay scheme—without affecting the individual. We expect that in practice very few employees will be affected.

Mr. Tony Banks: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his patience in taking me through this highly complicated point, which I now understand better. Although he says that very few employees will be affected, has he any estimates? This matter has been raised with me by people in Newham, and I should not like anybody in Newham to lose under the provisions which have just been announced. Has the Secretary of State any estimate of the numbers involved, and what will he do if examples are brought to his attention of people who are manifestly losing out?

Mr. Newton: I shall make three points in response to the hon. Gentleman. First, if he investigates the circumstances of everyone in Newham, as I am sure he does assiduously as a Member of Parliament, he will certainly find a fair number who are likely to gain. They will be either quite low-paid workers who will be helped by the increase in the lower rate of SSP, or women having babies who will be helped by the small real increase in the rate of SMP.

Secondly, I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a detailed figure of the sort he requires. Many of the theoretical effects will happen only if someone is sick. We think that about 290,000 spells of sickness might theoretically be effected. However, to know who is going to be sick and relate that statistic to the occupational sick pay scheme which they may or may not be in is a task that would be beyond even my Department's excellent statisticians.

Thirdly, even at the present rate, somebody with substantial numbers of dependants would be likely to need —as they would be entirely entitled to if they were on only SSP—some topping up from income support or housing benefit. That remains open under the new arrangements in precisely the same way as it does at present.

The £125 dividing line, apart from the slight administrative advantage for employers of alignment with the dividing line which also exists in relation to contribution payments—the point that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) noticed earlier—does no more than restore the balance of numbers between those receiving the standard rate of SSP and the lower SSP rates to where it was when the SSP scheme started in 1983.

While the proposal undoubtedly means that employers will bear a slightly greater proportion of the costs of short-term sickness, the actual amount involved—about £80 million—is small in relation to total labour costs in the economy of more than £250,000 million. Overall, I have no doubt that this relatively modest restructuring is a sensible and reasonable one, taking account of the many pressures for social security expenditure in sectors for which only the state can provide.

You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will be glad to hear that I need address the third instrument only briefly——

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): What information has my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about the 9 per cent. who are not covered by occupational sick pay schemes? Does not common sense suggest that they are more likely to be part-time, and therefore low-paid, people, who will benefit, not lose, from this change in the arrangements?

Mr. Newton: Common sense suggests that, as I implied when I originally announced this in my original uprating statement. That is one reason why I would expect many people to be helped by what I have done with the lower rate of SSP, which is likely to be disproportionately helpful to those lower-paid and part-time workers who may not be in occupational sick pay schemes.

If only to take the opportunity to encourage more employers to do this, I must say that one encouraging factor is that employers generally are tending to extend their occupational schemes to part-time as well as full-time employees. Not least because of its effect on so many married women, that is something that I welcome and would wish to encourage.

As for the Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order 1990, in line with my statutory duty under the Social Security Act 1986, the order obliges occupational pension schemes that are contracted out of the state earnings-related pension scheme to provide post-award increases in guaranteed minimum pensions, earned in the tax year 1988-89, of 3 per cent. from 6 April this year.

The main uprating order follows the announcement that I made to the House in October about the generality of social security benefits rates that will be payable from 9 April 1990. It provides for an increase in retirement pensions, and in virtually all other benefits that are not income related, of 7·6 per cent. That is the increase in retail prices that took place between September 1988 and September 1989. As for income-related benefits, the order provides for a general increase of 5·2 per cent., which is the increase in retail prices, other than housing costs, over the same period. That difference, as is now well understood, reflects the fact that for people on income support there is generally direct assistance with housing costs, either through the payment of their mortgage interest, or some part of it, or through housing benefit.

Rather than rehearse all the many benefit rates to which those general increases give rise, which are set out in the

[Mr. Newton]

order, it will be more helpful to concentrate on the ways in which its provisions depart from the general pattern that I have just outlined. They are quite numerous. On the one hand, the rate of child benefit remains unchanged. On the other hand, there is an extensive range of specific improvements that go well beyond the basic uprating percentages. They are closely associated with a number of important extensions of benefit coverage that we are making in other ways, especially for disabled people and their carers.

The House will recall what I said about child benefit in my uprating statement. The requirement is to review the level of child benefit each year, taking account of all relevant considerations. Having done so, I came to the conclusion that other claims should, on this occasion, be given priority over those of a general increase in that benefit, particularly since such an increase of itself does nothing to improve the relative position of those who are least well off—the families on income support or family credit.

I do not intend to repeat everything that I said on that occasion, but I shall make one observation which I hope hon. Members will bear in mind. Targeting—or whatever word we want to use—is not simply a matter of increasing benefits that pay regard to people's exact financial circumstances—the income-related benefits—rather than those which do not. It also involves making judgments about the needs of different groups at a particular time and the relative weight of their claims to any additional resources that can be made available.

The incomes of people in work, which include the great majority of families with children, have been rising fast. Over the past year alone, the take-home pay of a married man on average earnings, including the effect of the £3-a-week reduction in national insurance contributions, has risen by about £20 a week. In the numerous cases where both partners are working, the overall increase in family income will have been even more.

Against that background, I do not think that it was unreasonable to judge that the prior claims at this time lie in other quarters: families with children who are out of work or in low-paid jobs, the less well-off pensioners and —very much not least—disabled people, their carers and families with disabled children. It is on those groups that we focused additional help, both in the measures that we implemented last October and, in this order and in what we are doing in other ways.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): I am sure that the Secretary of State accepts that one of the primary causes of the classic poverty trap is those on low pay who are not earning the average wage of £258 a week, according to the Department's latest figures. Does not child benefit cut through the poverty trap because it is not means-tested? It reaches, therefore, precisely those families who cannot claim other benefits but whose take-home pay is too low to qualify either for tax concessions or for other benefits. Does not the Secretary of State accept that it breaks helpfully and progressively through the poverty trap?

Mr. Newton: I do not accept the full implication of that. As the House knows from what I have said on numerous occasions, the more effective way of tackling that problem is the one that we adopted with the move from family income supplement to family credit, a significantly more generous benefit than its predecessor. I refer also to the efforts that we are making to channel amounts averaging £27 a week in family credit to low-paid working families with children.

At the same time, we made changes that constituted an important aspect of the reforms introduced in 1988. Although they did not eliminate—I would not pretend that they did—the problem of high marginal rates of withdrawal associated with income-related benefits, they certainly mitigated those effects and, above all, virtually reduced to nil the number of people who could make themselves worse off by increasing their incomes. The hon. Gentleman is student enough in this area to know that we are discussing intractable problems. I do not want to over-simplify; I am sure that he does not want to, either. I do not entirely agree with his point, and I emphasise what we have sought to do by means of family credit.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): If the argument is about better targeting for the low-paid, why are the Government making cuts that amount, in the case of child benefit over the past three years, to £250 million, of which only £70 million—about 28 per cent.—will go to families in respect of family credit? Is not the right hon. Gentleman being a little dishonest by trying to pretend that the argument is not really about cuts?

Mr. Newton: I am not being dishonest. It has just become apparent that the hon. Gentleman must have switched off during the past few minutes when I was talking about what I understood by targeting.

Targeting is not merely a matter of picking out some money that has been going in one universal direction and deciding to add an income-related direction as well. We look more broadly at the various groups in the population and consider where it is necessary to direct extra help——

Mr. Meacher: That is a diversion.

Mr. Newton: I do not think so. I have made it clear that one aspect that has been in the Government's mind is the extent to which there has been a rapid and considerable increase in the standard of living, real incomes and cash incomes of the great majority of those in work, who include the great majority of families with children.

Against this background, we thought that priority should be given not only to low-income families with children, including those out of work, but to people in other parts of society, not least to many pensioners and disabled people who do not share directly and immediately in the growth in employment incomes either. That is a much broader point and I should be surprised if, at the end of the day, the hon. Gentleman disagreed with it.

I want now to cover as briefly as I can the many improvements contained in the uprating order. In income support we are increasing the premium for families with dependent children from £6·50 to £7·35, which is 50p more than inflation. We are increasing the adult disability premium from £13·70 to £15·40, which is a pound more than inflation. We are increasing the child disability premium from £6·50 to £15·40, which more than doubles it. We are adding more than £100 million to the income support limits for people in residential care and nursing homes, virtually all of which will rise by £10 a week as a result. At the same time, we are increasing the personal

expenses allowance for long-term hospital patients by more than £3, to £11·75 a week. These improvements all come into effect in April.

Then, in October—it is October rather than April only for practical reasons—we shall introduce a new carers' premium into income support, for those receiving invalid care allowance, at a rate of £10 a week. In housing benefit and community charge benefit, all these increases in the income support premiums carry through into the starting points for calculating benefit, thus giving additional help to yet more families with children, disabled people and carers.

In addition, we are making a number of other improvements aimed particularly at assisting those lone parents who are working or who wish to do so. The lone parent premium in those benefits is being increased by nearly 13 per cent. from £8·60 to £9·70 a week, and the amount that lone parents can earn without affecting their entitlement to them is being increased by two thirds from £15 to £25 a week.

In family credit, the adult credit is being increased by £1 a week beyond what inflation would have required to £36·35, which we hope and expect will reinforce our efforts to maximise the effectiveness of that benefit in helping low-income families in work.

In the social fund, we are increasing the maternity payment from £85 to £100, and doubling from £500 to £1,000 the amount of capital that people over 60 may have without affecting their entitlement.

Apart from those improvements in income-related benefits, the order also provides for a number of beneficial changes in other aspects of the benefit system. For those receiving invalid care allowance, it increases the amount that they can earn without affecting their entitlement from £12 to £20 a week. For those receiving invalidity benefit or severe disablement allowance, it increases what they can earn under what is called the therapeutic earnings limit from £28·50 to £35, to improve encouragement for rehabilitation into employment.

Not least—this will be particularly welcomed on the Conservative Benches—the order provides for a significant increase in the help given to the older war widows through the war pensions scheme, with a real increase in age allowances to all over 65, and a particularly large increase, from £15·30 to £20, for those over 80. It also doubles, from £5 to £10, the amount of war widows and other war pensions which is disregarded for the purposes of income-related benefits.

Those increases in the DSS war pension scheme are separate from what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced on 11 December when he said that he would be making a special £40 a week payment to the pre-1973 war widows. Those extra payments will also come into effect in April and they will be entirely disregarded in calculating income-related benefits.

While concentrating on the changes contained in the order, it is right that I should also remind the House briefly of a number of other changes which are being, or will be, brought about by other mechanisms but which are very much part of the context in which the order is brought before the House.

Last October we abolished the pensioners' earnings rule and made substantial increases in the income support and housing benefit premiums for disabled pensioners and those over 75. We are preparing, and will shortly lay, regulations to extend attendance allowance to disabled babies under two and to extend mobility allowance to those who are deaf and blind.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I hear on the grapevine that there may be some difficulties in the implementation date for the welcome extension of the mobility allowance to the deaf and blind. Is there any suggestion that the improvement will not be made in April as expected?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman will have seen me hastily consulting my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security, but all I can say is that the grapevine on which he heard that does not appear to have extended to Ministers in the DSS. Should it turn out that he is ahead of us in learning of those difficulties, I shall do my best to ensure that they are overcome, but I have not yet had any such difficulties brought to my attention.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): In the unlikely event of the grapevine being correct, will that extension be backdated?

Mr. Newton: I had better seek further advice to establish the merits or otherwise of the point that has been made before commenting further. I shall go no further than to say that my instinct is that if there proved to be some hiccup in the implementation of a proposal that is among those that are dearest to my heart in all these, I would look carefully at the possibility that my hon. Friend suggests.

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): While the Minister is investigating that hiccup, may I mention another possible hiccup with regard to war widows? A constituent of mine aged 81 in a nursing home will, I am told, have all of the £40 announced by the Secretary of State for Defence clawed back in her nursing home costs. Therefore, it will not be disregarded but will be taken into account in her income support when calculating her contribution to the nursing home costs.

Mr. Newton: It might be sensible if the hon. Lady sent me details of the case.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): She is right.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman might just listen, because the possibilities are not quite as simple as he thinks.

I have made it clear that our intention is to regulate to make sure that total payments are disregarded for the purpose of all income-related benefits. I wish to see the details of the case to which the hon. Lady referred, because it is not unknown, when a home learns that the income of a resident has increased, for it to increase its charge to that person. Clearly that would not be susceptible to action through the social security regulations. It might be susceptible to some form of intervention by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health or by the local authority. I hope that the hon. Lady and the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) understand that I need to consider that case. I cannot give an off-the-cuff answer.

Mr. Timothy Raison (Aylesbury): We read in the newspapers this morning that Wrens in the Royal Navy are to starting flying combat aircraft. Does the provision cover war widowers as well as war widows?

Mr. Newton: That was a very helpful question, not least because it is primarily one for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. I shall ensure that his attention is drawn to it.

I was referring to the mobility allowance for those who are both deaf and blind when I was subject to something of a barrage of queries and interventions. I was about to say that the Social Security Bill, which is now in Committee, in the able hands of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, extends attendance allowance to the terminally ill without the six-month waiting period and provides for the addition of invalidity allowance to severe disablement allowances later this year. We are preparing later legislation to introduce the proposed new disability allowance and the disability employment credit.

Last week we referred to the Social Security Advisory Committee draft regulations, all of which we hope to make by April, which make further beneficial changes, many of them fairly small and technical, to income-related benefits. I shall mention just one of them. As announced by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State in a parliamentary answer last week, we intend to double to £10 a week the current disregard for charitable and voluntary payments made to people receiving an income-related benefit, and to disregard completely any regular charitable or voluntary payment intended and used for an item other than certain accommodation costs met by benefit, food, ordinary clothing or footwear and household fuel.

We have been pressed hard by many voluntary and charitable bodies to make that change. It will allow charities, voluntary bodies and relatives to give more help to people, where they wish, without affecting their entitlement to income-related benefits.

It is conventional to end the opening speech in a debate such as this with some reference to money. The money involved is vast. The increase in social security expenditure between 1989-90 and 1990-91, most of it arising from this order, is £3 billion. It takes the total social security expenditure next year to well over £55 billion. As I said in my uprating statement, that is over £1 billion each week. No less important than the amounts involved is what we are doing with it, and the people whom we seek to help.

Taken together, the changes to which I have referred mean that in a comparatively short time we shall have brought about a real improvement in the position of nearly 3 million of the least well-off pensioners, 850,000 disabled people and carers, 1·5 million low-income families with children, including nearly 100,000 lone parents, and about 50,000 war widows. All those people have a particular claim to our concern as a community. We are pleased as a Government to be able to respond to that concern with this wide range of new steps to help, and I have no doubt that the House will be pleased to endorse those that are contained in this order.

4.19 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): Although the Secretary of State treated us to an array of minor changes across a whole range of marginal benefits, this debate on the uprating orders is, in effect, a debate about the overall adequacy or otherwise of the income of the poorest quarter of the population. Although market capitalism is dominated by the driving forces of money and wealth, the House never debates how that money is distributed throughout the nation.

I have often thought that many of the most important events or processes in our society are never debated when they happen, which is when it really matters, whether they relate to internment in Northern Ireland, competition and credit control in the City, the internationalisation of the capital markets or the accountability of the security services. In the same way, the House never debates the distribution of income and wealth, although it is at the heart of our economic system. I suppose that today's debate is the nearest proxy that we shall get to that, and I intend to treat it in that vein.

My first point, therefore——

Mr. Tim Smith *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: It is a little early, so if the hon. Gentleman will allow me to make a few points, I shall gladly give way to him then.

Mr. Smith: I have a helpful suggestion.

Mr. Meacher: Well, I shall take the hon. Gentleman at his word, which may be a bit risky.

Mr. Smith: I simply wanted to suggest that if these are such important subjects for debate, the Opposition might occasionally choose some of them for their Supply days.

Mr. Meacher: A number of those issues arose when the Opposition were the Tory party. However, I was not seeking to make a partisan point—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Well, I am sorry, I am not seeking to make a party political point but a much—*[Laughter.]* The hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) should contain himself and try to think a little more reflectively about what I have said. I am simply making the point that many issues in our society are not properly debated in the House. The system of income and wealth, which is absolutely critical in a market system, is rarely debated. This afternoon's debate is an opportunity to take that further, and I shall do so.

My first point, therefore, is that the share of national resources that is allocated to the poor has been declining not increasing, and will further decrease this year as a result of the Secretary of State's uprating of 25 October last year. The right hon. Gentleman likes to say—he says this in every debate and he said it again today—that total social security expenditure is now running at about £1 billion per week, but what he does not say is that the total expenditure has declined from 11·5 per cent. of gross domestic product in 1984-85—the middle of the 1980s—to only 9·7 per cent. now.

Part of the reason for that is, of course, the decline in unemployment, but the major reason is that, as one of their first acts in 1979, the Government deliberately broke the link between benefits and earnings. As a result, the quarter of the population which is long-term dependent on benefits has fallen further and further behind the living standards of the rest of our society. The right hon. Gentleman should be concerned that the Department of Social Security now gets a lesser share of national resources than in 1980, although there are 3 million more people on income support, nearly twice as many people unemployed and nearly 1 million more pensioners.

Clearly, this squeezing of the lowest-income quarter of the population will be taken a great deal further year by year as long as this Government remain in power. That is obvious from the techniques of what I sometimes think of as the Tory demolition contractors, which are now all too apparent, and are manifested, yet again, in the orders.

First, the Government strip out any earnings-related supplement so that only the basic minimum benefit is provided. That was done to unemployment benefit in 1982 and to invalidity benefit a month ago. The savings to the Government have been enormous. Of course, the other side of the coin is the loss to those entitled to benefit. In the case of invalidity benefit, Government savings will rise to a staggering £1·3 billion per year by 2025.

Secondly, the Government break any pension link with earnings so that poor families cannot keep up with rising living standards. Again, the savings to the Government from that device over the past decade have been colossal, as much as £20 billion, enough to fund the entire Government programme of tax cuts since 1979.

Thirdly, they chop universal benefit. That is why child benefit is being frozen for the third year running, leaving it to wither on the vine until the Government have the honesty and decency to admit that their ultimate intention is to do away with it altogether.

Fourthly, the Government start means-testing contributory benefits. That is why the former Chancellor of the Exchequer toyed publicly with the idea of shifting to means-tested pensions. That is why the former Secretary of State for Social Security, the right hon. Gentleman's predecessor, made a stab at abolishing SERPS before he was forced by the public furore to be content with merely vandalising it.

Fifthly, the Government privatise wherever possible. Sickness benefit and maternity benefit have both been handed over to the private sector. Now SERPS is being partially privatised by the encouragement to contract out into personal pensions, with the usual bribe, at public expense, if people satisfy Tory ideology.

With friends like that, the welfare state does not need enemies. It was for those reasons that John Hills, who is widely recognised as a specialist in these matters, in his comprehensive study of taxes and benefits over the past decade, found last year:

"Overall, the bottom half of the population has lost £6·6 billion of which £5·6 billion has gone to the top 10 per cent."

That is the reality behind the Secretary of State's smooth reassurances today. We have had 10 years of steady dismantling—an erosion here, a whittling away there, a whole series of minor and inexpensive improvements, which the right hon. Gentleman rattled off again today. Those things are held up to disguise major cuts. There is a constant reshuffling of the pack, but always with the same or fewer cards.

Exactly the same techniques are apparent in the uprating that we are debating. Clearly the Government have broken their promise that the poor would not lose under the poll tax when it is introduced in two months' time. There is a shortfall between the 20 per cent. of the poll tax that everyone, however poor, will be made to pay and the extra income support that is supposed to compensate. Let us take a local authority charging exactly what the Government claim will be the average poll tax —Kingswood in Avon. A couple there on income support will have to find £39 a year to make up the shortfall out of what is supposed to be the minimum income necessary for basic living expenses.

In the Prime Minister's constituency, in the London borough of Barnet, a similar couple will need to find an extra £55 a year, more than £1 a week. In neighbouring Haringey, a couple on the income support poverty line will be made no less than £151 a year worse off by the poll tax. I have the entire list of local authorities. The figures are large everywhere. Even those losses are likely to be exceeded in the event because they are based on the Government's published poll tax figures, which everyone knows are laughable under-estimates. The true figure could well turn out to be 25 per cent. higher, or more. The real point, however—I cannot emphasise it strongly enough—is that the very poorest people in our society should not have to pay poll tax at all.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): Just to confirm the point, does the hon. Gentleman consider that there should be no relation between what someone on income support pays and the expenditure of his local council, and that no pressure whatever should be put on that local council to keep spending down to essential levels?

Mr. Meacher: I certainly do not think that people living on £35, £40 or £45 a week should be made to suffer in any way, whatever their local authority does. We have a ballot box. It is perfectly possible for the people in the borough to vote out a local authority if it acts in a way contrary to their general interest.

Mr. Leigh *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: I do not want to get into a general discussion of the poll tax. I just make the point that the hon. Gentleman is very unwise if he believes that the poorest people should be targeted—if I may use a Government word in a slightly different way—in order to punish local authorities. We totally repudiate that view.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I noticed that while my hon. Friend was talking, Conservative Members were muttering, "Haringey?" and asking, "Who runs Haringey?" I am a former member of Haringey borough council. I am not ashamed of it, because I, while I was a member, and subsequent members of the authority did our best to provide a high and satisfactory level of social services, housing development, community development and recreational facilities, for which the borough was penalised by the Tory Government and continue to be penalised by them. It is now vilified for the level of poll tax that will be set for the proportion of expenditure that the authority itself controls. The high poll tax in inner and other London boroughs comes about solely because of the Government's past treatment of inner London local authorities and inner urban areas throughout the country.

Does my hon. Friend agree with me on those points?

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend is right: the basic reason for high expenditure in poor areas in inner London is unquestionably, first, the acute level of social need, and secondly, the sharp cuts in rate support grant by the Government, from about 61 per cent. to about 47 per cent. However, I do not wish to enter into a wider discussion of

[Mr. Meacher]

the poll tax. It is not appropriate now. I simply make the important point that the poorest in our society should not be targeted for penalties under that tax.

Not only are the Government failing to protect poor tenants—although that is certainly true—but they are turning a blind eye to the rip-off that landlords will make out of the poll tax. There is at present no obligation on a landlord to reduce the rent that he charges at the changeover from rates to poll tax, even though that rent includes a rates element that will soon be defunct. I want to quote one case given to me by a citizens advice bureau, which makes the point:

"Client is a pensioner living in very poor standard private rented house (outside toilet, only one tap, no bath.) The client has paid a weekly rent which has included rates and water rates. Now had a letter from landlord saying she must pay these separately and had a bill from Yorkshire Water. Landlord has not made any corresponding reduction in the 'rent' she pays."

We have consistently urged the Government to introduce legislation to outlaw that practice, but the Government have refused. They have not even sent a letter, or asked local authorities to send a letter, to all private tenants to warn them that they may be double-charged. That abuse has already netted some £40 million for landlords in Scotland in the past year, and it is expected that landlords in London will pick up a £90 million bonanza in the coming year because of that loophole. Since there are nearly a million private tenants on housing benefit, the total rip-off to landlords at the expense of tenants may turn out to be over £400 million.

It is extraordinary that the Minister of State can be so lax about this malpractice when his own borough of Kensington and Chelsea has the highest percentage of private tenants of any local authority—29 per cent.—rising in south Chelsea, I believe, to 39 per cent., and also the highest number of houses in multiple occupation, where undoubtedly the worst abuses will occur. I beg the right hon. Gentleman to reconsider that issue, as it is crucial that he acts to prevent that abuse from hitting some of the poorest tenants and other poor people in our society.

The Government like to pride themselves on being the party of the family, yet two of their actions—or, perhaps, omissions—in the orders strike at the heart of the family. The Government have not protected the poorest against the poll tax—as I have said—and, by freezing child benefit for the third year running, they have refused to find even an extra 50p for the family budget. That is not just mean but plainly dishonourable.

In its 1987 manifesto, the Tory party promised:

"Child benefit will continue to be paid as now, and direct to the mother."

Four months later, the Government froze it, and it has remained frozen ever since despite the pantomime of a yearly review. The Government have now cut the real value of child benefit by a fifth. The Secretary of State now has the distinction of reducing total family benefits for the average family to the lowest level in the EEC, except for Ireland, Greece, Spain and Portugal. In Britain, weekly family benefits for a couple with three children under 12 are £21·75, whereas in France they are £43·30—almost exactly twice as high.

After listening to what the right hon. Gentleman said today, I must say that one of the more pitiful sights on these occasions is to watch him being forced to dismiss child benefit and to expound on the merits of family credit or diverting to other needy groups, when he knows perfectly well that other needy groups—which I shall come to in a moment—have not had the uncovenanted increase that he pretends.

The right hon. Gentleman knows as well as anyone that family credit is riddled with defects. Child benefit has a virtual 100 per cent. take-up, whereas family credit achieves only 50 per cent. The Government formerly talked of targeting—now the word focusing is all the rage—but that focused benefit reaches only half of those for whom it is intended. Child benefit is cheap and easy to administer, but family credit is much more expensive and difficult. The last round of advertising recruited claimants to family credit at a cost of about £120 for every additional applicant.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) said in an intervention, child benefit does not contribute to the poverty trap, whereas family credit does, despite the Secretary of State's lengthy answer—and as do all means-tested benefits. I do not know whether it makes the right hon. Gentleman squirm to be forced by the Prime Minister to argue for things that he does not believe in, but it makes me squirm to have to listen to him being so dishonest.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): The hon. Gentleman sought to make a comparison between this country and our European neighbours. Does he agree that the picture that he painted looks less convincing when one adds what he forgot to mention—that no other European country has anything like family credit?

Mr. Meacher: Family credit goes to about 340,000 people. There are 12 million children in this country and there are similar totals in receipt of the equivalent of child benefit in those other countries. Family credit is a drop in the ocean. If the hon. Gentleman believes that that makes any difference to the overall question of the amount of money that societies in different parts of Europe are prepared to give to all families, he should reconsider.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Will the hon. Gentleman take into account the fact, that, in Germany, Italy and Greece, child benefit arrangements are means-tested and that other countries do not have the same universal arrangement as ours? Does the Labour party plan to means-test child benefit?

Mr. Meacher: No, we certainly do not, because it is unwise and we do not accept it. The levels of the means-tested benefits that the hon. Gentleman mentions are substantially higher than those in this country, so I suspect that the average family in those countries still gets considerably more than the average family in this country.

We also strongly object to the downgrading of statutory sick pay. I use the term "downgrading" deliberately. This further chipping away at an already eroded benefit is typical of the Government's emasculation of the benefit structure. As the Secretary of State fully explained, employees now get the full statutory sick pay rate as long as their earnings are over £84 per week. From April they will get it only if their earnings are over £125 a week.

To sugar the pill for the low-paid—that is the most euphemistic phrase that I can think of—the lower rate of

sick pay is to be increased by a magnificent 25p a week more than is needed to compensate for inflation. The Secretary of State made enormous play of that, but I suspect—I do not want to be patronising—that he would hardly stoop in the street to pick up such a paltry sum.

This act of unstinting and abundant magnanimity has to be balanced by more than equivalent cuts elsewhere in the sick pay uprating. Hence, the higher rate is being cut to the tune of £3·55 a week less than the amount that is needed to compensate for inflation. The right hon. Gentleman did not make that clear. The handling of the net effect of all those manoeuvres is characteristic of the Government. The Secretary of State parades the extra 25p as if it were generosity beyond the dreams of avarice, but the Government are clawing back £70 million to £80 million per year out of the whole shabby contrivance.

The Government's excuse for the change is that, since statutory sick pay started in 1983, the earnings threshold for the higher rate has been raised only in line with prices and not with earnings, so a much bigger rise in the threshold is now justified. That is fine. That means that the Government are at last coming round to the belated recognition that the logical basis for uprating earnings-replacement benefits is an index of average earnings rather than prices. The trouble is that under this Government, logic is partisan, selective and always rather self-interested.

The Government are using the earnings link to raise the threshold in order to disqualify hundreds of thousands of workers from the higher rate of statutory sick pay. However, when it comes to the earnings link for the uprating of pensions so that millions of pensioners will qualify for higher pensions, the Government do not want to know. Logic is fine for the Government as long as it leads to cuts.

Mr. Tim Smith: Let us be quite clear about Labour policy. Can the hon. Gentleman confirm that the logic of his argument would be to increase the starting point for the payment of national insurance contributions by the increase in earnings, thus increasing it at a faster rate than over the past 10 years? That would disqualify more low-paid people from benefit.

Mr. Meacher: Not at all. It is right that in general we should link contributions and benefits to earnings as far as it is possible to do so. We have certainly made a fundamental commitment, of which the hon. Gentleman is well aware. We believe that pensioners ought to maintain their share of rising living standards. National insurance contributions, which are a percentage of incomes, are based on buoyant income. That is why there is such a large surplus in the national insurance fund. We support that general principle as a means of ensuring that people in need maintain their share of the community's rising living standards.

When we take the fiddle on statutory sick pay into account, it becomes possible to net out the whole balance of expenditure over this benefit uprating. The Government are currently increasing expenditure on disability and carers' benefits by £100 million. They are helping low-income families with the five new measures that the Secretary of State announced in the uprating statement, which was repeated today, and that will cost £70 million. They are providing a small number of concessions for pensioners, which will cost £15 million. The total is £185 million.

I readily acknowledge that the Government are also spending £100 million on raising income support levels for people in residential care and nursing homes. The Secretary of State slipped over the point that that does not anywhere near match the rise in inflation and could thus be construed as a cut in real terms. It still leaves a problematic gap between benefits and charges of up to £50 a week, and it is usually treated separately from the benefits uprating. For that reason, I do not include it here, and I think that that is right.

On the debit side, the Government are saving £250 million on child benefit and, as I have said, a further £70 million to £80 million on statutory sick pay. That gives total savings of about £325 million. Despite all the paraphernalia of minuscule extras with which the right hon. Gentleman sought to adorn his uprating statement and with which he regaled us, the stark truth behind the orders is that, overall, the Government are not giving the poorest quarter of the population any extra money at all. They are relieving a very large part of the population of about £140 million. We all know the old adage:

"I fear the Greeks even when they bring gifts."

That takes on a new meaning under the Government. When the Government or the Secretary of State give us something, we would be well advised to count our fingers afterwards.

Mr. Newton: In the course of the past few minutes, the hon. Gentleman appears to have slipped into a proposition based on the assumption that all recipients of child benefit are among the poorest people in the population. If he does not think that, he could not justify his last sentence. However, we know that a surprisingly large part of any payment of child benefit goes to those with earnings of over £20,000 a year. Secondly, he has totally ignored the major increases in benefits for older and more disabled pensioners, which were made last October, and he has ignored the abolition of the earnings rule, both of which lead to significantly greater expenditure in the forthcoming year than in the present year. The cost is £600 million in a full year, and it was £300 million last year. Another £300 million has to be found this year. To be fair, the hon. Gentleman should take that into account in his presentation of these matters.

Mr. Meacher: I shall deal shortly with disability benefits and the earnings rule. I certainly acknowledge the right hon. Gentleman's point, but I made the same point to him, that I suspect that the great majority of the benefit does not go to the lowest quarter of the population that we are considering.

The cuts and the dismantling of the social security underpinning of our society do not stop here. I pay the right hon. Gentleman the compliment of saying that he is something of a master magician. He specialises in two tricks, one of which is the constant recycling of old money and endless exercises in the redistribution of poverty so that one group's gain is another's loss. However, it is called the provision of new money. The other trick is to flash a whole array of cards announcing trivial increases in marginal benefits before the bemused eyes of his onlookers while keeping the joker firmly tucked up his sleeve. The right hon. Gentleman did that today. In this case, the joker in the pack is the Government's sudden and unilateral abolition of the additional pension to invalidity benefit.

In his statement on disability benefit—for which, I might say, disabled people have waited 10 years—the right

[Mr. Meacher]

hon. Gentleman took us all round the houses about how he was going to do this, that and all the other to improve the lot of the disabled. But about the abolition of the earnings-related pension he kept very mum indeed. We can now see exactly why. He bragged about how he was increasing expenditure on disability benefit by £300 million a year by 1993, but he did not tell us that the figure would then fall steadily to nil by the year 2000 and would continue to fall steeply over the following 25 years. So, overall, the Government are making a colossal saving at the expense of disabled people.

The answer that the Minister of State gave me a fortnight ago—in *Hansard* of 26 January—shows clearly that over the first quarter of the next century the Government will rake off a staggering £9 billion by way of reductions in disability benefits. The disabled people's organisations have certainly made clear their intense disappointment with the Government's review, but even they had not anticipated that what was called a review could turn into ransacking and plunder on such a scale.

The last issue that I want to raise concerns pensioners. I want to repeat the central point about this uprating order: if the Government had not peremptorily ended Labour's link with earnings, a single pensioner, in two months' time, would be getting a pension of exactly £60 a week. As it is, he or she will get only £46·90—£13·10 less per week than Labour provided for. Similarly, a married couple would be getting a basic pension of no less than £95·80, whereas they will actually get £75·10—a full £20·70 less. I accept, of course, that there is in Britain one person over 60 who thinks that pensioners are getting a very good deal, but, of course, the Prime Minister does not actually have to live on the old-age pension.

It is not as if the Government did not have the funds to give more help to pensioners if they wanted to do so. Last April, the cumulative total in the national insurance fund was touching £10 billion. In 1988-89 alone, it grew by £2·25 billion. Yet, instead of paying higher pensions—which are desperately needed, as more than half of all pensioners live on, or only very slightly above, the poverty line—the Government are currently trying to reduce the surplus by giving money back to people in work. Indeed, the cost to the national insurance fund of the 2 per cent. bribe to personal pension schemes is already £1·5 billion over budget. If the Government had so chosen, that sum could have been used, instead, to double the pension increase that we are debating under the order.

Sir George Young (Ealing, Acton): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman does not wish to mislead pensioners, who may be following the debate. In the first year of any Labour Administration, would the link be restored?

Mr. Meacher: Indeed. I am very glad that the hon. Gentleman understands what we have been saying repeatedly. I am very glad that he is now tuned in. We have said that we shall restore the link. There is no question of retrospective payments. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] Of course there is no question of retrospective payments. There can be no question of retrospective payments. However, we have said that we would restore the link with earnings, so that, over a 10-year period, pensioners would get an extra amount of the magnitude about which I have been talking.

Sir George Young: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: No, not again.

The Government say that they believe in targeting, but it is now becoming all too clear that what they mean is targeting their friends in the City for bonuses for privatised schemes, at the expense of pensioners, who are being given the meanest possible increase that the Government can get away with.

I began my speech by saying that the debate was about the share of national resources allotted to the poorest quarter of the population. I think that it will be widely accepted that in this country there is a majority view that the divide between rich and poor is now too wide and should be reduced. It is because the Government have repeatedly and deliberately widened that divide, and have no intention whatever of closing it, that we shall vote against the orders.

4.55 pm

Mr. Timothy Raison (Aylesbury): At the beginning of his speech, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) made one point on which I should like to comment. He said that the House is not really very good at discussing strategic issues. Some of his examples were a bit far-fetched, but I think that we suffer from the fact that we do not discuss taxation and public expenditure together anything like as much as we should. That has particular relevance and force in the context of the subject about which the House will not be surprised to hear I intend to speak—child benefit. The history of child benefit is that it is a replacement both for a social security benefit and for a tax allowance. I shall come back to that.

In his opening speech, my right hon. Friend made a number of points with which I am entirely happy. The uprating that he is introducing is useful in many respects. He is a Secretary of State for Social Security who cares deeply about what he is doing, and he is held in very high regard by the House. Having said that, however, I must say that I think he is wrong in respect of child benefit. Every year, in the public expenditure plans, we make provision for an uprating of child benefit in the following year. Every year, the Secretary of State is required to review the level of child benefit. Every year for the last three years, this review has taken place, and every year for the last three years the result has been no uprating. I am bound to say that, with each year, our election pledge to continue to pay child benefit as at present sounds a little more hollow. It is time that we changed this policy.

We have debated child benefit so often in the last few years that I do not intend to run through all the arguments—I will simply itemise them. There is the fact of the poor take-up of family credit, as against child benefit; there is the fact that child benefit does not lead to the poverty trap in the way that selective benefits do; there is the fact that it goes directly to the mother; there is the simplicity and certainty of child benefit, as opposed to the complexity and uncertainty of means-tested benefits; there is the history of child benefit; there is the long tradition of help in this country for all those who bring up the children; and, as I have said already, there is the fact that when it was brought in, it was intended very clearly as a replacement not only for a benefit but for a tax allowance.

All this is familiar, but it is very important. Of course, as always, we come back to the argument: why provide a universal benefit and not be selective? This rings false when we look at tax allowances, which are the other half of the

equation. After all, we provide tax relief on mortgages —the main effect of which is probably to push up the price of houses—for everybody, regardless of income. We provide tax relief on pensions contributions for everybody, regardless of income. We have now actually brought in a benefit by which we provide tax relief on private health insurance for people over 60, regardless of income.

In all these cases, it may even be argued that the richer one is, the greater the benefit in tax allowances. I do not think that it is possible to continue to argue that there is something wrong with the unselective nature of child benefit while at the same time continuing to accept, and even to introduce, a new tax allowance that provides specific help for those with private health insurance. I do not think that that is sustainable.

I have some sympathy with the view that some of these tax allowances should be cut. However, that is not the Government's position. The Government have brought in a new allowance, yet they say, at least by implication, that we have to think in terms of pruning child benefit in real terms. I do not think that that is on. The one certainty is that bringing up children involves additional cost. That has always been recognised in this country. I realise, of course, that child benefit goes to some people who certainly do not need it, but its advantages are so great that that is a price worth paying.

What about this year's review? After all, the Secretary of State is required, each year, to look at the special circumstances of the year ahead. Let me again say that the money for an uprating was allocated in the public expenditure round for this year, so there is no question of an additional call on public resources. There are special reasons why there should be an uprating this year. I believe that it should be automatic, but in the present situation we have to look at the special circumstances—the relevant considerations—as the Act requires.

Some of this is political but some of it, much more importantly, is a matter of basic concern for our fellow citizens. The first special reason for an uprating is that it would offset the impact of the community charge, particularly on those people who are just above the rebate level. These are the people in my constituency who have been paying rates of £300 to £400 but who, as a couple, will face a community charge of £700 to £800 a year. There is transitional relief but that will be of no more than limited help in these cases. Many people will be affected, and they are beginning to come to our surgeries and to write us letters because of their special circumstances.

The House will recall, how, in 1988, we had to face up to the consequences of the Social Security Act 1986 and its effect on housing benefit. Hon. Members will recall the flood of letters that we received then and the flood of people who came to our surgeries saying, in particular, that the capital limit for housing benefit introduced in that Act was causing considerable problems. I should like my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security to let us know what will happen to transitional payments on housing benefit from April 1990. As well as that, we can recall the fact that, under pressure, the Government had to give way and, quite rightly, make concessions.

I believe that the Government will be faced with a much greater storm as a consequence of the community charge than they experienced as a consequence of that Act. The Government will have to make concessions. The simplest way to do that would be to recognise that the people who will have most difficulty as a result of the community charge, in the categories which I have mentioned, will be those who have to pay the cost of bringing up children. If we can do something to meet that cost by, even at this late stage, uprating child benefit, we would have a useful measure and something that would be entirely inside the terms of the Act.

The Government are clearly worried about wage pressure. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and others are making clear their concern about this. An increase in child benefit would do something—not everything: I am not trying to exaggerate —to help to head off the problem of wage pressure.

Furthermore, there is a growing campaign for tax relief on child care costs. I do not agree that there should be such tax relief, because I think that it would be unfair if the women who go out to work derived benefit not only from the income from that work but from tax relief, while mothers who stay at home to look after their children get nothing at all. That would be unfair. The simple answer to this is to approach it in a different way—by an increase in child benefit, which goes equally to the mother who goes out to work and to the mother who stays at home to look after her children. That would be neutral, which is as it should be.

Mr. Corbyn: Is there not the serious problem of a shortage of pre-school child care places? As a result, many private nurseries charge exorbitant fees, which people are forced to pay because there is no other way to have their children looked after. They naturally look to tax relief to offset that cost whereas a better solution would be larger and better statutory state provision of pre-school facilities for small children, who benefit from it in many ways.

Mr. Raison: That is a whole new topic. As it happens, I was Chairman of the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts when it produced a report advocating a substantial expansion of nursery education, so I agree with the hon. Gentleman, but I do not want to go down that path.

I have given the reasons why I believe that child benefit should go up. It is true that the additional child benefits resulting from one year's uprating would not offset all the needs about which I have spoken. However, it would more do so if we had uprated child benefit every year, and it would more do so now if we were to uprate child benefit in a way that includes an element for catching up on our failure to uprate it in the past.

Increasingly, I believe that we could go much further, again if we are willing to look at the tax and benefits systems together. As the House knows, the taxation of husband and wife is about to be separated—on the whole, an admirable measure. There is to be a married couple's allowance and a similar allowance for unmarried couples who have children. I thought it would be interesting to ask what the cost to the Exchequer of these allowances will be.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer replied:

> "The direct revenue cost of the married couple's allowance in a full year at 1990-91 levels of income is estimated to be £5 billion. If the allowance were to be given only to married couples where either the husband or wife was a 65 or over, there would be a saving of about £4·5 billion."—[*Official Report*, 20 December 1989; Vol. 164, c. *241*.]

In other words, the married couple's allowance is absorbing just about the amount of money that it costs to provide child benefit in any one year. We should seriously

[Mr. Raison]

consider the possibility of scrapping these allowances and doubling child benefit. That could be done without any net cost to the Exchequer.

It so happens that I am a strong believer in conventional, traditional, orthodox marriage, and in itself I like the idea of the married couple's allowance. On the other hand, if I look at the real problems in society, I find it impossible to deny that those who have children clearly have costs that do not arise simply from the fact of being married. Therefore, I put it seriously to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, as I would, if he were here, to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that they should look at the different ways in which we are providing help to families. They should take this opportunity to see whether, by scrapping the married couple's allowances, we could double child benefit, which would have enormous advantages. Nobody can say anything about targeting, because the married couple's allowance, like all the other tax allowances, is non-targeted.

Mr. Christopher Hawkins (High Peak): I agree with everything that my right hon. Friend has said, except his last point. The danger of getting rid of a tax allowance and turning it into child benefit is that the Government would continue to freeze it. The irony of the present problem is that, if child benefit had remained a tax allowance, we would have increased it by more than the rate of inflation and said what a good thing that was because it was part of our overall strategy of reducing taxation. However, because we converted a tax allowance into a benefit, it is a bad thing to increase it in line with inflation.

Mr. Raison: My hon. Friend has a strong point. The answer is that the arrangement about which I am talking would have to be statutorily compulsory, and the trouble about child benefit, as we know, is that it has been optional. We would have to have a firm guarantee, by some means or another—perhaps something like the Rooker-Wise amendment—that this would be an automatic process, and that would meet my hon. Friend's point.

By this approach, we could have a real means to help those with children. Many of our other anxieties would disappear. I have already mentioned child care, but in this way we could also provide help for single parents without having an allowance that is seen by some as an incentive to become single parents. Many other advantages would flow from this, and nobody could argue that we were abandoning a system of targeted benefits in favour of untargeted benefits.

I appreciate that such a change would have substantial consequences, and I do not expect the Minister, when replying, to say that the Government accept all that I have said. But they should at least take note of the fundamental changes that I have outlined. While many complications may be involved, we must get away from the annual refusal to uprate child benefit. It does the children and our party no good. I hope that my right hon. Friend has enough wisdom and understanding to appreciate that the policy we are pursuing is wrong, and that he will make sure that we change it.

5.10 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): It is a pleasure to speak following the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison) who made a powerful and impassioned speech, the majority of which I supported wholeheartedly. He has a notable record as a champion of child benefit and did that cause much justice in the way that he deployed his case.

Today, I think for the first time, the Secretary of State came up with what could be described as a relevant consideration. I have complained to his predecessors that child benefit has been frozen willy-nilly and without the semblance of an argument to justify that course. I was confused by the right hon. Gentleman's argument today: although I recognised the sense of his case generally, he seemed to suggest that, because average earnings have been increasing and money is therefore available to the average family with children, that is a relevant reason for freezing child benefit this year.

I suspect that there will be few years in the near-to-middle future when that will not be the case. In other words, if it is a relevant consideration now, and if it applies next year, child benefit will remain frozen for years to come. If so, the right hon. Gentleman should say so. It would be more honest of the Government to admit that, rather than continue with annual charades and uprating statements seeking to defend the freezing of child benefit. I endorse everything that the right hon. Member for Aylesbury said about that, and I will not rehearse again the important positive arguments that he adduced in favour of child benefit.

I wish to deal principally with the effects that the uprating will have on the elderly. Last March, there was an uprating of 5·9 per cent. The year-on-year inflation increase was 7·6 per cent. last September, and that is the figure that we are now discussing for basic increases in the state pension. Considering the monthly inflation increases that have occurred since April of last year—some monthly increases have reached 8·3 per cent.—and looking ahead, not even a 7·6 per cent. increase will measure up to the real increases in inflation that basic state pensioners will have to face after April. That is why it is inevitable, for at least another 12 months, that pensioners who rely for their income on the state pension will see their standard of living eroding.

The right hon. Gentleman cannot, in all conscience, allow that to happen year after year. There is a respectable argument for considering going back to the link with earnings. I would not go as far as the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) in that respect. The inexorable erosion of the standard of living of pensioners cannot be countenanced by the Government, who will have to do what they were forced to do last October, and I welcomed the one-off payment which they gave and which did not affect transitional relief. That was a payment of £2·50 or £3·50 to certain retired people who were in particularly straitened financial circumstances.

The Government will have to take that action with monotonous regularity unless they recognise the ongoing real needs of pensioners. The Social Security Advisory Committee pointed out to the Government years ago that they would occasionally—not every year—have to redress the balance between earnings and price increases if they were to be anything like fair to pensioners who struggled for their day-to-day existence on the basic state pension.

The increases to which the Secretary of State refers regularly in respect of pensioners with occupational pensions are welcome, and in the next century there will not be a problem if things go according to plan. That, too, is to be welcomed. But nearly 60 per cent. of present-day pensioners rely for more than 75 per cent. of their income on state benefit. The right hon. Gentleman cannot ignore that, or he will be ignoring generations of pensioners, between now and 10 or 20 years hence, who will suffer terribly unless the Government do something for them.

I am disappointed that the Government have not found a way to extend mobility allowance beyond retirement age. The age cut-off point is now 66. If the Government feel that it would be too expensive to do that immediately, they should accept that in cases where the payment of mobility allowance to people over retirement age would prevent them from having to be institutionalised—a precedent exists for taking such action with social fund community care grants—limited change could be made as a first step. All sorts of improvements could be made, but we should be opposed to having age discrimination built subliminally into the benefits system.

Some of the changes that the Secretary of State announced are imaginative, but there is force in the argument that he has been engaging in some sleight of hand by moving the money around, rather than trying to argue the case for more funds from the Treasury. I am not privy to the inside negotiations that he conducts with the Treasury, but a strong case exists for improving matters for the elderly and needy, and I hope that he is arguing strongly on their behalf privately, if he is not doing so publicly.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): My hon. Friend makes an important point about the mobility allowance. In rural areas such as Cornwall, pensioners who are capable of looking after themselves and living alone, but who are unable to do so because they are not mobile, are isolated without such an allowance. They find the cut-off point hard to understand, and I cannot justify it to them when they come to my surgery.

Mr. Kirkwood: My hon. Friend makes a helpful intervention. He and I, along with many Conservative Members, represent rural constituencies and are well aware of the problem.

We must take note of the increased fees that are having to be paid for residential accommodation for the elderly. I welcome, as far as it goes, the £100 million improvement that has been made, but I fear that difficulty will arise. I also appreciate that it is not the normal category of expenditure that we consider when uprating statements are made.

It appears that the Government have changed their policy of positive discrimination in favour of the behaviourally disturbed elderly patients in residential homes as opposed to the simply frail elderly. In the last four or five years, the increased payments made in the dementia category—the really severely behaviourally disturbed elderly—have suffered and the positive discrimination that such cases enjoyed in 1986 has been eroded to the point where the payments available after April from the DHSS to meet fees will be equal as between the frail elderly and the behaviourally disturbed elderly.

I have been conducting a lengthy and worrying correspondence with a constituent of mine who runs a good bona fide residential home for elderly demented people. That constituent is having great difficulty in trying to make ends meet and provide the level of service that he is anxious to maintain and would maintain if he could get a sensible level of support from the Department. Over the past four or five years, far from enjoying the £50 increase to which the Department said that he was entitled, he received only a £20 increase in weekly fees. Meanwhile, he has incurred extra employment costs because of Whitley Council increases and the need to employ the more highly qualified staff required for psychiatric patients. The Department should consider carefully that category of fees and the limits for that category of patient.

The community charge has been in operation in Scotland for almost one year. The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) made the point that the Government will be obliged sooner or later to reconsider the support given to claimants liable to community charge when it is introduced in England and Wales in April. The one-off compensation payment of £1·15 in income support rates for 1989-90 is significantly less than the amount for which many claimants paying above-average levels of poll tax will be liable after April. When that compensation was first given, an income support clawback of 50p was made that has never been made good.

It should be possible to identify a separate amount to compensate claimants for poll tax contributions, which should be increased by the average rise in poll tax each year. One hundred per cent. rebates should be given to all income support claimants liable to poll tax. If the Government set their face against that, there is an unanswerable case for increasing the 20 per cent. contribution element by the average annual increase in poll tax payments.

As I read the figures, the social fund has effectively been frozen, for the third year in succession, at £205 million —which shows a degree of bad faith on the part of the Government. The social fund was bruited as an experiment that would be progressive, flexible, and capable of overcoming the anomalies introduced by the 1988 changes, which were themselves the consequence of the Social Security Act 1986. To leave the sum at the level proposed for next year would be a huge mistake and a great shame. Figures for December 1989 show that 56 per-cent. of people requesting community charge grants and 40 per cent. of claimants for budget and loan facilities from the social fund were refused. There is a vast potential for the social fund to meet, but its effective freezing for the third successive year is a retrograde step.

The £20 million saving made in the 1988-89 Budget should be made good in 1990-91 and community care grants uprated regularly in line with inflation. For a variety of reasons, the proposed increases in pensions and benefits do not deserve support. They fail to meet the needs of the current generation of retired people who rely on the basic state pension as their principal source of income. Nor will they provide assistance to those struggling to cope with a 20 per cent. contribution to their poll tax or families relying on child benefit to make ends meet. Such improvements as have been made will be at the expense of other claimant groups. For those reasons, I urge the House to reject the orders.

5.24 pm

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): The answer that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) might have given to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) was that the Opposition have not proposed debates about the distribution of income and wealth on their Supply days because those responsible for purging and purifying the Labour party would not like that or allow it to be done.

I welcome the largely constructive approach taken by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), although I regret his call to right hon. and hon. Members to vote against the orders. I hope that my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Minister for Social Security will consider the hon. Gentleman's remarks about mobility allowance and the fees paid to nursing homes.

I welcome the positive way in which the hon. Gentleman responded to the interesting speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison). From it, there does appear to be new thinking in the House, and, I am told, outside it, in the child benefit lobby. Although I have not until now been sympathetic to many of that lobby's arguments, my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury addressed himself to new circumstances imposed by the community charge and other factors, and I hope that his proposal will be carefully considered.

A critical letter that I received from one of my constituents complains that the Government are adopting a social policy of "Victorian laissez-faire". I question how that can be squared with an increase in social security expenditure of 36 per cent. in real terms since 1979, with more than £1 billion per week in social security benefits in the coming year, and with total expenditure on cash benefits for the long-term sick and disabled doubling in real terms what it was in the last year of the previous Labour Government. Those are extraordinary achievements purely in resource terms, and do not justify the criticism of Opposition Members. I also praise, as I have before in private, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the considerable skill that he has shown in the few months that he has held his present office, in using those resources in an imaginative and intelligent way.

When I intervened in the speech of the hon. Member for Oldham, West in respect of European comparisons, he made the point in response that levels of child support in the countries I mentioned were very much higher than in this country. I wonder, for example, whether that is true of Greece. In France, Germany and the Irish Republic, there is no guarantee of annual uprating of child benefit, and in Italy and Portugal, eligibility is linked to insurance status. France does not pay benefit for the first child. Opposition Members should be careful before arguing that this country is behind in the European family.

Mr. Battle: I invite the hon. Gentleman to spell out France's policy on child benefit. Does he not agree that it introduced family support because of its declining population? France's benefits are well ahead of those of this country, and have been for many years.

Mr. Nicholson: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, and I hope that we can explore that point in future debates.

I have welcomed before, and welcome again, my right hon. Friend's imaginative proposals for giving more support to those who care for the disabled, which will benefit 30,000 carers. That is a positive improvement.

The deal for pensioners has always dominated social security debates, and is important to my constituents and to those of many other right hon. and hon. Members. There is a considerable difference in philosophy between the Government and the Labour party, which says, "Let's promise to raise the universal pension by a very large amount, by keeping it in line with earnings." When Labour was in government before, we discovered that that could not be done all the time, and that this effort had a horrifying effect on our economy in terms of spending, taxation and borrowing. The present Government guarantee a minimum, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has managed to improve this past year with the benefits paid to poorer pensioners. Above that minimum, pensioners are now benefiting from their own savings and enterprise in their working lives.

Pensioners' total net income, which is something that we must always consider rather than simply the value of pensions, grew by 23 per cent. above inflation between 1979 and 1986. That is as much every year as in all the five years of the last Labour Government. Between 1979 and 1986, pensioners' incomes grew twice as fast as those of the population as a whole, and that is an important factor.

We must bear in mind the fact that in 1979 only 60 per cent. of pensioners had savings incomes. In 1986, the figure was 70 per cent., and among recently retired pensioners in 1986 the figure was 85 per cent., so it is increasing all the time. According to the latest figures, 50 per cent. of all pensioners and 70 per cent. of recently retired pensioners have occupational pension which helps them to cope.

Approximately half of all pensioners own their own homes—44 per cent. own them outright and 4 per cent. own them with a mortgage. Let us consider how the capital value of those homes has increased all over the country, but particularly in the south. It is another matter for debate, because the price increases have caused considerable difficulty in those areas, but we need to consider more imaginatively how income-poor retired people can draw upon the considerable capital values locked up in their homes. My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) tried to carry an amendment two years ago, and I hope that more can be done in that issue.

I move on to comparisons with pensions in Europe. There has been a lot of propaganda on this subject. We have all received in our mail allegations that British pensioners are the poorest in Europe. However, there are significant variations between pension arrangements in European countries. For example, in France the pension is half the average earnings in theory, but in practice only one third of French pensioners receive a minimum pension which is designed as a safety net. Only the United Kingdom provides a separate pension for a wife who has not worked.

The comparisons that have been made by the Opposition omit to mention the role played by occupational pension schemes, which are rare in the rest of Europe. Also, in several European countries pensioners are charged for the use of health and social services, but in Britain those services are free of right to every pensioner.

Mrs. Dorothy Rhodes is president of Pensioners' Voice, which has lobbied strongly on the subject, and she concedes:

"I have been one who has spoken loudly in support of parity with Europe, but during the past year I have been to Pensioners Congresses in Italy and Greece and, having spoken at length to those who actually receive the Euro pensions . . . discover that in many cases the actual cash received in relation to the cost of living is often lower than that in the United Kingdom. I am revising my opinion; for in no way can our Federation ask for an equality that would disadvantage our own people."

That is an important concession and we should remember it when we pursue the argument about comparisons with Europe.

Every hon. Member who has spoken in the debate has mentioned that we are on the threshold of the new community charge regime. The hon. Member for Oldham, West mentioned double charging by private landlords. There are not many private landlords in my constituency —I wish that there were more, because it would help with the housing situation. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will respond to that remark and give his attention to it, because it is a problem and an abuse and it is used as a criticism of our arrangements for the community charge.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West also alleged a failure to increase family support to meet the community charge level in local authorities which were keeping to the Government's spending guidelines. I am not arguing that income support should increase to a level such as that in Haringey or Islington. I am sorry to see that the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) is no longer in his place, because he intervened on this subject. I do not think that anyone would argue that, because all voters, including pensioners, must recognise that they have to pay for Labour extravagance in those areas. *[Interruption.]*

I am making a point that I think Opposition Members will recognise is fair, because the hon. Member for Oldham, West mentioned Kingswood, which is near my constituency, and I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will respond to that because it is an important point.

On the subject of the community charge, I shall quote what I wrote in my local newspaper recently. It is no bad thing for hon. Members to say to the Government and to the Opposition in this House what they are saying to their constituents outside it. I said:

"My constituents (and I) have a right to be angry—but with the Department of the Environment, not the County Council at the huge discrepancy between the final figure, whatever it is, and all the figures previously forecast."

We think that the figure for the community charge in my area is going to be near £350. The reason I mention this is that the elderly and families on low incomes are told all the time to plan ahead and to budget. They do plan ahead. They listen with care to the figures that my hon. Friends and I have given them as to what we thought the community charge would be. We were guided by the figures that the Department of the Environment issued year after year.

Mr. Leigh: That was rash.

Mr. Nicholson: My hon. Friend says that that was a rash thing to do, and perhaps I should take his advice and not believe the Government's statistics, but I think we would be in bad trouble if we had to believe the statistics that the hon. Member for Oldham, West uses all the time.

On 17 November 1987, the estimate for the community charge in my constituency, based on 1987-88 spending, was £187. On 23 June 1988, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, as he now is, estimated that the figure, again based on current spending for 1988-89—I am not talking about Government targets or assessments—was £212. Finally, on 19 July 1989, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, as he now is, produced a table which again illustrated the impact of the community charge, if it had been implemented last year, giving a figure of £253. I fear that those figures are way below the amount that we are going to have to pay, and I think that that chiefly reflects an unsatisfactory grant settlement.

Over the coming months, I shall make efforts—and I think that many of my hon. Friends will join me—to help my elderly constituents and families on low incomes with the community charge in two ways. First, we shall carefully examine local government spending, make comparisons with other local authorities, see where local authorities managed to come up with a charge which is lower, what they have done and what efficiencies they have introduced. I think that we will benefit from the work of the Audit Commission because it has a powerful role in these matters. And we shall try to get the total spending by local authorities down wherever we can. I am sure that Labour-controlled local authorities have a major role to play in that.

Secondly, we shall try to obtain a better grant from central Government by next year—I do not think there is much to be done for this year. I think that is particularly valid for Conservative-controlled local authorities, so that we can move closer to the figures that the Department forecast for the charge.

I make no apology for raising this subject during a debate on social security because the beneficiaries of social security—the elderly on limited incomes and poorer families—are very concerned about it, and I am sure that that will be reflected in my surgery and in my mail box during the next few weeks.

On this side, we all praise Ministers in the Department of Social Security for what they have done to obtain and use resources. They should look to one or two Ministers in other Government Departments for co-operation in dealing with these problems. But we certainly want more sense and reason from Labour-controlled local authorities in meeting the need to help people in vulnerable positions.

5.40 pm

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): I shall make two points to the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson), the first by way of advice: beware Ministers bearing tables quoting poll tax figures; do not make press statements until the final figure is announced. Secondly, when he goes to the Minister to negotiate a better grant settlement for his local authority, we should like to add a few more local authorities to give him a rather long list. I am sure that he will be prepared to argue for Avon county council, a hung council, run by the Tories, in which Kingswood is based.

Mr. Raison *rose*——

Ms. Primarolo: I have not started yet.

Mr. Raison: I thank the hon. Lady for allowing me to interrupt so early. Any local authority wanting to increase its revenue support grant next year might note that one

[Mr. Raison]

factor which contributes to the size of the needs element in the revenue support grant is the number of false fire alarms. Therefore, if one stimulates many false fire alarms, the needs element goes out.

Ms. Primarolo: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that little tip, which I shall pass on to the local authority in Avon.

To return to the instruments that we are discussing tonight, when there is a massive redistribution of income through cuts in income tax for the top scale of those who pay the tax, little is said by the Government, although there is a massive loss of income to the Exchequer. When pensioners, the disabled, single parents and those on benefits are given a 50p a week or 25p a week increase, we are supposed to congratulate the Government on their generorsity to those people.

When we have debates on social security in this House, a little puzzle always goes through my mind: how is it that the Government keep telling us that they are spending so much more money which people in need are receiving, yet the people themselves are not getting any more disposable income—in fact, they often end up with less money? I have finally come to the conclusion that, if the social security system is set in the context of the 1989 reforms that the Government have undertaken over a period, what has been set up is a much meaner system all round.

Even so-called acts of generosity—such as the Government finally giving the war widows their increase—are transferred into people's lives as further cuts. I shall give the example of one of my constituents whom I mentioned in an earlier intervention and about whom I shall write to the Minister. Her name is Mrs. Bidwell. She is 81 years old, and suffers from Parkinson's disease and a number of other illnesses. She is in a private residential nursing home. Her daughter called to see me; she is allowed to earn £40 a week under the new regulations because her husband is in receipt of invalidity benefit.

Mrs. Bidwell now pays £270 a week to the private nursing home. She has to be in a private home because there are no other types of nursing home in our area. The nursing home charge went up to £295 a week from 1 February, and at present there is no increase in her income support to compensate for the increase in nursing home charges, so she has lost her £40 and is now £2 a week worse off. When the Government increase income support by £10 on 1 April, her net loss will be £32. Therefore, of the £40 that she was given—supposedly disregarded—she has only £8 a week left, with which she has to buy all her extras such as toiletries.

Naturally, Mrs. Bidwell's daughter was extremely upset and distressed when she called to see me. She felt that it was outrageous that her father, who had been killed, as she said, fighting for this country, and her mother, who had struggled all her life raising five children, had finally won justice in the form of the £40 a week rise only to have it taken away because it was still included in the calculations for income support. I should be grateful if the Minister would write to me about this.

That example highlights another point about the Government's policy. Such people are worse off because the Government have allowed the privatisation of nursing homes, which are now able to charge whatever they like. As the Minister said, the Government have no control over those increases.

Clearly, under the benefits system, the Government are robbing Peter to pay Paul. When extra benefits are given, they are clawed back from other parts of the benefits system. My case work load shows, as I am sure those of many hon. Members do, that claimants from all the priority groups identified in the 1989 social security reform—pensioners, single parents and those leaving institutions to settle in the community to try to establish a normal life—are in extreme need. Those people are being refused grants and loans because of insufficient funds in the local office.

The social fund manager in Bristol, South confirmed yesterday that, despite January's top-up of £8,000 on the grant budget and £25,000 into the loans budget for this financial year, there was to be no change in the policy which rules out a category of claimants from qualifying from that fund. Those who have been ruled out are families under exceptional stress. No one in the Bristol, South office area who comes in that category will be considered for loan or social fund grants. The local office policy is to rule out claims for grants or loans from families under exceptional stress, even though that is one of the priority groups in the social fund manual. Therefore, single-parent familes are being singled out for exclusion from cash. That is the opposite of the undertaking and promises that have been given in this Chamber.

From my case load, it is clear that discretion in the discretionary system operates to exclude the needy from help in order to allow the DSS managers to balance their puny budgets. From the claimant's point of view, there is no discretion or flexibility, merely interminable bureaucracy leading to closed doors. I shall give a couple of examples of such treatment.

A single mother on income support and her two children—one aged two years and the other four months—spent two months in bed-and-breakfast accommodation and were then housed in unfurnished accommodation. She applied for a community care grant of £940 for essential furniture. There is nothing in the house—not even floor coverings. In her letter she said:

"My daughter and I are sleeping on the floor"—

bare floorboards—

"with borrowed blankets from a neighbour. I am very depressed and cannot look after or care for myself and my children in these conditions—we have nowhere to store our clothes and no means of cooking our food."

The grant was refused because

"there are no exceptional circumstances",

to quote directly from the social fund officer's decision in October 1989.

The demands on the budget at the time were so great that these circumstances were considered unexceptional enough for the claim to be disallowed. I dread to think what an exceptional claim in Bristol, South is. If those circumstances are so unexceptional in the welfare state, exactly whose welfare is the state protecting? I suspect that the state is looking after people with money who are getting tax cuts.

One of my constituents who was re-establishing himself in the community after a long period in prison secured the promise of employment, which was vital to him, on a construction site, provided that he had his own tools. He applied for a community care grant. Those grants, we are

told, are aimed at priority categories. His application was refused. It was not even considered, because the rules stipulate that such items are specifically excluded.

A woman who was born in 1908 was recently hospitalised after she suffered a stroke that disabled her last summer. She needs constant day and night care. Her daughter is on income support. She could not afford the daily bus fares—which worked out at £15·40 a fortnight—to visit her mother in hospital. She visited the hospital daily because she was being trained by the staff to care for her mother.

They applied for a community care grant, both for the fares and for the additional items that they need at home. The old lady is incontinent. Their grant application was refused because the circumstances were unexceptional. Bus fares are paid only for the parents of sick children. Once again, both claimants were told that they were not in the exceptional need categories. Time and again we are told that the benefit system is targeting the needy, but time and time again the needy are told that their circumstances are unexceptional.

A Bristol-based charity wrote to all the advice-giving agencies asking that the number of applications made to its charitable fund for help for those in exceptional need but who had been refused grants and loans from the social fund should be reduced because its funds were running out. The Government are breaking up the decision-making process, thus reducing the amount of money that is paid to people in need. They try to convince us that they are giving them more money, but that is not true. At one time, we could be proud of our welfare state. How can we be proud of a welfare state that describes the needs of those people as unexceptional? How bad do people's living conditions and their poverty have to be before the welfare state recognises that they need support?

5.54 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): I listened with care to the harrowing constituency cases that the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) drew to our attention. I am sure that she will concede, however, that it is difficult to understand all the facts surrounding constituency cases until we have all the details. I therefore cannot comment on the cases that she has drawn to our attention.

The hon. Lady's sincerity and depth of knowledge compares favourably with what was said by the only other Labour speaker in the debate so far, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). His insincerity and vagueness went down extremely badly on Conservative Benches—and perhaps on Labour Benches as well. He told us that he wanted to talk about poverty and relative incomes. He did neither. Perhaps he thought that it was sufficient to mention them and then to move on to something else.

The hon. Gentleman said that he would outline the Labour party's policy. We should have known better than that. All he did was to add to the interminable list of areas where the Labour party's policy is, to put it at its kindest, far from clear. It is also deliberately transparent. Over £1 billion a week is spent on social security. We have to ask whether that is sufficient. The Labour party has a duty to the House and to the electorate to say what it would spend. Perhaps we shall be told later what the size of the Labour party's social security budget would be this year, if it were in office. I think that I can guaranteee that we shall not receive an answer to that question, since the Labour party has not bothered to answer all the other questions that it has been asked.

Under this Government, the social security budget has increased in real terms by 36 per cent. since 1979. That is far better than the Labour party's record when it was last in government. Whether it would be found to be better than the record of the next Labour Government, should there ever be one, we do not know.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Does not the hon. Gentleman agree that people are living below the poverty line and that bandying figures about will not change that fact?

Mr. Hughes: I shall deal with the figures during my speech. The Labour party wants people to look at its social policy through rose-tinted spectacles. It does not want them to look at the figures. If the Labour party cares about the problems that face the poor, it must tell us what a Labour Government would spend; otherwise, it cannot be taken seriously.

Is the £1 billion that is being spent each week on social security going to those who are most in need? My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave a number of examples of additional money being specifically targeted on those who are most in need. I shall give two other most important examples of people who will be most grateful for additional help from the Government.

The first is the extra £100 million a year to help 500,000 disabled people and their carers. Those people particularly needed extra money and they will get it as a result of the uprating. Secondly, those of us with young children know that they can be a great expense, but people with severely disabled babies must face enormous extra expenses. The fact that families with severely disabled babies whom one parent stays at home to look after can receive an extra £65 a week under the uprating is a matter on which the Government are to be congratulated.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West pretended to answer one question, but in fact he did not. He told us that the Labour party will restore the link with earnings. He told us how the pensioners and other groups have been robbed by the Government because of their failure to keep the link with earnings. But he failed to tell the House that the reason why the Labour party made the link with earnings, as opposed to a link with inflation, was that that was the cheaper option. The Labour Government had so lost control of the economy, and inflation was so high, that that was the only option that they could afford.

If, as the hon. Member for Oldham, West said, the link with earnings would be restored—he hedged his comments about with some weasel words—he must answer a further question. If a Labour Government lost control of inflation, as they undoubtedly would because their policies point in that direction, would they restore the link between the cost of living and the annual upratings? Would they use the best method or the cheapest method?

The Labour party uses statistics to disguise and distort reality instead of telling us the truth——

Mr. Battle: I want to get the record straight, since the hon. Gentleman has talked about distortions. Did not the Labour Government offer a link either with earnings or with inflation, whichever was the higher? That is the truth.

Mr. Hughes: No, it is not. History shows that that is false; otherwise, pensioners' incomes would not have fallen so far behind the cost of living under the Labour Government, who stole their £10 Christmas bonus and took away many other things from them. The Labour party cannot preach on this subject, as it allowed pensioners' incomes to fall behind the cost of living.

The Opposition use a number of statistics when discussing the incomes of poorer people, but they use them to distort. Why did they not tell us that between 1981 and 1985 the living standards of the bottom 10 per cent. increased by 8·3 per cent., against an average 6·4 per cent.? Why did not the Opposition tell us that real take-home pay for those on half average male earnings has risen in 10 years by 28·7 per cent.? Between 1973 and 1979 it rose by a pitiful 2·4 per cent.

Why did not the Opposition tell us that, for many of the poorer people in society, tax reductions have an enormous impact? Why did they not congratulate the Government on the fact that the personal allowance increase has taken 1·7 million of the poorest paid people out of paying tax altogether? The answer to all those questions is: because it is uncomfortable for the Opposition.

We can never be satisfied that all those who are most in need are being helped. I would never suggest that they were. A problem mentioned by the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), in an honest and reasonable speech, and by the hon. Member for Bristol, South, related to those living in private homes for the elderly. What I want to say applies also to elderly people living in some of the homes run by housing associations. We would all accept that many, if not most, of those homes are run to high standards, but the money available does not cover their running costs. As a member of a committee of a housing association, I know that the money that we receive from the DSS does not cover our running costs, so we are running at a loss on some of the people whom we want to keep in the homes. That problem must be dealt with.

I want to discuss two issues connected with housing —first, housing benefits. I hope that all hon. Members agree that it is no criticism of anyone to say that housing benefits have hardly been mentioned in the debate, and for a good reason. If one discusses housing benefits in terms of their relationship to any of the rented sectors, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State will rightly reply that they are a matter for the Department of the Environment; but if one raises the subject of housing benefits with a Department of the Environment Minister, he will reply that it is a matter for the Department of Social Security. It is thus impossible to debate whether the figures in the upratings are reasonable or unreasonable, sufficient or insufficient, because they have to do with housing policy.

I firmly believe that housing benefits must be returned to the Department of the Environment. The only reason why they have not been returned so far is the opposition of civil servants in the Department. They do not want them back; one told me once that they did not want the bother of them. However, most of us recognise that housing benefits are important and we believe that they would be better administered alongside housing policy. As such, that would be better done by the DOE.

I want finally to mention a group who may see little or nothing from the upratings—the visible homeless. They are not a problem; they are a series of interrelated problems needing a variety of solutions. Such solutions will help many vulnerable people who cannot cope with society. Many of those whom I am discussing, who sleep on the roadside and in shop doorways, could not cope in a house or flat. Many of them would even reject a conventional hostel.

I should like to suggest an additional form of help as part of the pattern of provision. I propose minimalist hospitals funded by the Government and run by the voluntary sector. People could crash out and get a meal in them, and most importantly, they would have access to psychiatric and counselling help. Without such provision, many people will inevitably continue to sleep rough, whatever other solutions the Government come up with.

We must face the problem honestly: many of those whom I am talking about will still prefer to sleep in the streets. Near where I live there is a lady who has lived by the side of the road for 25 years. She has a bed in a mental hospital around the corner and she goes there when it is very cold and for her meals. It is precisely such people, and young people who find themselves in the same position, who need specific but non-threatening help. I hope that the Government will turn their attention to that in their welcome reappraisal of the help that they give the homeless.

6.10 pm

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (Antrim, South): I welcome some parts of the uprating—for instance, the extra help for poorer families—but I hope that there will be greater take-up of family credit in future. Until now, the take-up has not been good enough, and I hope that some effort will be devoted to publicising the benefit.

I also welcome the extra help for the disabled and their carers, although I have a feeling that the improvement is being paid for by the freezing of child benefits and the cutting of statutory sick pay.

It is disappointing that benefits in general have not been uprated in line with inflation. The most obvious example of that is the freezing of child benefit, which concerns many people. The right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison) made an excellent speech in which he put the case for child benefit very well. I hope that Ministers listened to it.

It is said that child benefit will eventually be phased out, but if it is, the Government will have cause to regret that at the next election, leaving aside high interest rates and the community charge.

The social fund has also effectively been frozen for the third year at around £205 million, despite numerous reports of more and more claimants being turned down for grants or loans for urgent needs. The full effects of the way in which the social fund operates are only now becoming clear. Unfortunately, they will become clearer as time goes on.

Those effects were concealed when the social fund was introduced because an applicant who genuinely required help through force of circumstances could, or perhaps one should say were forced to, take a loan instead of a grant. That loan had to be repaid, reducing the applicant's income. If a further problem befell one—for example, if a cooker needed to be repaired quickly—a further loan had to be made resulting in higher payments. Such applicants may eventually be unable to apply for an emergency loan

because they have exceeded the amount of weekly payments that they are rightly allowed by DSS rules. That is a continuing situation that can only get worse.

Unfortunately, it is at that stage that the sad part of the story begins. Such people then turn to the only source of cash available—the moneylenders. People who, for the best of reasons, need finance but cannot obtain it from the social fund, either because of high repayments on previous essential loans or because no money is available in the fund, then approach loan sharks. Such people will then be worse off than they were in the beginning. High interest charges and intimidating collecting methods become their fate.

It is not unusual for people in such a position to hand over their benefit books in order to obtain a loan. The debtor is then allowed to take the book to cash a weekly order, which he then uses to pay the required amount of money to the lender who then retains the book for the future. That, sadly, is one of the bad results of the social fund which is there to help people. The situation can only get worse.

Support levels for people in nursing or residential homes do not match the rate of inflation. They certainly do not match their needs. Yet more and more such homes are being required as a result of Government policy in other areas, bringing people into the community who then end up in such homes.

Retirement pensions are uprated in line with inflation, but I am disappointed that they are not being increased in line with average earnings. The pensioners of today once created the country's wealth. It is a disgrace that they are now being treated so shabbily.

I am glad to have had the opportunity to point out some of the concerns that I and my right hon. Friends have about uprating. But other hon. Members hope to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so I shall conclude my remarks and hope that they will deal with some of my other worries.

6.14 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) said that he wanted a broad debate on incomes, benefits and poverty generally, but he proceeded to make a narrowly based speech. He talked only about state provision. Whether one considers the position of pensioners, those who are at work and become sick, or families, it is not good enough to look only at what the state provides. One must look at a broader picture, but the hon. Gentleman failed to do so.

The hon. Gentleman also complained about the cut in invalidity benefit at the very moment when the Public Accounts Committee is considering why expenditure on that benefit is rising so fast and the number of claimants has risen so rapidly.

The hon. Gentleman might have recognised that the 1980s were a decade when the average income of most pensioners rose more rapidly than ever before. That was not due to state provision alone. The position of pensioners improved because of private sector provision —occupational pensions.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) said, European comparisons no longer stand up to close examination because at the end of the 1980s the pensioner is much better off than he has ever been before. Of course there are exceptions to that, and that is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was right, last October, to give extra benefis to those in most need.

The Government have the right approach to social security benefits. It is right to give the extra cash that is available to those who are most in need. That is why I welcome this series of orders. In particular, I welcome the new carers' premium and I especially welcome the fact that the attendance allowance is to be extended to babies under two. The abolition of the earnings rule last October was most welcome, as is the substantial improvement to be made in April by the Department of Social Security and the Ministry of Defence to the war widows' pensions.

On child benefit, too, it is right to look at the overall position of families. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave the House an interesting piece of information. He told the House that, over the past 12 months, the average net income of a working man had increased by more than £20 a week. It is that that we need to look at when we consider child benefit.

If we compare the Government's record in just the past 12 months with the previous Labour Government's record, we can see why the policy announced by the hon. Member for Oldham, West is such a fraud. We all know that, if we have the misfortune to have another Labour Government, it is most unlikely that earnings will rise in the way that they did during the 1980s. Earnings will probably only just keep pace with prices, as they did under the previous Labour Government. Since there is no question of retrospection in the Opposition's proposal, it amounts to no more than a confidence trick.

When child benefit has been reviewed each autumn recently the Government have been right to say that the appropriate policy is to freeze it and to devote the extra resources to other benefits. But I also agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury, (Mr. Raison) that we need to come up with something better by the next election and to have a clearer policy. He suggested one alternative, which was to double child benefit and abolish the married man's tax allowance. He thought that the Government were inconsistent in introducing new tax allowances while at the same time freezing benefits.

Up to a point, I agree. I even took the trouble to come here last week to explain to the Treasury why I thought it was wrong to introduce a new tax relief for private health premiums. The Department should look carefully at my right hon. Friend's proposal, but other possibilities could be examined.

For example, it has been suggested that we could have a higher benefit for children under five and a lower benefit for children over five on the ground that it is during that first period that the mother is less likely to be at work, so it is then that the family is most likely to be in need of help. Against that, it could be argued that children get progressively more expensive, as I believe to be the case. That would suggest that the benefit should be the other way round.

It would be sensible to have a proper debate about how to proceed. It is not sensible simply to index-link child benefit year in, year out, when so many families that receive it do not need it. We need to come up with something better. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department will consider that and try to come up with something better. Subject to that, I welcome these orders.

6.19 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): As an introduction, I shall make a few remarks about the context of the debate. We are being asked to approve an uprating on the same day as we read that some right hon. Members fare very well indeed. I refer to the second, or what in all justice should be called the third, job of the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), the former Chancellor of the Exchequer. Let us not forget that his Budget last March and previous Budgets set the structural arrangements for this uprating and for previous arrangements for people on low pay and in poverty. I agree with the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison) that we always have the difficulty that we cannot discuss tax and benefit arrangements in the same debate and relate one to the other.

We now hear that the right hon. Member for Blaby has been offered another job at £40,000 a year, working as an non-executive director of GPA, the world's biggest aircraft leasing company based in Shannon, County Clare. That is on top of the job that he has already been offered at £100,000 a year, working two days a week for Barclays.

That focuses our attention on part-time work, which is a crucial issue in this debate. The right hon. Gentleman may well have spare time to write his memoirs and fit in political activities with doing those two jobs, but it is a shocking contrast with the 9 million people in part-time, temporary and low-paid work who make up the bulk of people in poverty, because low pay is the primary cause of poverty.

Today, the working party set up by Sir Gordon Borrie, the Director General of Fair Trading, reported that more than 200,000 households were in severe debt difficulty and that a further 500,000 people were having difficulty in coping with the debts that they had incurred. I hazard a guess that many people with such debts are precisely those who are on much less than the average wage. I am tempted to believe that most people with such debts are on low pay or low benefits.

I do not have time for a part-time job because I fill all my time responding to the inquiries of constituents who find it hard to get by on low incomes, low benefits and low pensions. I shall quote an example from the Department of Social Security agency benefits unit:

"Mr. Garnett's requirements have been calculated at £75·60, comprising of a personal allowance of £54·80 for a couple, a £19·50 disability premium as Mr. Garnett is in receipt of invalidity benefit, plus £1·14 a week housing costs. The latter consists of rent and general rates less housing benefit and the statutory 20 per cent. deduction of the gross rates. There is also a £12·50 deduction in respect of non-dependents. (Mr. and Mrs. Garnett's daughter Denise lives with them). . . .The comparison between Mr. Garnett's resources of £75·60 and his requirements of £75·44 resulted in an excess figure of £0·16. On this basis they are not entitled to help with prescription charges and are deemed able to meet the first £0·48 of any other NHS charges. . . .I am sorry that this reply may be disappointing for Mr. and Mrs. Garnett but I hope you feel the explanation helpful."

It is more than disappointing when people are trying to survive on incomes which are below half or even a third of the average wage.

In another case, Mrs. Whiteley has an income of £49·31. Her needs are £46·10. She is not eligible for income support and the extra £2·50 that she received last October makes no real difference to her income.

Mr. and Mrs. Stanley wrote to me to say:

"We are not destitute, but over the last 12 months the cost of living has risen so much. Every week the cost of different items, especially food, it is frightening to think of what is to come and new clothes are a non-entity.

The future looks very grim, I dread to think what next year will bring, what with the poll tax and increases are expected on electricity etc. . . . My Wife and myself know how things are worsening from the fact that the small luxuries that we used to enjoy, such as a visit to the theatre and an occasional evening meal, to celebrate a birthday or anniversary are now a thing of the past."

They are hardly living on the average income or even half the average income, yet they are being denied some of the things that we take for granted as ways of participating in society.

Today I received a letter from someone who was worried about residential nursing homes. I ask the Minister to consider this issue. I tabled a parliamentary question asking why personal expense allowances, in particular the pocket money part of the board and lodging allowance, are being reduced to top up fees paid to private residential establishments. That pocket money is being absorbed. I hope that the Minister will suggest that that money will not be absorbed and that people will not have their pocket money withdrawn to cover increasing costs. Although the order suggests that there will be an increase of £10 a week, it will not match increases in inflation or needs. There will be a shortfall in the provision for the true cost of care. Many people will have to pay a huge shortfall out of their own pocket. The shortfall should not come from the personal expenses allowance.

I do not have time to speak about the knock-on effects on rents. The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) said that he had noted that only one Labour Back-Bench Member had been called so far. May I assure him that there is plenty of scope to talk about housing benefit.

At the turn of the century, Seeborne Rowntree, in his study of York, identified one of the primary causes of poverty as the fact that people have to spend almost a third of their income on housing costs—either on rents or to purchase their home. I should like the Government to tell us what market rent levels should be, because it is the policy of the Department of the Environment to push up rents to market levels which will absorb more than a third of people's incomes and effectively price them out of their housing.

I hope never again to hear Conservative Members make comments such as those which the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) made on 24 January. He suggested:

"The long term homeless have turned their back on society."

He continued with a little slip:

"Young offenders should be the responsibility of their parents, not of this Government. The Government have done quite enough for the homeless. I hope that they will spend no more money on them."—[*Official Report*, 24 January 1990; Vol. 165, c. 879.]

I invite the Minister to repudiate that remark, and to dissociate himself and the Government from those ill-informed remarks. Not least, the Minister should not associate himself with the suggestion that anyone who is homeless is also a young offender. That criminalises the victims of homelessness and blames them for their plight.

In an intervention, I mentioned child benefit. I hope that the Minister will accept that raising means-tested

benefits is not adequate compensation for failing to maintain a non-means tested benefit which could cut through the poverty trap.

The Secretary of State has shifted from using the word "targeting" to "focusing". I suggest that the Government have bifocal vision. They see through one lens the larger image of tax cuts and those who do well. Then they look through the other lens and see a smaller image where they are reducing benefits. As my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) said, it is clear that money is being taken from the poor and redistributed to the rich. In booming Britain, it is not enough to tell us about average wages. It may be that those who are at the top are doing well, but those at the bottom are paying the price because their incomes are going down. It is possible for that to happen even when the average is rising.

We have a new Secretary of State for Social Security and a new Chancellor of the Exchequer. Already the new Chancellor is rejecting the policies and direction of his predecessor. I hope that the Secretary of State for Social Security will say, "Now that we have a new Chancellor of the Exchequer with new policies, why should we accept the uprating statements of his predecessor?" I urge him to take that statement back to the Chancellor and ask him to look at it again to see whether the Treasury could be more generous to those in need rather than insisting that the House divide on it tonight. If we have to divide on it, I urge hon. Members to vote against it.

6.29 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) for allowing me three or four minutes in which to speak at the end of this interesting debate.

I have always thought that there is something rather artificial about these debates, and to listen to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), one would think that when looking at the Treasury Bench, one was looking at Scrooge before his conversion. That image sits unkindly on the shoulders of my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Minister for Social Security, and does not accord with the facts.

I do not want to repeat what has already been said, but we have a social security budget of £55 billion, and in 1992-93 it is forecast that it will be 4 per cent. above inflation, running up to £63 billion. Therefore, the argument that we may have to address is not that the Government have been less than generous, but that we must now establish where we are going. That is why I wanted two or three minutes in the debate to put down one or two markers.

The Government have won the argument against economic collectivism. Indeed, that argument is being won right across Europe and not only in this country, but we have not yet won the argument on social collectivism, and we must now address that problem in time for the general election. After all, we have a Government who are courageous enough to address the difficult subject of the reform of the National Health Service—I applaud what the Government are doing—and I believe that we have a Government who will be courageous enough also to address the problem of a social collectivist society.

That is a difficult problem to address, and nowhere is it more difficult than in the conundrum of child benefit. On the one hand, we have a universal benefit, which is universally taken up, does not add to the poverty trap, and which we should all like to keep; on the other hand, it is given to all members of society regardless of wealth.

In addressing that problem, perhaps we should think in terms of combining the two structures of taxation and benefits. I hesitate to say this to my distinguished colleagues on the Treasury Bench, but perhaps the Department of Social Security should become part of the Treasury.

When I talk of the two systems being combined, I am not talking of a tax-credit system or of a system of minimum income guarantees. However, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) argued in *The Times* earlier this week, perhaps we could use a combined taxation and social security system to try to encourage people to invest not only in bricks and mortar, but in social security provision, pension care, health and education. It is an exciting prospect and one to which the Government must look if we are to solve the problem of how we can cope politically with a social security budget that is now running at £1 billion a week.

Finally—I know that this is a courageous remark, but it must be made—I am not questioning that we have a commitment to provide all those who are now of working age with a state pension that will keep pace with prices, but we must remember that the state pension now accounts for £28 billion out of the total budget. Perhaps we should use the taxation and benefit system to give people more incentives and to encourage future generations to provide for their own future.

If we are to be honest with people, we cannot continue to tell young people that the state can provide for them. I stress that I am not talking about people in middle age or those coming up to old age, and I am certainly not talking about old-age pensioners. Perhaps we should have the courage now to encourage young people, through the taxation and social security systems, to invest in their own future.

As a society, it is easy to be generous with other people's money. However, those societies that are most collectivist are often the most barren in personal generosity. The taxation and social security system must encourage personal generosity. We must escape from our dependency society, which creates two nations. If we had the courage to address those problems, I believe that we could make considerable progress and seek to end the ratchet effect of an increasingly collectivist society.

6.33 pm

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): It is a pleasure to reply to this informative and worthwhile debate, in which we have heard creative ideas and constructive arguments from hon. Members of all parties. I deal first with the final points of the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), who seems to have swallowed the myth of Government generosity as a result of the £55 billion figure. Although that figure is impressive in itself, it represents only 9·7 per cent. of our gross domestic product, whereas as recently as three years ago the social security budget accounted for 11·5 per cent. Therefore, with an aging population and growing demands for more expensive medicines, we are spending less on such services as a proportion of our national wealth.

The hon. Members for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) and for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) made useful contributions

[Mr. Paul Flynn]

about the great difficulty of making comparisons with our fellow members of the European Community. Although they are real, there is no question about the selectivity of the figures quoted by the hon. Member for Taunton, which did not help the argument. The European Commission has made a serious attempt to make objective and valid comparisons. It took as its standard the amount paid to each new pensioner who had worked for an average wage in manufacturing industry and it compared the figures for each country in two ways.

First, the cash amounts were converted into European currency units by using a standard rate of exchange called the purchasing power standard, which takes full account of the cost of living in each country. The pension was thus related to what it would buy locally. The United Kingdom came badly out of that comparison because, on that basis, the British pension is £55, which is barely half the £104 paid in Luxembourg and the £101 paid in the Netherlands. In that comparison, Britain was beaten into bottom place only by Ireland.

The second comparison involved calculating the pension as an average of manufacturing earnings in each country after taking account of tax. The figure of 100 was used as the base for the ratios. On that basis, the best countries in Europe paid 90 per cent. of average earnings, while Britain came bottom, along with Ireland, paying 46 per cent. I do not ask the Government to accept those figures, although they were produced independently by the European Commission which does not have an axe to grind. However, I have used parliamentary questions to ask the Government to carry out the same calculations themselves.

Sadly, the reply has been that the figures cannot be given except at disproportionate cost. That is an unfair answer. If they want to make a comparison, the Government should match the figures from the European Community. The truth is understood by our pensioners —not only by the ones who have been on holiday to Greece—that, especially in relation to West Germany and to France, they have fallen behind their European counterparts in many ways.

If we want proof of the way in which the Government present their figures, we need only to consider the thoughtful speech of the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison), who, like his hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle, referred to the European tradition and to how we should set an example to the newly democratised countries in Europe. I hope that those right hon. and hon. Members saw a telling programme a few weeks ago on Channel 4 in which a Conservative Member was rash enough to explain how to write a manifesto to aspiring Members of Parliament from Hungary and Poland.

I shall not identify that hon. Member because I am a kindly person, but he said, "In the Conservative manifesto of 1987 we made a promise about child benefit, saying that it would be paid as now and direct to the mother. Of course, when we come up against a problem, we can look back to the manifesto and if we want to pay the benefit, we can pay it, but if we do not want to pay it—if we want to freeze it—we can freeze it, because the sentence was ambiguous." There is the truth of the Government's duplicity in this matter.

The minor calamity of the national insurance scheme has hardly been mentioned in the debate. The scheme has been plundered and pillaged by the Government during the past 10 years. They have jacked up the contributions from 6·5 per cent. to 9 per cent. and have held down the benefits. The Government have had a particularly bad year this year. I can remember the Minister of State describing the buoyant state of the national insurance scheme last year. He said that we were heading for a surplus of more than £2 billion on the year—and, indeed, the Government achieved that.

On that basis, we as a Parliament decided for the first time since 1911 to withdraw the Treasury supplement. It was significant that in 1911 Lloyd George sold the idea by saying, "You'll get 9d. for 4d." The Government contribution has been more or less the same for a long time. Even in 1979 it was paid at the rate of 18 per cent. If it were still at the same level, the Government contribution to the national insurance scheme would be £5·3 billion. That would go directly to pensions. When hon. Members ask where the money comes from, let them remember that figure.

What has happened this year? We were promised that there would be a surplus on the scheme of £519 million. A few weeks ago, we were told that there is a deficit of over £900 million, an error of £1·5 billion. The Treasury supplement has gone, but the deficit is also caused by the large take-up of personal pensions. Nearly 4 million people have taken up the bribe offered by the Government on personal pension schemes and their contributions have been denied to the national insurance scheme.

Therefore, the genuine rises that pensioners should have had have turned up in the profit sheets of insurance companies. It was no coincidence that, on the very day it was announced that the national insurance scheme had lost £1 billion, the Prudential announced a 26 per cent. increase in business, including 250,000 new personal pension schemes. So we are targeting the scheme to give to the richest pensioners of the day after tomorrow by robbing the poorest pensioners of today.

The Secretary of State gift-wrapped the changes to be made in the statutory sick pay scheme. It was an interesting performance. He said that he was criticised by someone—a sketch writer, I presume—for not being jovial enough at the Dispatch Box. I was once unkind enough to accuse the Minister of State, when his jovial mask had slipped, of wearing the guilty look of a vulture that had stolen the wrong eyeball—a description borrowed from America. I think that that is a suitable demeanour for Ministers who are carrying out the wretched task of dismantling the welfare state and spreading misery.

What is behind the extraordinary decision on the statutory sick pay scheme? The Secretary of State mentioned that it had been considered by the Social Security Advisory Committee. Indeed it was, and the committee disagreed with it. The Government announced their decision in October but did not put the details out for consideration until late in December, just about Christmas. Opinions were received from 13 prestigious groups and individuals. The view was unanimous: they all said that it was wrong. However, we are going back to the old eastern European strategy. There is not so much a consensus as a Ceausensus, as Mr. Ceausescu would have understood it. The Government ignored all the opinion that came in and have gone ahead with their scheme.

The Secretary of State mentioned several times the increase in benefit. It is an increase of 25p for a small group. At the other end there is a cut of £3·55. One point is very important. The Minister made light of the fact that it is a cut of between £70 million and £80 million, but there will be a severe cut for 2 to 3 per cent. of workers, the disabled, who will find it difficult to get employment because their employers will have to pay the full cost. There will be a great additional burden for people in that position. It makes a mockery of the Government's claims about helping the disabled.

Behind the changes in statutory sick pay introduced by the Government is another part of the strategy of reducing the panoply of the welfare state. One wonders why the Government go on in this way. My great fear is that the myriad of small cuts here and there—little deceptions in the Health Service and elsewhere—mean that we are going down precisely the same road as they did in America in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The British Government are adopting the same philosophy as America. As all who have visited America know, there are 3 million casualties of the collapsed welfare state. There are 3 million walking wounded, many with histories of mental illness, living on the streets—the homeless, the shunned, the despised, the tent people.

We have a social fund that is not delivering. Terrible cases are brought up week after week—a boy who was told that he could not have a loan because he could eat in soup kitchens; a pregnant mother who was told that she could not have a loan for a bed two days before her baby was due because she could sleep on the floor; a disabled husband and wife who were told that they did not need a grant for a cooker because they could go out to eat. That is the reality of Britain today. Anyone who walks the streets of London sees a growing army of despised and homeless. Bush has called America's homeless America's shame. What is being created now will become known as Thatcher's shame.

6.45 pm

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Nicholas Scott): As the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) ended with an American analogy, I am inclined to refer to his speech by using the words of a former mayor of New York who said of an opponent's speech that however it was sliced, it was still baloney. The hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) and for Newport, West portrayed the present state of the social security system in a totally distorted and perverse manner.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) entered robustly into the lists. The ratchet that he described was a phrase invented, I think, by my noble Friend Lord Joseph. I think that the ratchet has been moving rapidly in the opposite direction for the past 10 years. We are not moving toward the collectivist society that Lord Joseph envisaged when he invented that concept.

Before dealing with the detailed points raised in the debate, I want to correct some of the apparent misunderstandings on the Opposition Front and Back Benches about the Government's record on social security. It is easy for Opposition Members to forget that, since 1979, spending on benefits has risen by 36 per cent. Spending on the elderly is up by 24 per cent. ; spending on the long-term sick and disabled—a group in which I take a particular interest—has almost doubled; spending on working families with children is double the spending through its predecessor, family income supplement.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): That is not true.

Mr. Scott: It is true beyond peradventure. I cross swords with the hon. Lady in Committee twice a week. If she wants to intervene, she may, although she will understand that I have only 13 minutes left in which to reply to the debate.

Ms. Short: I shall be brief. This is a crucial question in the conflict between the two sides of the House. The question is how we share the economic growth that we have, year in, year out. The Government have not allowed the poor, the sick and the elderly to share in the economic growth. There has been marginal growth, but they have got worse and worse off.

Mr. Scott: What is true, and cannot be denied, is that at all levels people have benefited and have had improved standards under the Government. I do not resile for one moment from the fact that there has been more inequality. I believe that the competitive society, which includes extra rewards for those who do well, is the engine that enables us to provide the resources for the poorest. For Opposition Members, at least some of whom were members of a Government who failed manifestly to have sufficient economic resources to provide for the poor, to criticise us for a growth in inequality while we are still managing to provide resources to look after the poor, the sick and the elderly, is beyond the pale, as we used to say across the water—as the hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) will remember. We are certainly not seeking to starve the social security system of resources. The hon. Member for Leeds, West had some fun with the change of phrase from targeting to focusing. We are trying to make sure that the help available in the social security system goes to those who are in real need.

I should like to deal with a couple of points made by the hon. Member for Newport, West. It is not really the incentive that has created the problem within the national insurance fund—there were two other matters: the ordinary rebate was introduced for all contracted-out schemes some time ago and this was combined with the reduction in national insurance contributions, a move widely welcomed on both sides of the House when it was introduced.

Nor is it any good looking at European pension provision and trying to compare it with ours in the way that the hon. Member for Newport, West did.

Mr. Flynn *rose*——

Mr. Scott: I am sorry, but I now have only 10 minutes.

We are concerned about total pensioner incomes. It is all very well to draw on some theoretical position in which people might find themselves in Germany or France if they had paid enough contributions, if their earnings had been at certain levels, and so on. It is the total income of pensioners that we are concerned with—and very few countries in the Community keep any data at all about the total income of their pensioners. The hon. Member for Oldham, West said recently that he would be the first to admit that it was difficult to make comparisons with

[Mr. Scott]

Europe, not only on pensions but on other aspects of social welfare, and that any comparison must be significantly qualified.

It would be a help in discussing these matters to get away from European comparisons. It is clear to me that it is the total income and standard of living of retired people that matters to them rather than the level of the basic state pension. We have seen a tremendous growth in occupational coverage and in the income from savings of retired people, which have contributed substantially to their prosperity.

The hon. Member for Newport, West also went on to claim that the changes that we had made in statutory sick ply would somehow damage the prospects of the disabled and those with poor health records. All those allegations were made when statutory sick pay was introduced. None of them has turned out to be true, and I do not for one moment believe that the changes that we have made now will have that result.

I refer now to the hon. Member for Oldham, West. It is a debating point—I freely confess it to him before I make it—but he said that we had never had debates on the distribution of wealth and so on at the right time. We had an Opposition Supply day last week, when we had the chance of a proper debate. I do not know which part of the Opposition was responsible for managing to waste most of the day on discussions about identity cards for football supporters rather than—*[Interruption.]* We know what was going on among the Opposition——

Mr. Meacher: It is a bit rich for the Minister of State to try to make a political point about debates on the distribution of income and wealth. When we had an opportunity last week, what did the Government do? They spent 50 minutes on a footling statement on hill farming when there was nothing of any significance to debate—*[Interruption.]*—and then took 20 minutes on points of order to prevent my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) from introducing a ten-minute Bill.

Mr. Scott: I detect a certain amount of agitation among hon. Members who have hill farmers in their constituencies, about the very proper contributions made on that issue. It was up to the Opposition business managers to decide how the remaining time was distributed, and they preferred to spend it debating identity cards rather than poverty, the subject that they had chosen for their earlier debate.

It is quite untrue that fewer resources are going into social security now than 10 years ago when we came to office, as the hon. Member for Oldham, West said. In 1978-79 social security took 9·5 per cent. of the gross domestic product; in the current financial year it is taking 10·2 per cent. of gross domestic product. As a percentage of public expenditure, which in many ways is a better guide to the priority given by successive Governments to social security over other matters, it has risen from 25 per cent. in 1978-79 to over 30 per cent. at present. It is therefore wrong to portray this as a reduction in the priority that we give to social security.

On inclusive rents, referred to by the hon. Member for Oldham, West, I hope that landlords will take account of the introduction of the community charge and the abolition of rates and reduce their rents. But it would be living in cloud cuckoo land to imagine that one could legislate to force the rents down in such a complicated area of housing, where there are inclusive rents and where many contracts entered into are not even signed but are simply verbal agreements to pay a particular rent. Many housing experts have agreed that that would be totally unworkable.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West might like to try it, but he would end up reducing the resources available for rent assistance to claimants on social security or housing benefit. That would be the inevitable outcome of the hon. Gentleman's attempts to trample into this area with his boots on. Our interest is in making sure that those claimants are able still to pay the rents to which they are committed not to damage the claimants at all. That has been our first priority.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West went on to say that we have somehow broken our promise over the compensation for community charge. That is absolutely wrong, and the figures that the hon. Gentleman gave are totally wrong. Income-related benefits were adjusted at the last uprating in April 1989 to include help towards the 20 per cent. contribution that income support beneficiaries will have to make. The amounts included £1·15 a week for single people of 18 to 24, £1·30 for single people of 25 and over and £2·30 for couples, and the amounts will be uprated from April as part of the overall benefit levels. The amounts included in benefit levels will be more than adequate to meet the average 20 per cent. contribution, if local authorities are able to keep their expenditure within appropriate levels—one of the main reasons for introducing the community charge in the first place.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West made great play of what he called the joker in the disability package—that is to say, that we would be stopping entitlement to increases in additional pension for purposes of invalidity benefit once the Social Security Bill had gone through. That is a sensible measure, for more than one reason. It will improve the balance of benefits between those who are in and out of work in the longer term. I believe that we were right in our disability package to try to shift the balance so that those who are disabled early in life or from birth have a more equitable provision of benefit compared with those who have enjoyed a whole working life and have been able to build up savings, contributory benefits and occupational pensions as a result.

Ms. Short: The Minister has taken from the elderly disabled to give to the young disabled.

Mr. Scott: I do not agree: I think that the balance is right. In the longer term, the savings which may accure from this measure might give my successors—I suppose I have to say—greater room for manoeuvre in negotiating improvements and in increasing benefits in the future. The hon. Member for Oldham, West, however, could not bring himself to admit that, even with the change that we propose in the legislation, the cost of additional pension will rise from £450 million now to over £1·3 billion by the turn of the century.

I have been unable to address several points made in the debate but I undertake, as I usually do, to read the debate in the *Official Report*—although I have listened to almost all of it—and to take careful account of all the contributions made. I simply add that Opposition Members ought to be more realistic in their attitude. It is all too easy for them to come up with recipes and

prescriptions for spending more money; the fact is that when in government they were never able to produce the necessary resources.

From the low base that we inherited when we took office in 1979, this country's economic performance has been transformed and an increasing share of the resources, both of public expenditure and of gross domestic product, have been spent on those who need it most. It is a record of which we can be proud and which would never have been achieved by the Opposition.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating) Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 18th January, be approved.

Resolved,

That the draft Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 18th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

Motion made, and Question put,

That the draft Statutory Sick Pay (Rate of Payment) Regulations 1990, which were laid before this House on 18th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

The House divided: Ayes 285, Noes 222.

Division No. 68] **[7 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, W.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*

Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Michael Fallon and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfedder, James
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes, and
Mr. Martyn Jones.

Question accordingly agreed to.

It being after Seven o'clock, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to the Order [5 February], to put forthwith the Question on the motion relating to pensions.*

Resolved,

That the draft Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 18th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

Social Security

7.14 pm

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Nicholas Scott): I beg to move,

That the draft Social Security (Industrial Injuries) (Regular Employment) Regulations 1990, which were laid before this House on 18th January, be approved.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): It will be for the convenience of the House to debate this motion together with the following motions:

That the draft Social Security (Recoupment) Regulations 1990, which were laid before this House on 25th January, be approved.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Income Support (Transitional) Amendment No. 2 Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 2340), dated 12th December 1989, a copy of which was laid before this House on 13th December, be annulled.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Social Fund Cold Weather Payments (General) Amendment Regulations 1989 (S.I., 1989, No. 2388), dated 19th December 1989, a copy of which was laid before this House on 19th December, be annulled.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Social Security (Industrial Injuries and Diseases) Miscellaneous Provisions (Amendment) Regulations 1990 (S.I., 1990, No. 73), dated 22nd January 1990, a copy of which was laid before this House on 23rd January, be annulled.

Mr. Scott: The House has before it two affirmative instruments—the draft Social Security (Recoupment) Regulations 1990 and the draft Social Security (Industrial Injuries) (Regular Employment) Regulations 1990. There are also three negative instruments: the Social Security (Industrial Injuries and Diseases) Miscellaneous Provisions (Amendment) Regulations 1990, the Social Fund Cold Weather Payments (General) Amendment Regulations 1989 and the Income Support (Transitional) Amendment No. 2 Regulations 1989.

I shall deal first with the recoupment regulations. These stem from section 22 and schedule 4 of the Social Security Act 1989. That sets out the scheme by which the compensation paid for personal injury or disease will be reduced by an amount equivalent to benefit paid in respect of the same injury or disease. It will apply to compensation payments made from 3 September this year for injuries or diseases which occur on or after 1 January this year. The recovery scheme will replace the present offsetting rules which have grown up over the past 40 years and which I think were regarded by most commentators as ripe for reform.

Broadly speaking, at present either one half or the whole of benefits paid over five years, or longer in some cases, is deducted from the compensation payment and used to reduce the compensator's liability to compensate the injured person. Therefore, in effect state benefits have been subsidising compensation liability.

The new legislation is based on two fundamental principles—that compensation should not be subsidised in this way but that compensators should meet their full liability and, secondly, that the injured person should not receive more from two sources than he could have received from one. The scheme provides that the compensation payment will be reduced by payment of any of the benefits listed in regulation 2 of the draft regulations which have been paid for the same injury or disease. The deduction will be in respect only of what has been paid up to the date when the compensation claim is finally settled or five years if that is earlier.

Some 80 per cent. of claims are settled within two and a half years and we expect that the majority of injured people will see no difference whatever or may get more than under the existing rules. The difference will be that the amount formerly retained by the compensator, usually an insurance company, will in future be repaid to the Department. I emphasise that we are not taking away benefit entitlement any more than the current offsetting provisions do. It is the compensation payment that is reduced in either case.

The regulations are affirmative because of the list of benefits and the lower limit of compensation above which recovery will apply. Some hon. Members may remember our discussions last year in Committee, when I set out what the relevant benefits would be. They are listed in regulation 2. They are broadly the same range of benefits to which offsetting currently applies, and are those which the victim of an injury or disease may claim in respect of incapacity, disability or inability to work.

I shall now deal with the small payment limit in regulation 3. The level of £2,500 was announced on 21 December in reply to a question by my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd). The limit results from a recommendation to us by Touche Ross that in 1987 about 36 per cent. of settlements were at £1,500 or below, and represented about £2 million-worth of benefits. We accepted then that it would make sense to exclude small payments to avoid the paperwork with which insurers and ourselves would have to deal for a relatively modest amount of benefit revenue.

We provided that these small payments would continue to be subject to the existing system, which is 50 per cent. offsetting over five years. That serves a dual purpose. It ensures that injured people are treated in roughly the same way as they are now with some reduction in compensation, and provides some relief to insurance companies in the additional costs that they incur as a result of the new scheme in general. The £2,500 figure is a 60 per cent. increase on the original £1,500 and we estimate that it will obviate the need to deal with about 37 per cent. of all settlements. At the same time, insurers will retain about £2 million to offset their costs.

The other regulations are largely administrative details which have been worked out by officials in consultation with the private sector, whose co-operation we greatly appreciated. We have tried to place the minimum burden on them, to take their advice very carefully, and to take account of the procedures that are used already in the insurance industry.

I turn now to the draft Social Security (Industrial Injuries) (Regular Employment) Regulations 1990. The House will recall that last October the Government removed the pensioners' earnings rule. I think that that step was widely welcomed. As a result of that decision, these regulations, which I commend to the House as wholly beneficial, help to clarify the likely entitlement to reduced earnings allowance of people who either are approaching or are over pensionable age. Reduced earnings allowance is payable when earnings are lost as a result of an industrial accident or disease, and since April 1989, when a person reaches pensionable age and retires from regular employment, reduced earnings allowance is

[Mr. Scott]

replaced by retirement allowance. That is payable at 25 per cent. of the rate of the reduced earnings allowance paid at the date of retirement.

Since October 1989, when the abolition of the pensioners' earnings rule took place, those who continue to work past normal pensionable age, and indeed those who previously retired and then decided to return to regular employment, have been able to retain or regain REA. However, regulations are needed to define "regular employment" for the purposes of these entitlements. I believe that the regulations themselves prescribe quite generously the condition of being in regular employment.

Basically, when pension age is imminent, or when someone has retired and decides to return to regular employment and wishes to claim reduced earnings allowance, the adjudication officer will have to be satisfied that the person works, on average, 10 hours a week over a five-week period in order to qualify. Anybody getting reduced earnings allowance while incapable of work, or while unemployed as a result of industrial injury, will be treated as being in regular employment. These regulations are wholly beneficial, and I commend them to the House.

I want to turn now to the instruments that are subject to negative resolution. Regulation 13 of the Social Security (Industrial Injuries and Diseases) Miscellaneous Provisions (Amendment) Regulations 1990 has been around for some time. I see at least one Opposition Member poised on the edge of his seat as I come to this matter. Originally the regulations were to have been laid at the end of October, but, following representations from some Opposition Members, I withdrew them temporarily to give time for further consideration and, in practice, to provide time for the possible revocation of the regulations to be publicised.

A very large number of applications under this regulation have been received by the Department in the intervening period. I hope that, whatever complaints hon. Members may have about the ultimate revocation, they will recognise that I acted in a way that was helpful, both in practice and in theory.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I am obliged to the Minister for showing his usual courtesy in giving way.

May I ask him to confirm that any letter concerning a backdated claim for disablement benefit, no matter how rudimentary, will be accepted by officers of the Department of Social Services up to closure of the Department's offices on Monday next? Can he confirm that people living in areas remote from DSS offices will also have their letters of application for such benefits considered if those letters are posted before the evening of next Monday?

Mr. Scott: I can agree with the hon. Gentleman's first proposition. I shall ask my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, who will reply to the debate, to clarify whether the latter proposition can be acceded to. The hon. Gentleman will no doubt accept that in this area, I have tried to be as helpful as possible. Perhaps I should clear up one possible misapprehension. It is not true that from the relevant date there will be no further applications under regulation 13. I think that the hon. Gentleman understands that, but it has been suggested that, somehow, the whole operation is being revoked.

The position is simply that any applications received after that date will be treated under the new rules that were introduced in 1986, rather than under the previous rules. Broadly, those cases where it is judged that less than 14 per cent. disability arises from the injury or disease will not be allowed, whereas those in which it is judged that the disability is over 14 per cent. will be allowed. I think that that reflects the intention that help should be concentrated on those who need it.

As I have indicated, regulation 13 was introduced on 1 October 1986 as a transitional measure to help people who suffered an industrial accident or the onset of a prescribed industrial disease before 1 October, but did not claim disablement benefit until after that date. The intention was quite clear: that those people incapable, by physical or mental disability, to make their claims before 1 October 1986 should be safeguarded. But a tribunal of commissioners widened the scope of the intention by asserting that "incapable" could encompass justifiable ignorance that a claim to disablement benefit could be made. But since that commissioners' decision became known—and I suspended the earlier amending regulation at the end of October—a very substantial number of claims have been made.

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): Does the Minister recognise that, in Merseyside alone, about 5,000 applications were made during the period of the relaxation? Does he agree that 14 per cent., which is the cut-off point, represents a very high proportion of disability, not only in this field but generally? Will he take that into account when he is considering the whole question of the cut-off point for industrial benefit?

Mr. Scott: I cannot give an undertaking to reconsider the 14 per cent. cut-off point. This was a sensible rationalisation of the system introduced in 1986, and, four years later, it would take an awful lot to persuade me to reconsider it. If the hon. Gentleman wants to make any representations we shall take account of them, but I do not think that I could consider going in the opposite direction. Of course, the decision was made before I became a Minister in this Department, but I have considered it carefully in the context of my discussions with hon. Members who came to see me, and I certainly do not think that there is a case for resiling from it. It is now about three years since the transitional regulation came into force, and it is about time we revoked it.

I want to turn now to the Social Fund Cold Weather Payments (General) Amendment Regulations 1989. The main purpose of the regulations, which I hope will be welcomed, is to enable elderly people who are receiving income support to qualify for cold weather payments whilst retaining up to £1,000 of their savings. The capital limit is increased from £500, with effect from 1 January 1990. This is the increase in the amount of capital to be disregarded that was announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 25 October. It will apply to help from the rest of the social fund for the elderly, except crisis loans, from April this year.

These regulations apply to the cold weather payments and are operable from 1 January. This set of regulations will enable more elderly people to obtain help with the

extra cost of heating their homes at times of very cold weather. In addition, the regulations put it beyond doubt that a partner's capital is to be treated as the claimant's, as is the practice throughout the social fund, as well as in respect of income support. There are minor amendments to the description of areas linked to certain weather stations necessitated by the closure of Oakhampton station, and to rectify defects that the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments identified in the original set of regulations.

I am slightly surprised that Opposition Members should be seeking to have the Income Support (Transitional) Amendment No. 2 Regulations 1989 annulled. These regulations are wholly beneficial. It may be that hon. Members, simply want the opportunity to have a canter round the course, rather than that they seriously want the regulations to be annulled.

Before outlining the impovement, and the reason for it, I should like to remind the House of the transitional protection arrangements. I think that all hon. Members are well aware of the fact that we reformed all the income-related benefits—income support, family credit, and housing benefit—in April 1988. Also, of course, community charge rebates have been introduced since then. Our aim, in reforming the system, is to provide so far as possible, a sound common basis for all the benefits affected.

To do this, we had to get rid of the complexities of the old supplementary benefit schemes, such as additional requirements, which had grown up piecemeal since the end of the second world war, and the introduction of national assistance, as it was called then, in 1948. That was no easy task. We achieved our aim through a modern system of personal allowances and premiums, which has targeted help more effectively on those in greatest need. Inevitably, with such a major change in approach, some people fared better than others. Therefore, we introduced transitional protection to ensure that such claimants did not suffer a drop in the cash that they had coming into their households.

Our declared intention was to provide a temporary cushion at the point of change, which deflates as claimants' new entitlement catches up with the old one, or their circumstances change. All this was spelt out in the White Paper on the reform of social security as long ago as 1985. Nevertheless, we have made some special exceptions to the general rule for the most vulnerable. For example, we recognised the exceptional needs of severely disabled people in two ways. First, we provided special transitional protection for those who had to pay high charges for domestic assistance. This special protection has been, and is being, increased in line with inflation each year. Secondly, we ensured that increases in benefit arising from spells in certain types of respite care do not reduce protection either.

The amendment regulations before the House further demonstrates our willingness to respond to difficult situations. By these regulations, we shall be helping families with children in the care of the local authority. Hon. Members will be aware that such children very often return home for weekend leave or their holidays, and we should all want to encourage this continued link with family life.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): Will my right hon. Friend spell out—if he cannot do so now, perhaps my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will do it later—the significance of the eight week period in the amendment regulations and what would happen to a family if a child returned from care and then remained at home and would no longer qualify for this relief?

Mr. Scott: The object of these amendments is not to affect what would happen if a child returned to the family home for a long period and then had to be taken back into care. It is to take account of a child going home for a weekend or being taken away for a holiday, which is still the proper subject of the transitional protection arrangements. I want to ensure that it is possible for children to go back to their own homes or to go on holiday for short periods, but not to undermine the fundamental principles. I accept that at the moment such families could lose transitional protection, which is unfair and could discourage families from having children on home leave. In these regulations, we have taken steps, which I hope that the House will applaud, to remove that disincentive.

7.33 pm

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): We are discussing a batch of social security regulations that are part of the Government's ever continuing programme to redistribute income from those with least to those with more. I have quoted the figures to the House before, but I intend to continue to do so until every hon. Member and, I hope, many more people outside understand what the Government have been doing. I hope also to correct the false impression given by the Minister for Social Security in his winding-up speech in the previous debate.

John Hills has written a book called "Changing Tax: How the Tax System Works and How to Change it" in which he looks at the system over the past 10 years. If we take the old tax and benefit system and see where it would be if everything had been uprated in line with economic growth and compare it with what we have now, we find that those in the bottom 60 per cent. of the income distribution have lost, while those in the top 30 per cent., especially in the top 10 per cent., have gained. The losses to those in the bottom 50 per cent. average out at nearly £8·50 per family. Anyone in that category who feels hard up should be made aware that it is because the Government have taken £8·50 from him.

On the other hand, the top 10 per cent. have gained nearly £40 per family. Overall, those in the bottom half of the population have lost £6·6 billion, of which £5·6 billion has gone to those in the top 10 per cent. Indeed, £4·8 billion has gone to those in the top 5 per cent. That is the reality, and it is important to keep pointing out that reality so that we do not have speeches from those on the Government Benches who pretend to care, who pretend to be concerned about the groups in our society who find it difficult to make ends meet, and who pretend that social conditions are not much more unequal than they have been for a long time.

The Minister admitted as much a moment ago. He said that he thought that greater inequality meant greater economic growth. It is funny that the Government are boasting about economic growth when the economy is in such serious difficulties, with high inflation and a dreadful balance of payments, and when we are heading into a recession, as everybody understands. What the Minister was saying was that homeless young people on the streets

[Ms. Clare Short]

and pensioners who have managed for years but now find it difficult, produce economic growth. That is morally unacceptable and economically untrue.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): I have listened carefully to the hon. Lady's line of argument. Is not the greatest scourge to all social security benefits the robber baron—inflation? Will she comment about the effects of inflation during the last Labour Government on the value of a whole range of benefits?

Ms. Short: It is interesting that Tory Members want to draw attention to inflation. The incompetence of the previous Chancellor—now happily gone and being paid far too much elsewhere—led to a big growth in inflation. Compared with the average in Europe, ours is a poor performance. We have to compare the performance of the last Labour Government with the OECD average for inflation, when inflation was high across the world because of the effects of American spending in the Vietnam war.

Inflation is a serious problem, which erodes the value of benefits if they are not updated. It is serious because the Government have used it to erode the value of the income of many people. It is an example of the Government's failure in economic policy and the failure of their policy of using inequality to create economic growth. Instead of producing economic growth, it has produced more and more inequality.

This weekend I was approached in my advice bureau by two 17-year-old girls, both of whom were working and both of whom were homeless. I have not had that experience before, but I am having difficulty in helping them because the Government's benefit changes have resulted in the closure of many hostels that used to provide for such people. I was also approached by two young mothers—competent and able women—who cannot manage to buy enough food for their children and heat their hard-to-heat houses.

I was approached by a number of pensioners who told me—I have had this experience time and again—"I can't understand it, Clare. I've managed for years and now I can't manage. Surely there is something wrong with my benefits as I don't seem to be able to pay all my bills and find the money I need." That is the result of the Government deliberately cutting the value of the state pension and making poorer those who are dependent on that state pension.

We are continuing that process tonight in this the 15th richest country. It is unforgivable and uncivilised that so many people are having such a struggle every week to live decently. The regulations are more bad news for those who are sick or cold or have been injured at work. They are part of the continuing erosion of civilised standards.

I shall deal with the instruments in the order that they are set out on the Order Paper. The first needs little debate and is not contentious. As I understand it, the Government are correcting the law to reflect current practice, as there is a loophole in the law, to allow somebody between the ages of 60 and 65 in regular employment to retain reduced earnings allowance. We support that, but we should note that the Government have recently announced that they are to abolish reduced earnings allowance for all new claimants, so although there is a tiny bit of generosity here, they are planning a big dollop of cuts in incomes a little later.

The draft Social Security (Recoupment) Regulations 1990 are designed to implement the provisions of the Social Security Act 1989 to take back from anyone who has received compensation for an accident or injury at work up to 100 per cent. of that compensation. Since 1948, the Government have had power to take back up to 50 per cent. of such compensation.

Mr. Scott: That is not true. They can take back 50 per cent. of some benefits but up to 100 per cent. of others. A patchwork arrangement has been built up over the years. We are seeking to have a common rule.

Ms. Short: I think the Minister misguides the House when he suggests that the Government are not increasing the proportion of compensation that they can take back. What they propose is a contentious move, and those who served in Committee on the 1989 Act recall that the Government were honest enough to make it clear that everyone they had consulted about the change was opposed to it.

The consequence of the change is that there will be further delays for victims of accidents and industrial injuries receiving compensation. Money will be clawed back from compensation given for things other than loss of income—for pain, hurt and suffering—in lieu of benefits paid by the state to make up for loss of income. The regulations implement that unfair and unpopular move. The Government are cutting benefit payments at the expense of those who have suffered serious accidents or injuries at work.

Mr. Scott: It is not true to say that what is proposed will damage the interests of those who have been compensated. What we are doing at the moment is, in effect, allowing insurance companies to reduce the amount of money that they pay to claimants because of the benefits that they are being paid. We are anxious to make sure that the claimant will not suffer and that those who accept the contract for insurance should pay the full amount of money and not shift some of that burden on to the state. That is the principle behind it.

Ms. Short: My understanding is different from that of the Minister's and I shall be grateful if the right hon. Gentleman will tell me if I am wrong. He and I served on the Committee which considered the relevent measure. The Government are taking power to take back money —to make up for income paid out in state benefit by way of basic family income credit, unemployment benefit, income support or whatever the case might be—from compensation paid, even if part of the compensation is given not for loss of income but for pain, hurt or suffering. We, and most people, believe that it is wrong for the Government to take power to do that, and that is one of the major reasons why we are objecting to the regulations.

The Minister is right to say that we do not object to the Income Support (Transitional) Amdt. No. 2 Regulations 1989. We accept that it is a good idea that families who have had children taken into care should have those children back to stay. I agree with the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) that it is sad that they

can have them for only up to eight weeks and that, should they have them for longer than that, they will lose their transitional protection.

It is shocking that special exemption must be made in such a case. The whole provision for transitional protection mislead the public and hid the vicious cuts that were introduced under the last re-organisation of social security benefits. The truth is that the Government could not bear the idea of individuals suddenly seeing a massive cut in their benefits. They knew that such awareness would be deeply unpopular and would make people angry.

So while they said that nobody would lose in cash, they knew that, with the passage of time, inflation would erode the value of the transitional protection and that people would become poorer. That is happening and that is why many pensioners are hurting, for with the passage of time the value of the transitional protection has diminished, their incomes are lower and they are finding it difficult to manage.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: The hon. Lady has failed to explain why the Opposition are seeking to annul the regulations which will benefit families by up to £10 a week.

Ms. Short: Had the hon. Gentleman been listening to the Minister, he would have heard the answer to that question. The right hon. Gentleman said that he thought it unlikely that we would oppose the regulations, but appreciated that we wished to discuss the question of transitional arrangements and to criticise the fact that such provision was necessary. I am doing that now, and the hon. Gentleman will note later the way in which we vote on this issue. The regulations themselves are not objectionable, but the need for them reveals an objectionable feature in the way in which the Government made provision for transitional protection, when they were cutting benefits.

The Social Fund Cold Weather Payments (General) Amendment Regulations 1989 slightly modify a wholly unacceptable scheme of providing help to people on very low incomes in times of extremely cold weather. The Minister explained that they allowed for a capital limit of £1,000 instead of £500. In the past, some poor pensioners who had saved more than £500 for their funerals could not apply for help, to the tune of £5 a week, when it was severely cold in their areas.

We need to set the proposed improvement in the context of what has been happening in help for heating costs to people on low incomes. The organisation Neighbourhood Energy Action has a fine record of work in this sphere. It points out that the figure of £5 a week has remained at the same level since its introduction at the end of 1986. So inflation has been eroding the value of that payment to those who are poor and who need extra help because the weather is severely cold.

Neighbourhood Energy Action also points out that the system of payment is wrong. It claims that the payment should be made automatically to all income support claimants, which would obviate the need for people to make individual claims and would avoid money being wasted on advertising campaigns and so on. It would mean that women such as the two who came to my advice bureau, who live in bad housing that is hard to heat, would receive some help, whereas at present they receive none.

Before April 1988, supplementary benefit claimants received more than £400 million a year by way of additional payments for heating. That was in addition to severe weather payments. That £400 million was supposedly absorbed into income support premiums. That meant that help that had been directed at specific problems —cold homes, expensive heating systems and so on—was lost.

The result is that many people living in badly built and poorly insulated homes are having to spend on heating money that was meant for their children's food. The alternative for them is to allow their children to be cold. The cold weather payments system is an outrage and must be changed. The minor change that we have before us is, of course, acceptable, but it is not good enough, and that is the basis of our case.

The Social Security (Industrial Injuries and Diseases) Miscellaneous Provisions (Amendment) Regulations 1990 represent a further cut in benefit for people injured at work. It comes on top of the previous cut to which I referred. In 1986, the Government abolished compensation for those whose injuries had a less than 14 per cent. disability determination and who previously received a lump sum. It had also been provided that, if one failed to claim before the cut-off date—before the benefit was abolished—because one was misled by the DSS or was ignorant of one's rights, one could claim.

In December 1986, Mr. Kenneth Potts successfully claimed under that provision. He was awarded compensation for contracting vibration white finger disease, which was recognised only in 1985 as an industrial disease. He had left his job in the shipyard in 1980 having no knowledge, of course, of the availability of the benefit.

The Government were furious. They appealed to the Tribunal of Commissions in August 1989, and lost. Now we witness the Government's respect for the rule of law. The law went against them, so now they are changing the law so that others in Mr. Potts' position will not benefit in future. We should also note that those with an injury causing more than 14 per cent. disability who had the capacity to receive a reduced earnings allowance will lose that entitlement under the current social security legislation.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): Is my hon. Friend aware that we in the mining industry have a dual problem? Not only are we losing benefits, but there is an increase in the rate of serious injuries caused by new production methods and a reduction in manpower.

Ms. Short: I appreciate the point that my hon. Friend makes A cynical package has recently been announced that is meant to give the impression of increasing benefits for people with disabilities. Announcements about such matters are made by the Government every few days in the hope of proving that what is, in fact, a paltry package is a big improvement for people with disabilities. It has partly been paid for by cuts in benefits. People injured at work who in the past could claim reduced earnings allowance will in future lose that right in order that other deserving people with disabilities, who of course need help, can receive something. It is not right that one group of disabled people should pay for the benefits of other groups of disabled people.

The package represents another series of sordid little cuts and unfair provisions from a Government that is busy still, at this late stage and even given their current level of popularity, to redistribute money from those with less to

[Ms. Short]

those with more. That is making our country more unfair and more unequal. The Labour party opposes that—and so do the British people, who are showing more and more their deep concern at Britain becoming an increasingly divided, unequal, unfair, and economically inefficient society. We look forward to the return of a Labour Government and to values of fairness and reasonableness, to protect people who are old, sick or cold in the decent way that the British people would like to see them protected.

7.50 pm

Sir George Young (Ealing, Acton): I was amazed by the speech of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short), who described the measures before the House as "another series of sordid little cuts" that was part of some package of promoting inequality. She tried to link the orders to a broader debate about the redistribution of wealth. However, having listened to the measures being described by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, and having examined them myself, I find that they contain some relatively minor but useful social reforms. Many of them will help claimants, some are neutral, and one of them does reduce benefits but in a way that was trailed four years ago, when transitional provisions were introduced. To link the measures before the House tonight with some so-called grandiose and sinister package is incredible.

I believe that the hon. Member for Ladywood misunderstood the recoupment provisions. My right hon. Friend clearly said that he is not taking away any benefit entitlement. Instead of the insurance company pocketing the recoupment, it will be returned to the taxpayer, which is neutral so far as the beneficiary is concerned. I do not comprehend how any responsible right hon. or hon. Member could object to that change.

Ms. Short: I was listening, and I served on the Committee on the Social Security Bill 1986 that introduced the powers being implemented by regulations. There is no dispute between us that claimants should not be paid twice, and that if they have received a state payment for loss of income, the insurance payment for loss of income should balance it out. However, the Government are taking the power to claw back money that is paid as compensation for pain, injury and hurt, to make up for the payment of unemployment benefit, family credit or income support. We believe that that is wrong.

Sir George Young: We can all read *Hansard* tomorrow, but my understanding of my right hon. Friend's remarks is that he is not taking away benefit entitlement any more than the existing offset provisions do. The compensation payment is reduced in each case. My right hon. Friend went on to explain that the money pocketed by insurance companies will be returned to the taxpayer. I see nothing objectionable in that arrangement, which is neutral so far as the claimant is concerned.

The hon. Member for Ladywood did not mention the 60 per cent. increase in the small payments limit—a useful reform that might have found a place in her speech. As to cold weather payments, she did not mention the useful increase from £500 to £1,000 in the capital disregard, which I hope signals more general examination by the Government of the whole question of capital cut-offs.

The removal of any disincentive to a child returning home for the summer holidays is also to be welcomed. However, in the light of the intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson), it will be helpful if my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security will explain, when she winds up, what would be the financial implications for child benefit entitlement, for example, if a child remained at home. One could then think through the consequences if what was originally planed as an eight-week visit transpired to be the prelude to the child returning home permanently.

All right hon. and hon. Members must surely accept that, unless transitional arrangements are eventually brought to an end, there can never be a move to the new structure. We all remember the debates of two years ago when the new scheme was introduced, when argument centred not so much on structure but on the level of benefits and the transitional arrangements. If one argues against transitional arrangements being phased out, the logical consequence is that the new structure will never be introduced.

I happen to believe that the new structure is better and fairer. Transitional arrangements must be truly transitional, and those right hon. and hon. Members who supported their introduction did so in the acceptance that, as benefits moved up, those of people enjoying transitional protection would stand still until they in turn benefited from general upratings.

I find no difficulty in supporting the package, but I find it impossible to relate the measures before the House to the rather emotional speech by the hon. Member for Ladywood.

7.55 pm

Mr. Bob Clay (Sunderland, North): In speaking mainly on the revocation of regulation 13, I want to make it clear that in no way do I make light of the other squalid and appalling cuts that the regulations impose, but that I have a particular constituency interest in regulation 13.

It is generally acknowledged that most of the people who will be disadvantaged by the revocation of regulation 13 are those suffering from vibration white finger. I trust that Conservative Members in particular do not imagine that vibration white finger is some sort of minor technical disability. Even in its early stages, it can cause numbness, leading to a considerable loss of facility and of ability to work in particular trades. It can lead also to the end of participation in a number of social or cultural activities. A darts player, for example, may no longer be able to throw darts, and a pianist will be unable to play. I shall not go through all the condition's ghastly stages, but eventually it can cause, through gangrene, the loss of the use of the hand, or something worse.

Very often, the level of disability exceeds 14 per cent. When the Minister says that the new arrangement will deny people whose disability is determined at less than 14 per cent. the right to a payment, in fact he is talking about well over 90 per cent. of people suffering from vibration white finger.

The Secretary of State referred to the decision of the commissioner in respect of my constituent, Kenneth Potts, which he said widened the law. That is an interesting

concept. The law is the law. Initially, it was not the commissioner but the social security appeal tribunal that found in favour of Mr. Potts, and it did not widen the law but merely interpreted it. Its decision was upheld by the commissioner, who also interpreted the law. It is wrong for the Government to regard that decision as a widening of the law and now to put a stop to that benefit, simply because many more people would be entitled to claim it.

It is worth considering why the commissioner concluded that Mr. Potts—and, now, many thousands of others—have good cause to make late claims. It has been established that vibration white finger did not become a classified industrial disease until 1985. Not a great deal of time elapsed between then and 1 October 1986, when the Social Security Act 1986 took effect.

This case illuminates two wider aspects of Government policy. First, if one decimates every industry—shipyards, coal mining, heavy engineering—which cause this disease, the people who worked in them are scattered to the winds. There was a community of information in which shop stewards, health and safety representatives and others could go around and say, "By the way, Ken, that vibration white finger that you already claimed for, or maybe you were told not to bother because it was not a prescribed industrial disease, is now a prescribed industrial disease." But the ability to do that in the workplace is limited if the workplace has gone or been significantly reduced.

Some of the people displaced from the workplace because of redundancies or closures have taken the advice of the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) and got on their bike. They are now working somewhere else, where they do not have mates who will say, "By the way, did you know that vibration white finger is now a prescribed industrial disease?" There is very good reason, as the commissioner found, for them not to have heard the good news that they could now claim

Secondly, there is the Government's attitude towards trade unions. People affected by the disease are most likely to find out that the law has changed through their trade union. I do not think that we would expect to find the Government publishing notices in the press, warning all trade union members that if they do not regularly attend trade union branch meetings, they might miss out on information to their benefit. But that is precisely what has happened in this case.

Members of the GMB, the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers, or the National Union of Mineworkers, who were regularly in contact with and active in their trade unions found out that they could now claim for vibration white finger. Workers who had been scattered by the four winds, had become apathetic or had found it difficult to keep in touch with the trade union, particularly while they were unemployed, did not find out. The Government, who are so hostile to trade unions, are taking advantage of the fact that it is more and more difficult for trade unions to carry out the job of communication. But if the information had been communicated more effectively, with Government assistance, it might not have meant that so many people had good cause, as the commissioner found, to make a late claim. That is the position now—we have a large number of late claims.

In one social security office in my constituency—Dunn house—in early January there were already 1,500 requests to review old cases and 2,000 new claims. That number will have increased significantly by tonight, and will no doubt continue to increase until a week on Monday.

The Government cannot have it both ways. If they find that there are an alarmingly large number of claims, surely they have to accept that that means that a significant number of people had good reason for not claiming and, in justice, since it is therefore a widespread and serious problem, they should not revoke the regulation and they should allow more late claims. If the claims are coming in by the thousand now, they will not all be dealt with by the cut-off point; indeed, they will not all have been made by that date.

If the Government take the view that most people who have good cause to claim will now have done so, and only a handful of peculiar cases are left, why do they revoke the regulation? Surely there is no problem. If they are expecting only a handful more claims after a week on Monday, they could leave the regulation and allow all the time in the world for the few remaining claims to come in. After all, this case is a closed universe, because those who started suffering from vibration white finger since 1986 are in a different position. In this instance we are talking only about people who developed the disease before 1 October 1986, and that is a limited number. The Government ought to accept that.

It comes down to this—I think that this is an illustration of what my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) said earlier. What is the point of the regulations and what is the point of the social security system? Is it to provide justice for people who are genuinely entitled to it, or is it to provide an obstacle race, in which the best-informed, the cleverest and the most persistent finally get over the obstacles and win? If the Government deny that it is the latter, and say that the purpose of the system is to provide justice for those entitled to it, the fact that there are now thousands of claimants with this disability ought to lead the Government to say that they will not put another obstacle in their way, as they have already suffered enough.

Many of the late claimants have suffered because they have been made redundant, and they have had to change their place of work and move their home. They have suffered many times over, and now they suffer the final insult of an unnecessary cut-off date.

I repeat that the Government cannot have it both ways. Justice means that all those who have vibration white finger, or any other disease that became a prescribed industrial disease at a later date, ought to be able to claim, provided that they can show good cause, in line with the commissioner's decision.

If the Government are trying to limit claims because of the amount of money, why do they revoke the regulation now, when it will not cost very much and they might as well leave things as they are?

I genuinely cannot make my mind up why the Government are doing this. I attended a meeting with the Minister last October with some of my hon. Friends. We were told that this policy had nothing to do with the commissioner's decision in the Potts case. It was only a temporary regulation to allow fairly late claims after 1 October. The Government had meant to revoke the regulation earlier, but they had somehow overlooked it, and now they were tidying up. I think that the Minister may have said that if it was causing a lot of problems, they would reconsider and give people a few months more.

[Mr. Bob Clay]

That is one interpretation of what happened, but it did not have anything to do with the commissioner's decision. However, what the Minister said tonight implied that it had something to do with the commissioner's decision, because it widened the law. I have already disputed that. The Minister said in a rather horrified manner that it had produced thousands of claimants, and had cost a lot of money, and the implication was that the Government would revoke the regulation for that reason. The Minister should tell us which interpretation is correct. Whichever it is, it is unsatisfactory.

If the Government are admitting to stopping claims because many people are claiming, it is a complete contradiction of what the social security system should be about. On the other hand, if it is genuinely a tidying-up measure that they were going to take anyway, they should recognise that thousands of people have been caught out by the change, and they should allow more time for those people to claim, since there are a limited number of people left who can claim.

Whatever the explanation, the Government should say that this change is stupid, unnecessary, cruel and vindictive, and they should not revoke regulation 13.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. It seems that the debate is over-subscribed, but with some self-restraint all round, all hon. Members may be able to speak.

8.8 pm

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): Before dealing specifically with the two affirmative instruments and the three negative instruments which we are debating, I shall make a few general comments on the Government's record on social security uprating and on their priorities in this important matter. But before I do that, I shall comment on the speech by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short), for whom I have a great respect, not least because she once attended the House at 4.30 in the morning when I was moving an important Adjournment debate on Nottinghamshire. She took part in that debate.

The hon. Lady describes our record as one of squalid cuts. I and other Conservative Members cannot recognise that description. It is simply not true. I do not want to bandy statistics with the hon. Lady because, as she will agree, that is not sensible. However, this year we are spending £1 billion a week on social security, there has been a 36 per cent. real increase in the past 10 years and cash benefits for long-term sick and disabled people have doubled in real terms since 1979.

I am quite content to agree with the hon. Lady that there is still an awful lot more to be done about these matters, but she should at least give credit where it is due and agree that the Government have prioritised some of these issues and done a great deal to help.

Ms. Short: One reason for the increase in spending is that unemployment is still higher than it was when the Government came to power. Secondly, we have more of an elderly population than we used to have. The hon. Gentleman should also know that the Government have been in power 10 years and that roughly every 20 years the income available in Britain doubles. The income of people in the same position as the hon. Gentleman will have increased significantly because of the general economic growth we have experienced every year since the second world war, if not before. Those in greatest need—the old, the sick and so on—are becoming relatively worse and worse off and are not sharing in the benefits of general economic growth. To say that there has been some growth in spending does not answer my fundamental point.

Mr. Mitchell: I do not accept the hon. Lady's last point, although I have some sympathy with her first two. The Government's record on this matter is good. The hon. Lady should pay credit where it is due and acknowledge that in those important matters, the Government have prioritised expenditure. I do not wish to make a particularly party political point, but the Government's record is a great deal better than that which the last Labour Government achieved. I entirely accept that they had aspirations, but they were not able to deliver the economic goods to meet them.

Two of the Government's most important priorities should be to tackle the problem facing the disabled and give aid and support to those coping with long-term sickness. The hon. Lady mentioned child benefit. That is not an easy issue to deal with, but we should at least accept that it would have been ludicrous to increase child benefit last year. To do so would have helped people like me with young families who are not prime candidates for it. It would not have helped those who most need it. The extra help that we have been able to give this year means that 1·5 million families and 3 million children, who would not have gained from an increase in child benefit, have benefited. It is important to recognise that.

The hon. Lady also mentioned pensions. Perhaps we could do more for pensioners. I believe that we could. The Government have honoured their electoral pledge. There are five new measures that will benefit pensioners from this April. For example, 200,000 elderly and disabled people living in residential care and nursing homes will benefit from an increase of £10 in their weekly benefit limit. That is important.

Last year, I and many of my hon. Friends argued strongly that the poorer pensioners' package should be brought forward. That proposal has been implemented and will do a lot to help those people who are least well off. The hon. Lady should welcome that and I regret that she did not do so in her speech.

Much is changing in the pension world. By the time that I retire there will be a different picture for pensioners from that which now exists. It will then be much easier to help those who are least well off and those who fall through the net.

The hon. Lady hinted at a comparison between British pensions and those paid overseas; to do so is beguiling, but wrong. The only countries with a universal state pension are the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark. Only the United Kingdom provides separate pensions for wives who have not worked. The Labour party omit the part which occupational pension schemes play in British pensioners' total income when they produce the figures. Above all means-tested benefits in this country for elderly people are among the best in Europe.

About a year ago an interesting comment was made by the president of Pensioners' Voice, Mrs. Dorothy Rhodes——

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West) *rose*——

Mr. Mitchell: I shall just finish my point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) has already made this point but it bears repetition. Mrs. Dorothy Rhodes said:

"We have talked about percentages of pensions in Europe, and I have been one who has spoken loudly in support of parity with Europe, but during the past year I have been to Pensioners Congresses in Italy and Greece and, having spoken at length to those who actually receive the Euro pensions [sic] and discovered that in many cases the actual cash received in relation to the cost of living is often lower than in the UK, I am revising my opinion; for in no way can our Federation ask for an equality that would disadvantage our own people."

If that lady is revising her opinion, just possibly the hon. Member for Ladywood might consider revising hers.

Mr. Flynn: Opposition Members who have been here since 5 o'clock are getting vivid feelings of déjà vu. The hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) made not only the point but the hon. Gentleman's entire speech and to avoid my answering the speech again it might be useful if the hon. Gentleman returned to a speech of his own.

Mr. Mitchell: All that demonstrates is that my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton is a wise man who, like me, makes important points which the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) should bear in mind. When I read that quote—it is quite clear that the hon. Gentleman did not like it—I said that the point might have already been made by my hon. Friend, but was important enough to bear repeating.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): The Opposition do not like it.

Mr. Mitchell: As my hon. Friend says, the Labour party do not like it when we make the facts clear.

I particularly welcome a number of changes in this year's social security upratings, some of which fall wider than the regulations, but are extremely important. I am particularly pleased that the disability premium for families with disabled children who are also on income-related benefit has been increased. That will give extra help to 20,000 families, which is extremely important.

The carers' premium, which has been introduced into income support for those receiving invalid care allowance of £10 per week is also important and will help 30,000 carers. I am pleased that mobility allowance will be extended to deaf and blind people. That is worth £26·25 more per week to 3,000 people.

Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie (Glasgow, Pollok): The hon. Gentleman is in the wrong debate.

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman says that I am in the wrong debate, but these are important matters to do with this year's upratings.

The overdue changes in attendance allowance are particularly welcome. More money will be made available to terminally ill people without the normal six-month waiting period. That will help 50,000 people by anything up to £37·55 a week and is extremely important.

This year's measures, over and above the normal uprating, will reach 500,000 seriously ill disabled people and carers.

Ms. Short: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not want to be unfair to the hon. Gentleman, but his speech is completely out of order. We are debating a number of regulations to which he is not referring. He appears to be discussing issues that were before the House before the vote at 7 o'clock.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I must confess that I find it difficult to follow where we are with so many different and complex regulations before us. I am sure that the whole House finds this difficulty, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman will make it clear to which of the regulations he is referring.

Mr. Mitchell: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for reminding me of that. I am dealing with an overview of many of the regulations——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but although there is a temptation to have a general debate, the hon. Gentleman must relate his remarks to the specific regulations before the House.

Mr. Mitchell: I am again grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I shall turn to a number of specific aspects of the regulations the first of which is the Social Fund Cold Weather Payments (General) Amdt. Regulations 1989. The Government deserve credit for that for two reasons: first, for bringing forward the date to 1 January. It must have been tempting for social security Ministers to save it until later but they did not do so. Secondly, they deserve credit for doubling the capital limit to £1,000. That was much needed, and I am glad that it has been done. My hon. Friend the Minister might consider going further with this matter next year and I hope that she will listen to Help the Aged and to the local authorities to find out whether anything else could be done to improve the operation of the scheme.

Secondly, it is right to reform the recoupment regulations. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) made a fair point when he said that it is wrong for state benefits to subsidise compensation that is paid out by insurance companies under valid insurance policies. We should act as guardians of the taxpayer and ensure that sums which are lost to the taxpayer are recouped. The insurance companies should pay out. Thirdly, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State said that the private sector was consulted about the administrative details. That is long overdue and unusual. The business community often says that it is not consulted. I am glad that it was consulted on this occasion.

Fourthly, I greatly welcome the help for families whose children are in care but who return home for the weekend and for holidays. I have some sympathy with the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood, (Ms. Short) on this and I hope that the Minister will deal with the point. We must provide direct support for families united in this way. I am very pleased that additional funds will be provided through income support for children who return home for holidays and at the weekend.

Finally, if a new system is introduced, which I believe will be both fairer and better than the old one, there must be transitional arrangements, but at some point they must be brought to an end, I welcome that aspect, too. I strongly support the Government tonight and I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to take part in the debate on these regulations.

8.21 pm

Mr. Eddie Loyden (Liverpool, Garston): I want to refer to regulation 13, which was so ably spoken to by my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay). We welcomed the extension of the transitional period. However, since then, it has become clear that vibration white finger is now found in industries where it was not previously considered a problem. We have to thank welfare rights officers for having drawn to our attention the fact that so many people suffer from the disease.

All Governments have overlooked the fact that when people start work they will, in almost all cases, be putting their health, or even their life, at risk. Most workers are completely unaware of the dangers of working in certain industries. Mine workers suffer from pneumoconiosis and emphysema and building workers suffer from asbestosis, while workers in shipbuilding, ship repairing and other industries suffer accidents, and workers in the chemical and rubber industries suffer from carcinoma of the bladder. Workers suffer from many other diseases simply because they work in certain industries.

The Government should allow them to claim benefit for industrial diseases. Workers have difficulty in establishing their right to benefit. It is difficult for them to prove that their disease was caused by their working environment. In its heyday, Merseyside employed 24,000 workers in the shipbuilding and ship repair industries, but that number has long since been cut. No doubt my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) will confirm that there are only about 1,000 workers in those industries.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): About 2,500.

Mr. Loyden: There is no comparison between that figure and the 24,000 workers who previously worked in the shipbuilding and ship repairing industries. Many of them are now out of contact with various organisations, in particular the trade unions, who could give them advice.

The Government spent a large amount of money on television advertising when they decided to privatise certain industries. It is shameful, therefore, that the Department of Social Security has not spent money on television advertisements so that workers might know about their right to industrial and other benefits. It would be inappropriate to end the transitional period; many people still do not know about their right to benefit. The scheme ought to go further.

Mr. Clay: Before my hon. Friend leaves the point about Government publicity, will he confirm that I am right in believing that in the case of vibration white finger, which became a prescribed industrial disease in 1985, the Government provided no publicity whatsoever about its having become a prescribed industrial disease? Despite that fact, they want to revoke legislation that would permit late claims, with good cause, to be made for industrial benefit.

Mr. Loyden: That is a very important point. I hope that the Minister will take it on board.

The magic figure of 14 per cent. excludes many people from benefit. I do not accuse the Minister of conspiring to set that figure, but civil servants have probably said that such a figure would preclude many thousands of people from claiming benefit. There is evidence that industrial disease and injury figures are set at a certain level in order to exclude genuine cases of industrial disease and injury which can result in disability and even death. The Opposition are very concerned about that, as well as about industrial disease and accidents throughout industry. I emphasise the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North that the transitional period ought not to be revoked, so that people with a rightful claim can claim benefit.

8.28 pm

Mr. Lewis Stevens (Nuneaton): The hon. Members for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) and for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) offered reasonable points of view on why the Opposition wanted to debate these regulations. Difficulties always arise when people come forward to claim for industrial injuries, but the first decisions were taken in 1986 and there must be a cut-off at some point. It is not unreasonable to implement it now.

The hon. Member for Garston said that these people had been given a considerable extension of time and were grateful for that——

Mr. Loyden: I said "a brief period".

Mr. Stevens: I apologise.

The Government have been reasonable. It is true that, when people leave industries, their trade unions have more difficulty in tracing them and they have problems finding their unions again, but the vast majority of people have had a good chance to claim.

The hon. Member for Sunderland, North asked whether social security was designed to give people their just entitlement or whether it was an obstacle around which only those who were clever and persistent enough could get. When we debated the Social Security Act 1986, it was clearly the Government's intention to simplify an extremely complex system which lent itself precisely to those who could work the system and thus come off better than those who went through the routine procedures only to end up in an unsatisfactory position. The new system is more simplified and easier to understand.

Ms. Short: The new system has replaced a system that the hon. Gentleman describes as complex but which I would say provided for need. The new system is meaner.

Mr. Stevens: That is exactly what I would expect the hon. Lady to say. Hers is the attitude that the Opposition displayed throughout the passage of the 1986 Act and ever since. Whenever the Government try to help specific groups of people, the Opposition say that they are wrong or not doing enough. When in government, the Opposition never even contemplated directly helping some of these groups, but they ignore that completely.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) started from the premise that we should have stuck to a link with pay. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) took the same line when working out what she called cuts. If the Opposition had been in government for the past 10 years, they would not have had the slightest chance of maintaining the link. They messed up the situation when in government. They needed economic growth to be able to put the money into the benefit system. As my hon. Friends have said, this Government can put £1 billion a week into the system, and have spent it on, for example, the disabled. The mobility allowance is now claimed by six times as many people as before, and that is a significant difference.

Whatever the Government do, the Opposition always say it is not enough, but they would not generate the economic growth to do as much themselves. They want to cut——

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Surely my hon. Friend recalls that the last time the Opposition formed the Government they had to go to the International Monetary Fund for money, and they made cuts the like of which we have not seen since and hope never to see again.

Mr. Stevens: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Earlier, the hon. Member for Ladywood said that the Government cut taxes, so the money did not go to the Exchequer. She should have attended some of our Treasury debates. We cut some of the high rates of tax, and that increased the money coming into the Treasury, which could then be spent on social security and so on.

The Opposition are guilty of a strange contradiction over the recoupment regulations. As I understand it, the system did not disadvantage people who were recipients; the money was taken from the insurance companies. It is rare to find the Opposition supporting the insurance and financial sector, yet here they are, dedicated to saving insurance companies money.

Ms. Short: It is not good enough to put false propositions before the House and to seek to mislead people in the country. We all agree that if people are compensated for loss of income with a state benefit the insurance money should be paid to the state. But the Government have wrongly taken power to take money paid to people not for the loss of income but for pain and suffering—to recoup state benefits.

Mr. Stevens: That is what the hon. Lady said before, but it does not alter the fact that the insurance companies should pay. They receive the premiums from companies and from people.

We welcome the raising of the capital ceiling for cold weather payments to £1,000. That is helpful. I also agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson), who said that young people visiting home should have no detrimental effect on the support that their parents receive. I, too, ask my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to extend the eight-week period——

Ms. Short: Good for you—very brave.

Mr. Stevens: All the regulations are evidence that the changes that the Government have made to improve the social security system have generally been in favour of individuals and groups. I only wish that the Opposition would look more kindly on the upratings announced earlier; they were good news for people. The Opposition, however, take delight in trying to squash the good news and degrade what is being provided. That suggests that they do not care about the people who receive social security and are more interested in making political points at the expense of the Government. They may always say that they want more, but they should at least give credit to the Government for what they have done for those most in need.

8.37 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I want to put the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) right on one point. The Opposition are certainly interested in those who receive or should be receiving social security. We are passionately interested in trying to improve their lot, and time and again, in letters or in our regular surgeries, we come up against constituents who come to us for help and who live on the barest minimum incomes. I ask the hon. Gentleman to bear that in mind. No doubt Conservative Members will earn their brownie points from the Whips Office for coming here and trying to justify and defend the Government's social security policy.

I want to concentrate on the cold weather payments. As my hon. Friends will know, I have raised this matter in the House several times over the years. Pensioners on income support and those just above that level undoubtedly face immense difficulties in paying their fuel bills during the winter months. I remind the House of the increases in the price of gas and electricity. Between November 1979 and November 1989 the pensioners prices index rose by about 85 per cent. But gas went up by 127 per cent. in that time and electricity by 96 per cent. Moreover, fuel takes up a larger part of a pensioner's budget, as we all know.

In some respects, the fact that temperatures this year have not triggered off the cold weather payments illustrates my argument. It could be argued that, rather like last year, we are witnessing an ordinary British winter with some storms thrown in. However, temperatures have not reached freezing, so cold weather payments have not been made. But imagine what this House would be like if there were no heating on now. I am sure that every hon. Member ensures that his or her home is heated. It is not freezing, but some form of heating is necessary wherever we are, be it at work in the House of Commons, or in our private homes.

As a result of various comments that I have made in the local press, many of my constituents with small incomes, mainly pensioners but not entirely so, have complained to me bitterly about the rent that they pay. I raised the matter during social security questions on Monday when I gave as an illustration a constituent of mine with an income of £54 a week who, due to the substantial reduction in housing benefit, is paying £10 a week in rent. That is not due to the local authority; it is due purely to the Government's policy on substantially reducing housing benefit.

Mr. Loyden: Disgraceful.

Mr. Winnick: As my hon. Friend rightly says, to have an income of £54 a week and to pay £10 a week is disgraceful, but in addition to the cost of food and other daily essentials, money has to be found for fuel. Pensioners' fuel bills, after all, are like ours. There is no discount because they are pensioners. The Government may argue that the bills can be paid in weekly or monthly instalments—I accept that—but at the end of the day the same amount of money has to be paid and, as I have just said, during the past 10 years gas has gone up 127 per cent. and electricity 96 per cent. That is why the Opposition are deeply concerned about the poorest in our community, and certainly pensioners on the basic minimum, who clearly do not have sufficient income to heat their homes adequately.

I accept, of course, that the increase in the capital threshold from £500 to £1,000 for cold weather payments is a step in the right direction. We would not for one moment argue otherwise. Common sense ensures that that is right. But many conditions have to be met before the cold weather payment is made. The average temperature

[Mr. Winnick]

has to fall to freezing point for seven consecutive days before the £5 a week is paid. Moreover, the discretionary social fund does not meet the cost of fuel consumption. It is no good the poorest pensioners on income support going along to the DSS office because they do not have sufficient funds and asking for help with winter fuel payments. By regulation, no additional help would be given.

Heating allowance ended when income support replaced supplementary benefit. Before the changes in April 1988, some £400 million a year was received in additional payments, quite apart from the cold weather payments. But that all ended when supplementary benefit went and income support came in. The Minister will argue, no doubt, that that sum of money has been duly absorbed in the income support premiums, but I doubt whether that is the case.

Pensioners have less income because the pension is no longer increased in line with earnings. We have already given the figures. As a result of the decision by the Government in 1980, a married pensioner will have lost £21 a week in April and a single pensioner £13 a week. That simply means less money to pay for fuel during the winter months.

Reference has been made in previous debates to the dangers of hypothermia and other cold-related diseases to the elderly in the winter months. Far more elderly people die during the winter months in Britain than in a number of other European countries. Undoubtedly, one reason must be the poverty that exists among so many of our elderly people for all the reasons that I have been explaining. We in Britian suffer from fuel poverty. Far too many of our elderly people simply do not have an income that is adequate to meet their fuel bills. Winter is a nightmare for so many of our elderly people.

Our constituents have done nothing wrong. They have simply not earned enough money during their working lives. They do not have much by way of an occupational pension, if any, and if they do, if they are council tenants, it is taken into account in housing benefit. It is wrong that those people should be penalised every winter in the manner that I have been describing.

Much more needs to be done. I would like £5 a week, which after all does not add up to much, to be paid during the winter months regardless of the temperature. Hon. Members should not forget that even if it is freezing, cold weather payments can be made only to those on income support. I have said it before and I do not care how many times I say it, and I shall go on doing so until the situation improves: we should be thoroughly ashamed that we allow our elderly people to suffer the poverty, discrimination and deprivation in the winter months that we do.

Conservative Members have a responsibility to put the kind of pressure on their Government that Opposition Members would be doing if a Labour Government were not carrying out the kind of policies that we would wish to see. There is no doubt about that; we have done it before. We would be putting pressure on a Labour Government. However, Conservative Members have come along tonight and made nice complacent speeches. I only wish that they could be more concerned with the poor pensioners who have to suffer the hardship that Conservative Members, and we ourselves, do not have to suffer.

8.47 pm

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak briefly in this important debate. I listened with interest to the remarks of the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick). In my constituency also there is concern about elderly people who suffer from cold. That is why I pay tribute to the Government. They were the first Government to introduce severe weather payments some years ago. The least that the hon. Gentleman could have done was pay tribute to them for that. We can look at the details of the scheme, but once again it is a Conservative Government who have taken action and who have moved forward on cold weather payments.

I want to speak briefly on the Opposition's motion to annul the Income Support (Transitional) Amendment No. 2 Regulations 1989 which were laid before the House just before Christmas. It is important to set the whole question of the transitional arrangement in income support against the background of the Government's achievement in income support.

I was amazed that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short), should challenge my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell), who rightly pointed to the fact that spending on social security under the Government has risen by 36 per cent. in real terms since 1979. She also challenged the correct assertion of my hon. Friend that we are now spending £1 billion a week on social security benefits.

Ms. Short: I did not challenge it.

Mr. Thompson: I remember the hon. Lady's exact words. She failed to recognise that it is only because of the economic growth and success under this Government that we have been able to increase payments to those levels.

Transitional arrangements protect people affected by the more efficient targeting of benefits. In my constituency in Norwich few people when they think about it challenge the Government's intention to target benefits where the need is greatest. That must be right, and it is one of the reasons why we are debating these regulations tonight. Total expenditure on income support will reach £7·7 billion this year.

I express amazement that the Opposition, led by the Leader of the Opposition, wish to annul a measure which will benefit families in my contituency by as much as £10 a week or more. The Opposition Front-Bench team is ill advised to put out the message in my constituency and elsewhere that the Opposition want to annul a measure which will provide such benefits.

The Government's record on support for the family is good. I shall use even more statistics to make my case, because they speak truths which cannot be refuted by Opposition Members. In 1990-91, the Government will spend almost £10 billion on the whole range of benefits for the family. That is an increase of 27 per cent. in real terms since 1979. In case the hon. Member for Ladywood and her colleagues have forgotten, it was their Government who cut such support by 7·3 per cent.

I do not wish to stray too far from the regulations. The Government's record on family support leaves the record of previous Labour Governments completely in the shade. The facts speak for themselves. With a little help from the Library, the staff of which I commend—I shall speak later about the complexity of the social security regulations and

be a little more controversial—I have found out that a family on income support of £50 a week may have a transitional addition of some £10 a week, making a total income of £60 a week.

We now come to the point of the transitional regulations. If the family have a child under the age of 11 in the care of a local authority who rejoins the household for a short period, the family's income support could be increased by some £11·75, leading to a total of £61·75. Under the unamended regulations, which would still apply if the Government had not taken the action that we are debating tonight, such a family in my constituency would receive only £1·75 extra to help with the child.

It must be right to introduce these regulations to bring back transitional support. I have read the regulations and with the help of expert advice I have got it right. The family will benefit by some £10.

I support the Government in laying the statutory instrument before the House. I repeat that I am amazed that the Opposition, led by the Leader of the Opposition, seek to annul such a measure. My constituents will find it difficult to understand the points that the hon. Lady made in defence of that position.

My second point is rather different. I should like to quote from the written evidence submitted to the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments on this matter. I make no apology for reading it out in full:

"Regulation 14(1) of the Transitional Regulations provides for the reduction of transitional additions. In particular regulations 14(1)(a) and 14(1)(d) provide for reduction in the additions by increases in the applicable amount. There is no provision in these Regulations for the increase or re-introduction of a transitional addition once it is reduced or lost."

In case you are wondering why I am reading this out, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the reason will become clear in the next paragraph.

"The unintended consequence of the interaction of the provisions of regulation 16 of the General Regulations and regulation 14 of the Transitional Regulations is a loss in benefit to families whose children are in the care of the local authority if such children subsequently come home on leave."

I draw attention to the word "unintended". In the drafting of the regulations, it was not noticed that the effect would be a loss in benefit.

My last substantive point is that we do not have a satisfactory system for drafting social security regulations which are comprehensible to those who work closely in the system, never mind to Back-Bench Members of Parliament trying to debate them. That is amply illustrated by the statutory instrument.

My last quotation supports a campaign which I first initiated and supported in 1984, a campaign to get rid of gobbledegook in government and to move towards more comprehension, particularly of social security matters:

"In regulation 14 of the Income Support (Transitional) Regulations 1987(b) (reduction and termination of transitional and personal expenses addition) after paragraph (1F) there shall be inserted the following paragraph—

'(1G) Notwithstanding paragraph (1)(a) or (d), where a claimant's applicable amount increases because a child or young person mentioned in paragraph (5)(c) of regulation 16 of the General Regulations (circumstances in which a person is treated or not treated as a member of the household) is treated as a member of the claimant's household under paragraph (6) of that regulation, the claimant's transitional addition shall not be reduced by the amount of that increase unless the child or young person has been treated as a member of the household for a continuous period which exceeds eight weeks'.".

I support the Government in their intentions and their measures. I support my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young), who ably supported the Government's record and their intentions.

Eventually we must do something about the language of drafting. I know that it is said that it is required for legal purposes, but that is not good enough. Other countries can do things better. When a Member of Parliament has to spend three hours in the Library to begin to understand the simplest statutory instrument, something is wrong. Therefore, I hope that I shall have all-party support in saying that we must work to remove gobbledegook and to increase understanding of our regulations.

8.58 pm

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): You will be pleased to know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not only that I intend to speak exactly to the terms of the debate and to the regulations, unlike most Conservative Members, but that I do not intend to waste a lot of time reading out the regulations from the papers in front of us.

So far as Conservative Members have dealt with the regulations at all, they have paid fulsome compliments to the Government for, as they have put it, "helping" families with children, with disabled relatives or with children in care when they come home for the weekend, as if the Government were giving those families something.

I shall quote just one line from the regulations, a sub-title that refers to

"Amendment of regulation 14 of the Income Support (Transitional) Regulations 1987".

That means that, since the regulations came into force all that time ago, families with children in care who have come home for the weekend have been penalised. Although it took the Government until 14 December 1989 to remove that penalty, Conservative Members compliment their Front Bench on that dilatory action. Obviously, their expectations of their Government are low.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) on his able speech on vibration white finger. I shall not repeat his comments, but I will repeat his challenge. If the regulation will not affect many people because most people have already been able to claim their benefit, why waste the time of the House in bringing it forward, and why cut from benefit the very few people who might be left? However, if the regulation will affect a great many people and save the Government a lot of money, it is grossly unjust. The provisions will mean that people who have been injured through their work—often because of the carelessness of their employers, in my opinion—are to be deprived of benefit. My hon. Friend's challenge needs to be dealt with.

We also face a clawback on some compensation payments. There was an interesting contradiction in what the Minister of State said. In his speech he said that claimants should not get more from two sources than they would have got from one. That makes it clear that claimants are being deprived of what he sees as an extra benefit. However, in an intervention, he told my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) that the provisions were directed not against claimants, but against insurance companies. The right hon. Gentleman should remember what he said in his speech when intervening only a few minutes later. I hope that that will be clarified.

[Mrs. Audrey Wise]

My hon. Friend the Member for Ladywood pointed out that the state will claw back money that has been given in compensation for pain and suffering. The Minister of State did not deny that. The state, which has felt no pain or suffering, is taking from people who have felt such pain and suffering the money to which they are entitled. The right hon. Gentleman expects us to believe that the provision is simply to ensure that insurance companies do not make too much profit.

I conclude by referring to the severe weather payments. As my hon. Friends have said, the statutory instrument is an improvement, but it is a meagre improvement. It would be foolish of us not to take the opportunity of this debate to show exactly how meagre it is. Eligibility for the benefit is still far too restrictive. Yes, the Government have brought the age limit down to 60 and have increased the capital threshold from £500 to £1,000. However, it is possible to be severely ill and still not qualify for the extra £5. A claimant must either be chronically sick and in receipt of a benefit or have been sick for at least 28 weeks. That means that a person can suffer a severe or dangerous illness and yet not meet the eligibility requirement for this meagre benefit. In addition, the Government have retained the £5 claim limit that has existed since 1986, thus allowing the benefit to wither.

The Government have also retained the same silly way of measuring whether claims can be made. People who do not live near weather stations might suffer severe weather —and even meet the ridiculous stipulation about seven days at freezing point—but because they do not live near a weather station, their weather may not be recorded and they cannot claim.

The Government have also retained the system whereby people have to make a claim. They need to know that the weather station has recorded seven consecutive days of "freezing point" weather and that they will therefore be eligible. How many people would know that? It is within the competence of the Department of Social Security to pay the benefit automatically. The Department is keen on talking about efficiency. This would be a way of demonstrating it.

In all, we are justified in regarding such improvements as are contained in the regulations as completely inadequate and meagre, and the cuts as mean-spirited in the extreme.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If hon. Members follow the example of the hon. Lady and take no longer than seven minutes, the four hon. Members who have been waiting patiently for a long time will get in.

9.5 pm

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): The speech by my neighbour, the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise), and other Opposition speeches highlight a problem for the Opposition in debating social security. They are long on advice but short on ideas as to how we might have a workable social security system, sufficiently resourced. That point was made amply by my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell).

One fact that seems not to have been made clear by Opposition Members is that the Social Security (Recoupment) Regulations will add £55 million to the social security budget. We have heard a lot from the Opposition about how we will pay for the improvements which the various regulations bring into force. Here is £55 million, but there was not a word of praise from the Opposition for the Government's courage in producing the regulations.

I am concerned about how the recoupment regulations will operate. I am worried about the complexity of the regulations which appear to take away something. The public may worry that their entitlement to a range of benefits listed in the regulations will be denied them. When people talk to me in my advice bureau about how the social security system works, they are worried about the principle that a person cannot be compensated twice for the same type of claim. I seek from my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State reassurance that the Department will address the question of communication with potential claimants.

I am also concerned about how insurance companies may react to the implementation of the regulations. I seek reassurance from my hon. Friend that insurance companies will not try to minimise compensation, particularly in out-of-court settlements, so as to reduce their liability to recompense the Department of Social Security. Obviously, insurance companies, whose requirement is to look after the interests of their clients, might be tempted down that road. It would be helpful if my hon. Friend could reassure the House that she will keep the operation of the regulations under close scrutiny to ensure that people are not disadvantaged by sharp practice.

Something positive could result from the recoupment regulations in that insurance companies and those subject to compensation claims may recognise where their liability lies. For example, industrial injury claims may be made because of a company's inappropriate practices that could injure workers. The insurance company might say to that company, "We have had to stump up on a number of claims. Your claims record is costing us money. Put your house in order." That positive benefit might come out of the introduction of the regulations.

I praise the Government for ensuring that the Macfarlane Trust, whose funding has been increased recently to deal with haemophiliacs, will not be subject to the recoupment provisions. That shows an appreciation of the problems of that group who are much in need of support.

I also note that miners are singled out for——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster) *rose*——

Mr. Jack: I am sorry, I am trying very hard to keep within the time limit.

I see that miners are also a favoured group under the pneumoconiosis regulations. Did my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary give thought in drafting the regulations to the needs of nuclear workers who might be affected by industrial injury? I have some in my constituency who would be interested in her comments, either when replying to the debate or by letter afterwards.

The regulations also indicate that the Department of Social Security must advise people of their liabilities to recoupment within four weeks of request for that information. Will my hon. Friend assure me that her

systems are capable of delivering that information as rapidly as it is required? Recoupment, therefore, has much to commend it.

On the subject of cold weather payments, however, while I support the order—any improvement is better than none—when I checked with my local social security office I found that the last time this particular benefit was paid —I note from comments by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) that it was not available to people under the last Labour Government —the office had received about 3,000 applications, only 500 of which were granted. If my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary cannot at this juncture move as far as some kind of additional flat-rate payment during the cold winter months, could she look at ways, perhaps through the use of the order book, of helping people to understand who is entitled to this particular payment? I am sure that, being a cost-conscious Minister, she will understand that to process 3,000 requests and pay out on only 500 of them costs a lot of money.

The problem of the aged and heat is one that voluntary organisations and local newspapers have tried to address. I put on record my praise of my local branch of Age Concern and the Blackpool *Evening Gazette* for what they have done this winter in trying to show elderly people how they can keep warm. Having visited many elderly people in my constituency, I was struck by one particular constituent who lives in a house with rather old-fashioned electric central heating. She was worried about being able to pay the bills and whether she should turn the heating on.

I am aware of the efforts made by the gas and electricity boards to assist elderly people. If my hon. Friend cannot change the regulations, could she discuss with the power suppliers the possibility of providing advice, such as energy audits of elderly people's houses, so that they can make the best use of their money? After this order is in place, perhaps my hon. Friend could reconsider the whole question of reassuring elderly people, perhaps through financial means, that keeping warm must be their first priority.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who I am pleased to see in his place on the Front Bench, knows of the efforts in my constituency—he attended an excellent meeting two years ago—and knows of the worries expressed by elderly people on this score. The time must now be right to look at the whole question of heating for the elderly and how it can be made affordable.

9.12 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I begin by asking the Secretary of State a question about cold weather payments. Will he ensure that they are paid promptly and that delays in payment are reduced to an absolute minimum? I want also to make a plea on behalf of my constituency that a more appropriate weather station be chosen for it. Many of my constituents in Greenock and Port Glasgow who live in poor housing are several hundred feet above sea level and hence several hundred feet above that particular weather station.

I want to speak principally about statutory instrument No. 73, regulation 13. I shall preface my remarks with a comment about one of the aims of the regulations, which must surely be an improvement of the quality of service given to claimants. The Minister seems not to show dissent when I say that. That is how it should be, especially in the light of the report of the Public Accounts Committee, which was concerned with the quality of service to the public at local social security offices. When that report was debated in the House on 30 November last year, I directed most of my remarks to the sufferers of vibration white finger. I said that the tough criticisms of the poor quality of service to claimants did not hold for the two offices in my constituency.

With hindsight, that was a little rash of me, because on 15 December I received a report from the parliamentary ombudsman concerning an investigation that I had asked him to conduct into the disgraceful treatment meted out by DSS officials in Greenock and Port Glasgow to a young pregnant woman. Because of her resilience and determination and the assistance that she was given by an able social worker, she persisted with her applications for financial help. Her mother had put her out when she had announced that she was pregnant. At the time, I said that it was like a Victorian melodrama. The parliamentary ombudsman was scathing in his criticism of the treatment meted out to that young girl.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, I am fair-minded, so I must point out that the Under-Secretary—who is not in her place at the moment, although she has been here all evening—sent me a lengthy letter offering the Department's apologies to that young woman. She assured me that no other young woman in those circumstances would be treated as that girl was. I am willing to accept the assurances of the Under-Secretary and of the Minister concerning such treatment.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The hon. Gentleman will have to keep a close eye on them.

Dr. Godman: I shall keep a close watch—as I always do —on the behaviour of DSS officials in my constituency, given that several thousand people are directly dependent on social welfare incomes. I am sometimes tempted to think that the Minister should clear out, in wholesale fashion, the senior management of the DSS in the Scottish headquarters in Lady Lawson street in Edinburgh, but that is another matter.

Mrs. Wise: On the question of young pregnant girls, it is not simply the attitude of officials that is at fault, it is the regulations. My hon. Friend may not be aware that 16 and 17-year-old girls who become pregnant are not entitled to income support—even if they are put out of their homes, such as in the case that my hon. Friend described—until they are six months pregnant. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is disgraceful?

Dr. Godman: Of course I agree with my hon. Friend. As I have said, it is not only the disgraceful treatment meted out by officials, but the gaps in the regulations which, at that time, were new regulations. The problem was caused by a combination of the regulations and the treatment meted out by officials.

Let us now return to vibration white finger. Since I met the Minister, together with my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) and two or three others —and we were treated courteously—about 2,200 men in Greenock and Port Glasgow have made applications for that backdated disablement benefit and for the reduced earnings allowance. I regret to say that when I sought from the Minister's office details of the numbers who had

[Dr. Godman]

applied for the benefit throughout the United Kingdom, I was told that they were not available. However, I received them readily enough from my local DSS office.

For example, I wanted to know how many shipyard workers in Belfast had applied for that benefit, to which they are entitled. If the Minister is not willing to extend or to pull back the statutory instrument, I must ask him to answer my earlier question about letters of application that are to be posted on Monday of next week. When the doors of the DSS offices are closed on Monday evening, the 2,200 claims from Greenock and Port Glasgow will not be allowed. Many men who are entitled to this benefit live in remote areas of Scotland, in the Highlands and Islands, and many of them are miles from social security offices. They should be given some sympathy.

Mr. Frank Field: I should like to add my weight to what my hon. Friend said, because there are about 2,000 applications in the Birkenhead offices for this benefit. I was alarmed to find that although the commissioner's decision was made in September, processing of claims in the Birkenhead offices did not start until 19 January. Does my hon. Friend agree that the processing of claims and the sending out of decisions is one way to spread by word of mouth the knowledge that people may be entitled to claim? Given that the officers have sat on the applications, it is crucial that the message goes out clearly from the debate that people have a few more days in which to make applications. As my hon. Friend says, applications posted on Monday should be accepted.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful for that fine intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). The concept of justifiable ignorance can still be applied to many people. A Mrs. McLoughlin telephoned me from Edinburgh today. She had heard about what we in Scotland call the take-up campaign and went to the Causewayside office of the DSS to make an application, but was turned away by the official at the counter.

It is lamentable that in Scotland the Department has failed to publicise the implications of the test case in Sunderland in August last year. In the case of Belfast, any publicity urging people to make such claims has come from the conveners of the shop stewards' committee of Harland and Wolff. In Sunderland, it has come from the unemployed workers' offices, and in my constituency I paid for a big advertisement in my local paper urging people to make such applications. The Fees Office will pick up the bill for that advertisement.

One of my major criticisms of the DSS is its deliberate failure to advertise the implications of test cases for claimants and would-be claimants. We have the vibration white finger take-up campaign in Scotland. I am talking about ex-forestry workers in our remote communities and construction workers living in the islands who will get to know about this benefit when, perhaps, it is too late for them to claim. There has been a failure to reach those people and meet their legitimate claims.

I look forward to the day when the English electorate puts out these Ministers. I say English electorate because Scottish Ministers are doomed. When a Labour Minister is in charge of the Department of Social Security, I should like to see him sort out the senior officials in that Department, because they have badly let down many of my constituents and many other people throughout Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

9.23 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): This is my second opportunity to make a brief contribution today. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) for referring, albeit in passing, in his short and useful contribution to the fact that the changes in regulation 13 affect not just shipyard and industrial workers in heavier industries—the people that will be mainly affected—but such people as forestry workers. The Government must bear that in mind when they are considering the implications of this change.

As I represent a constituency that does not have a heavy industry base providing part of its employment prospects, perhaps it is useful that I should support the able case that was made by the hon. Members for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) and for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden) on the question of the proposed change in regulation 13. It is a very shabby change. Ministers should have had the courage of their convictions. They should have told their officials quite clearly that they, the officials, cannot always seek to redress unacceptable decisions—unacceptable as the officials see them—taken by tribunals in the adjudication process, that they cannot simply use secondary legislation changes like the change to regulation 13 simply to redress the balance.

The important effects of vibration white finger are felt throughout the length and breadth of the land. However, the cost of retaining the provisions of regulation 13 must be finite, and it is quite wrong to move the goal posts in this way.

I want to refer now to the Income Support (Transitional) Amendment No. 2 Regulations 1989. Ministers' decision to make this change has my unequivocal support. They must have been under an inordinate amount of pressure from their officials to have no truck with any changes, to avoid tinkering with transitional support. I understand that it is a difficult benefit—for a reason to which, if I get a chance, I shall refer later. I recognise that this step must have taken courage, and I welcome it wholeheartedly.

Having said that, I have to point to the fact that about 200,000 people on transitional support will still feel the effect this April. If there have been problems in advertising the proposed changes in regulation 13, there will certainly be worries this April because of the changes in transitional support, and people will be unaware of these, too. The Department is not doing nearly enough to make clear to people, by advertising, the difficulties that they will have when the uprating advantages come through.

Some people who are falling out and are being floated off transitional protection will find that they are getting no actual cash increases. It is my experience, and my submission, that a vast proportion of those 200,000 people will, in ignorance, look forward to operating in the normal way. They will get a shock. They will find themselves in severely straitened financial circumstances in the 12 months following April 1990.

The Government must recognise that, for example, there have been significant changes in the financial circumstances of some poorer families and pensioners, particularly as a result of the poll tax changes. The poll tax

provisions that are about to be visited on people south of the Border have been in operation north of the border for nearly a year. There will be a great need and a great demand for the full protection that the uprating orders afford, but, because of the erosion of transitional protection that has been built in since 1988, that will simply not be available to people who are currently expecting it. The Government must pay some attention to this matter.

The changes relating to severe weather payments, in so far as they go, are welcome. I want to repeat and to reinforce a point that was made earlier: that the flat-rate £5 payment, which was set originally in, I think, 1986, must be a candidate for uprating in some way, either on an occasional, ad hoc basis—every few years—or as part of the price protection available with other benefits. Ministers should look carefully at the level of flat rate benefit for the severe weather payment and find ways to increase it in the immediate future.

Secondly, many DSS offices fall within the ambit of weather stations that are near the coast. The hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow cited an example of this. The weather stations near the coast regularly reflect warmer temperatures.

The best case to illustrate my point is that experienced by my hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) who, in 1987, found the temperature at Aviemore was minus 16 deg C but his constituents did not receive any severe weather payments because the weather station was linked to Kinloss, which never experienced temperatures below zero. Only Eskdalemuir, which is in my constituency, regularly triggers payments, and that is the most inland weather station in Scotland.

The ambient ground temperature can often be significantly reduced by the wind chill factor, and my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) has made strong representations to the Department about that. There are easy and simple methods to establish temperature that include the wind chill factor, so that the Government cannot argue that it is too complicated to do so. The need for the severe weather payment, although luckily not felt this year, is as great as it was, and unless the Government find ways to improve the system, the benefit will be eroded and, like child benefit, will wither on the vine.

9.31 pm

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): The hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) accused the Labour party of not giving credit where credit is due. I hope that we shall have the pleasure of thanking the Minister and giving him full credit for it when he withdraws the regulation altering the law on vibration white finger. My hon. Friends the Members for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay), for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden), for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) and for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) have ably destroyed any case for this change. One of the reasons we feel so passionately about this is our personal experience of heavy industry and our knowledge of how one of the bonuses of working is underpaid degrading jobs is often a crippling disease. It was clear from the speeches of Tory Members and the difficulty that one of them had in pronouncing "pneumoconiosis" how unfamiliar they are with this experience.

This regulation is cruel and unjust and should be withdrawn. I hope that, even at this late stage, the Government will do that. I cannot think of any answer that they could possibly give to justify the regulation. However, my hon. Friends are grateful for the intervention by the Minister of State, which was wholly justified, to allow so many others to come forward. If only 1,000 or 2,000 are left who have not met that claim, their rights should be protected.

The hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) criticised us for not making practical suggestions. However, we have some practical suggestions for the severe weather payments scheme, which is miserly, paltry and unworkable. If it ever has to be operated again, if the greenhouse effect is abated, the scheme will collapse under the weight of its own absurdities, as it did in 1986-87. As hon. Members have said, the payment is only £5 when we know that, on average, pensioners spend over the year £9 a week on heating, and over the winter that is substantially increased. Therefore, £5 is fairly meaningless. The hon. Member for Fylde valuably drew attention to how badly the scheme operated when it was tested. He gave an example of 3,000 people applying and only 500 being successful.

That is precisely what happened. Large numbers applied and, although 1·4 million were entitled to claim under the scheme, 500,000 were not successful, let alone the many people—the one to six who applied—who were not entitled to participate in it. The cost of advertising the scheme in the winter of 1987 represented the price of making 82,000 severe weather payments at that rate.

We suggest that the Government pay out under a scheme that is automatic. It could be done, because the system as it exists provides full details of all those entitled to severe weather payments. The only additional information needed, the Minister informed me some time ago, is how many claimants would be eliminated because they have capital—what was then £500 but is now £1,000. The simple answer is to increase the capital limit—the funeral money—from £1,000 to the usual £3,000. In other words, the information is already in the hands of the Department.

That would end the farce of local temperature triggers. The pay-out could be made on a national basis the moment bitter weather arrived and we would achieve a worthwhile gain for only a modest increase in the number of people receiving benefit. The administrative cost would be slashed to nothing, and the take-up would rise to 100 per cent. Such a system would be simple and cheap and would reach those in greatest peril.

We are well aware of the seriousness of the situation in view of the excessive number of winter deaths. We should send out a signal from the House that does not say, as it was once suggested from the Government Benches, that the elderly should dress up like Mother Hubbard or, as a predecessor of the Under-Secretary suggested, that they should go to jumble sales and deck themselves out for the winter.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): When the hon. Gentleman says that the scheme should operate nationally, does he mean that, although it is freezing in Aberdeen and boiling in Brighton, the scheme should nevertheless apply all over the country?

Mr. Flynn: I am shocked and outraged at the hon. Lady's suggestion that Aberdeen is in the same country as Brighton. I am sure that there would be similar objection if she suggested that Cardiff was in the same country. For this purpose, I am suggesting that the nations within this kingdom are the nations of Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales.

At present, the real value of the scheme is being drowned in administrative costs. It is a ludicrously wasteful arrangement. If it were changed, the nations could be divided into north and south—as many people think they should be divided in England—and in Wales and Scotland the system could work. I think I see Conservative Members shaking their heads in dissent, but that is what happened last time. The scheme was thought to be so ludicrous that hon. Members on both sides were up in arms, saying that it was crazy to wait for triggers that were miles from where the people lived. Finally, the Government decided under pressure to declare a national trigger. Why should they not do that again?

The important message that should go out from the House to the elderly who are at severe risk—and thousands of deaths are involved in this issue—is: "When the cold weather strikes, put up your heating. Keep warm and the costs will be met." That is not the message that is reaching them now. The message coming from the Government is, "We do not care. We are not bothered with what you do." All hon. Members are aware of cases where there is central heating in homes but the elderly do not use it; it is rarely, if ever, switched on. That is a terrible waste.

When discussing the recoupment regulations, the Minister gave an interesting account—it was something fresh for those of us who were on the Standing Committee which considered the enabling legislation—when he said that there would be a saving to the Government of £55 million. Perhaps he should have called it a cut. Either way, where will it come from? We were assured, if I understood the Minister aright, that it would not be a cut in benefits, that it would not be benefit confiscation.

In fact, that is precisely what it is, for while those on benefit will receive their benefits—there is a long list of essential benefits—they will not receive the compensation due to them. It is another Government cut. The Government have suddenly discovered an opportunity to save money and they are doing it in the teeth of universal opposition.

The Minister of State announced in a press release that he had listened to the Association of British Insurers. I accept that he had listened to them, but he had not done what they asked him to do, which was to set the limit at £5,000. I say with some certainty that, in the years ahead, Conservative Members will encounter in their surgeries cases that are so complex and unjust that they will ask themselves, "How on earth did we ever pass that legislation?"

The Government's action is laudable in many ways, and that there is courage behind it is something for which we give them credit. However, there is also in it some recklessness. The Government are trying to achieve an impossible objective in trying to mix compensation paid for injury, suffering or pain with social security funds paid out for very different reasons to maintain a standard of living under certain circumstances. Parts of the scheme are crude legislative lunacy, as will become apparent when cases involving contributory negligence come to the fore.

The Government are taking from claimants not the value of the benefits themselves but the value of compensation that will now never be received. That is the simple truth of the matter. Under the Government's scheme, sometimes the guilty will be rewarded and the innocent will suffer. Many right hon. and hon. Members will find cases coming before them that will be difficult to believe. The great flaw in the scheme is the Government's attempt to mix oil with water, in trying to exchange benefits for compensation.

A number of hon. Members have referred to the Lawson embarrassment bonus, and at least one hon. Member read from a brief that related to the previous debate. If we are to reach some kind of agreement and save unnecessary disputes between both sides of the House, it may be as well if the briefings given to Conservative Members are circulated among right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House. The much-lauded Lawson embarrassment bonus seems to be giving great comfort to Government Members. The story needs repeating.

The sum involved is only £90 million for the first year and £200 million for the second. Right hon. and hon. Members will remember the remarkable series of events. There was the Autumn Statement and an uprating statement, yet there was no mention of the Lawson embarrassment bonus in either of them. Suddenly a remarkable event occurred. The then Chancellor of the Exchequer held a press conference in the company of 12 untruthful, lying journalists and one silent tape recorder, as a consequence of which it was inaccurately reported that the Chancellor intended to means-test pensions.

A matter of weeks passed, and the then lamented Secretary of State for Social Security pulled out of the hat a marvellous new measure—but one involving only a tiny amount of money.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Do not the Opposition welcome that improvement?

Mr. Flynn: I say to the hon. Member for Gelding that of course we welcome it, but it is means-tested and will be received by less than half of the pensioners on income support.

Mr. Mitchell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As in so many other respects, the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) is wrong about the name of my constituency, which is Gedling, not Gelding.

Mr. Flynn: I am sure that there was a Freudian reason for my mistake, but I would not be so indelicate as to explore it.

We entirely share the Government's view that a group of elderly pensioners need special help. However, the new benefit will be means tested and will assist only those aged over 75 who are already receiving income support, or those aged over 60 who are receiving disablement benefits. Half the pensioners on income support will not enjoy that new benefit. The amount payable is only £2·50 to a single person and £3·50 to a married couple, which compensates in only tiny measure for the great cuts that pensioners have suffered because of the breaching of the link between prices and earnings.

In reality, life today is very different from the fantasy world portrayed by Conservative Members. This very day, a report has revealed that 250,000 households in Britain

are in serious financial trouble because of debt. The report, published by the Church of England Children's Society, is part of a great confetti of reports. They come out weekly and they all make the same points. They are issued by bodies which are not Left-wing but are genuinely independent and involved in the care of children and the elderly. The message is repeated on every page of this report. It says that social security cuts have savagely divided Britain.

I see that the Secretary of State has the report with him, and I am sure that he will be able to see a condemnation on every page. It says that the YTS rates are too low; that loans are not working; that making a claim is so difficult that only the desperate succeed; that the system absurdly discourages young people from going to work; that the social fund is inadequate; that the system is hostile to pregnant young women—the list goes on and on.

Each year that the Government have been in office they have produced one major piece of legislation that has cut an important benefit. We have become a divided and unhappy nation. The rich have had tax cuts lavished on them, and the poor have been cruelly robbed. In a mockery of their poverty the ex-Chancellor—the great architect of divided Britain—today flaunts his new wealth. Moonlighting from his parliamentary job, he now brings in a gross salary greater than the earnings of 100 pensioners.

Finally, I quote early-day motion 105, which I commend to Conservative Members:

"That this House notes that at times of growing international tension the Government's policy is to increase spending on weapons, in times of stability the Government's policy is to increase spending on weapons and in times of lessening tension the Government policy is to increase spending on weapons; and calls on the Government to answer a changing world situation with a flexible response."

There must be a flexible response, and we look for a peace dividend as a result of that. Hon. Members on both sides of the House who wish to use that peace dividend constructively for social service will unite to say that a rich slice of it must be spent on social security.

9.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): This has been a wide-ranging and interesting debate—as it is usual to say. The measures have been described variously as squalid and sensible, as cuts and beneficial. There seems to be general agreement on their complexity, and my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson), who reminded the Government of the need to produce simpler regulations, should remember that the Department has received the plain English award for the simplicity of its forms.

There have been balanced contributions from a number of hon. Members, such as my hon. Friends the Members for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young), for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell), for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) and for Fylde (Mr. Jack). There have been passionate contributions from Opposition Members on the understandably difficult issue of industrial injury.

I shall attempt to deal with as many of the issues as possible, which is more than I can say for some of the contributions that have been made.

The draft Social Security (Industrial Injuries) (Regular Employment) Regulations 1990 are, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, wholly beneficial. I am glad that those regulations at least commend themselves to all Members of the House.

I listened with interest to the points raised by the right hon. and hon. Members of the Opposition in connection with the proposal to repeal regulation 13 of the Social Security (Industrial Injuries and Diseases) Miscellaneous Provisions Regulations 1986, and in particular, of course, to their concern about that condition known as vibration white finger. There were strong contributions from, among others, the hon. Members for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman), for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay), for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden), for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) and for Preston (Mrs. Wise).

I remind the House that the original decision to revoke the regulation was made as long ago as December 1988. Almost a year and a quarter will have passed before the regulation ceases to have effect. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said earlier, the transitional regulation has been in operation for nearly three and a half years and there is no justifiable reason now why it should continue. Those for whom this regulation was originally intended have been provided with an opportunity to claim and those who also might benefit from the wider interpretation put upon the regulation by the tribunal of Commissioners in August 1989 have also had ample time to make a claim for benefit.

We have, following representations from Opposition Members, allowed regulation 13 to continue for a further three months. Claims received after the regulation ceases to have effect—this should be remembered—will still be accepted and considered under the current rules. Transitional regulations, especially those of a quite exceptional nature, cannot be allowed to continue indefinitely. The regulation was never intended to cover justifiable ignorance, but circumstances in which a person was mentally or physically incapable of putting in a claim on time. It is a transitional regulation which has been in place more than three years. The time is now right to amend it.

A question was asked about the number of claims that have been received under regulation 13. The answer is 26,000.

Mr. Clay: I hear what the hon. Lady says, but will she give one small undertaking as a gesture of sincerity from the Government? Will she undertake that offices will be asked to locate those claims that were made between vibration white finger becoming a prescribed industrial disease and the Kenneth Potts case? Where, until the commissioner's decision, DSS officers told people that they did not have good cause to claim, will the DSS write, inviting them to resubmit a claim without a time limit?

Mrs. Shephard: I shall look at the hon. Gentleman's suggestion, but I cannot give any undertaking now.

Although claims received at local offices on Monday 12 February will have to be dealt with under the new amendments, I shall ensure that any claims lodged at local offices before that date, including the weekend, will be endorsed accordingly. The adjudication officer will then be able to deal with the claims under the current provisions.

The social fund cold weather payments scheme is one of a range of measures that the Government have taken to help those most at risk during periods of cold weather. It

[Mrs. Shephard]

has a number of merits. It is simple to understand. It provides £5 for particularly vulnerable groups for any seven-day period of cold weather—when the average temperature is 0 deg C or below. The use of that clear, fixed trigger point avoids confusion about eligibility, which is more than can be said for the half-baked suggestions emanating from the Opposition Front Bench.

Our scheme is sensitive to differences in local conditions and although windchill is always a matter for debate we reviewed the effectiveness of the weather stations this autumn and are satisfied that each one is reasonably representative of the main centres of population in the local office's area. The scheme also targets help on those particularly at risk. Payment can be made to the elderly, sick, disabled and very young.

In the past year to October 1989, gas prices fell in real terms by 16 per cent. It now costs less than in 1970. The price of domestic electricity fell by 8 per cent. in the same five years.

The regulations widen access to the scheme further by raising the savings limit for elderly people from £500 to £1,000. As announced by my right hon. Friend, that increased limit for elderly people will be used for the rest of the social fund from April. In order to make it possible for more elderly people to receive cold weather payments this winter, the regulations bring forward the effective date of the change for the cold weather scheme to 1 January. That should be welcomed by the House

Mr. Winnick: Does the hon. Lady realise how miserly those arrangements are? Unless it is freezing, not a penny will be paid and then, as she said, it has to freeze for seven consecutive days. Does she not have constituents like mine, who have the smallest possible income and simply cannot afford to pay their fuel bills even when it is not freezing?

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman knows that allowance is already made in income support for heating costs. The £5 payment is intended to provide additional help in very cold weather.

As for the Income Support (Transitional) Amendment No. 2 Regulations that relate to children returning home from local authority care, we have attempted to help the particularly vulnerable groups. The amendment regulations further reflect our concern about exceptional cases. The regulations will help the tiny minority of families who still have transitional protection and whose children are in local authority care.

We provide such families with additional benefit when their children come home temporarily from care. We wish to encourage children to take advantage of home leave. We do not want the additional benefit of leave to reduce the financial protection for parents. We have therefore legislated accordingly. I remind the House that special arrangements were incorporated in the transitional protection for the severely disabled and also for those who require respite care in residential homes or nursing homes.

As for recoupment, the Opposition have misunderstood the position, despite the fact that the matter was fully debated last year in Committee. The division of damages into special damages and general damages is almost academic. The distinctions apply only to cases that are heard in court—1 per cent. of all cases. In all the other cases—99 per cent.—compensation for total damages is already sought. The aim of the legislation and regulations is to accept the realities.

In general terms, the legislation is based on two fundamental principles: that the compensator should fully compensate a person for injuries caused to him and that his liability should not be subsidised by the social security services. Such a scheme operates in most EC countries. I do not know why the Opposition fail to understand that it is the compensator's liability that is dealt with in the legislation.

The second principle is that the injured person should not receive more from two sources than he might receive in compensation or social security alone. However, the savings to which Opposition Members referred come from the compensators. We have been grateful for the co-operation of a number of outside organisations in working out the details of the scheme in such a way as to reduce the burdens on them. We are well aware of the calls for a higher small payment limit, but we believe that £2,500 is a reasonable figure.

It has been an interesting debate, with good contributions from hon. Members on both sides of the House. On the whole, the regulations provide a package of measures that are designed to improve and refine the way that the social security system operates. They deserve to be supported. I recommend their approval.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Social Security (Industrial Injuries) (Regular Employment) Regulations 1990, which were laid before this House on 18th January, be approved.

That the draft Social Security (Recoupment) Regulations 1990, which were laid before this House on 25th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

Motion made, and Question put,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Social Security (Industrial Injuries and Diseases) Miscellaneous Provisions (Amendment) Regulations 1990 (S.I., 1990, No. 73) dated 22nd January 1990, a copy of which was laid before this House on 23rd January, be annulled.—*[Mr. Meacher.]*

The House proceeded to a Division, and Mr. Speaker *having directed that the doors be locked——*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I understand that there has been a miscalculation and that I called for the doors to be locked one minute early. I shall have the doors opened for one minute.

Whereupon the doors were unlocked.

The House having divided: Ayes 218, Noes 270.

Division No. 69] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis

Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfedder, James
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, W.
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Budgen, Nicholas
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*

Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nicholas Baker and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

Question accordingly negatived.

East Hertfordshire Health Authority

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

10.13 pm

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn Hatfield): I thank—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the hon. Member wait a moment please? Will hon. Members who are not remaining for the Adjournment debate please leave quietly?

Mr. Evans: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for granting me this Adjournment debate. I welcome the opportunity to raise in full the funding of East Hertfordshire health authority. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is only too well aware of the strong feelings on this subject held by myself and my hon. Friends whose constituencies have the misfortune to fall within the ambit of North West Thames regional health authority. We have run out of patience and we want to see some action that will put an end to the cycle of incompetence, mismanagement of public funds and generally deceitful behaviour of the regional health authority, which has dogged patient care in our area for so long. Promises made by the region no longer have any credibility, and that has undermined staff morale.

To appreciate the specific problems faced by East Hertfordshire health authority, it is necessary first to see them within the wider context of the general position of the six shire authorities in the North West Thames region. In particular, it is necessary to examine the methods and formulae used by the regional health authority to allocate funds to the 13 district health authorities in the region.

For many years, the shire authorities have argued—rightly—for a formula that would result in a more equitable distribution of funds and for one that would take into account the distance from target and over target. Instead, the regional health authority has persisted with its practice of distributing funds on a pro rata to cash limits basis. In other words, the message that it has been sending out to its Left-wing friends in the inner London health authorities is clear—"The more you spend, the more we'll give you"—and that is precisely what it has done. The result is a regional health authority in which the inner London authorities can go grossly over budget without fear and where many of the shire authorities are forced to make cuts to help pay for that extravagant spending.

Perhaps not surprisingly, therefore, an inspection of the underlying position in 1989-90 of the 14 regional health authorities in England on the basis of income to expenditure reveals that only three are in deficit and one, of course, is the North West Thames regional health authority with a deficit of approximately £13 million, which is the largest and more than twice the size of the other two deficits put together.

The shocking practice of punishing well-managed and prudent authorities for the irresponsible and spendthrift policies of their neighbours is a problem that the Government have addressed in relation to local authorities. It is time that regional health authorities had to succumb to greater financial discipline—otherwise the incompetence of authorities such as North West Thames will continue to prevail.

That financial incompetence has manifested itself most recently in the expenditure on the Westminster and

Chelsea hospital scheme. During the nine months between July 1988 and March 1989, the cost of the scheme rose from an estimated £78 million to a staggering £173 million. My hon. Friends who represent shire seats in the region agreed to support the scheme on the basis of the original estimate and on the understanding that it would not have a detrimental effect on capital projects in the shire authorities. It is difficult to see how it can do anything but, given the vast increase in spending that is involved.

More recently, we have learnt that the authority has had to go back on a promise that it made to fund a CT scanner, which would have cost £100,000 in revenue to support. That promise has been broken not once, but twice.

Luton and Dunstable hospital needs £12 million for capital needs, which is a mere 15 per cent. of the overspend at Riverside. I repeat to my hon. Friend the Minister that we are not asking for more money, we are pointing out the consistent misuse of public funds, which results in some people in the region having as much as 25 per cent. more spent on their health than is spent on others.

Putting it another way, why should a person living in Welwyn Hatfield have 75p spent on him when for someone living in Brent the amount increases to £1? Where is the fairness in that? Why do shire authorities receive only 31 per cent. of the region's funding when, on the basis of population, they should rightfully receive 43 per cent.? Perhaps the Minister can enlighten us on that and not give the standard answer that next year we shall get 33 per cent., and the year after 35 per cent. I am afraid that we do not believe him any more. Only if the chairman and his administrators are changed, and only if the funds are reallocated, will we believe the promises that have been made over the years.

Frustration, bordering on contempt, for North West Thames regional health authority is not confined to my hon. Friends whose constituencies are within the region. Last month South Bedfordshire community health council passed unanimously a motion of no confidence in the ability of the regional health authority to manage the financial and planning affairs of the National Health Service in North West Thames region. The motion was supported by the chairmen of the other five shire community health councils in the region. It is worth reminding the House that those are independent bodies that represent local opinion on Health Service matters.

The South Bedfordshire motion encapsulated neatly the problems encountered in North West Thames. It was passed in view of the health authority's failure to take the necessary financial and planning measures to achieve the substantial strategic redeployment of resources from London to shire districts; to prevent the development of chronic overspending in the major strategically losing districts during the 1980s; to exercise the necessary measures to monitor, control and re-evaluate the cost escalation of capital projects, particularly in central London, one of which has risen by 220 per cent. of its June 1988 cost; and to recognise and fund the desperate and immediate capital needs of the district. That is a damaging indictment, but one that is entirely justified.

The problems for East Hertfordshire, however, have their origin as far back as 1974. There is not time to dwell on the background to the whole sorry affair. Suffice it to say that East Hertfordshire has traditionally suffered from under-funding and has been consistently under pressure to make economies of scale. There is a feeling of desperation because we want to give service to the people, but starvation of money eventually weakens one's resolve. Yet money could easily have been found.

Let us take, for example, the staffing ratios of East Hertfordshire compared with the Riverside authority, an authority with a similar population but located in central London. Why has that authority funds for 120 occupational therapists compared to East Hertfordshire's measly 19, 119 physiotherapists compared to 18, and 179 district nurses compared to 17? So it goes on, with health visitors, speech therapists, psychiatric nurses and chiropodists. If measures had been taken to reduce the overstaffing in Riverside, money could have been diverted to assist the under-funded shire health authorities that are struggling to produce a basic service.

The real scandal involves nurses' regrading. The Prime Minister herself stood at the Dispatch Box and told the House that the Government would refund in full the cost of clinical regrading. However, the process of regrading has left us in East Hertfordshire with a shortfall estimated to be £400,000, excluding the cost of appeals. Despite earlier statements to the contrary, the regional health authority claims that it is not now in a position to fund the shortfall. Yet it is responsible. The money was there. It was its formula for distributing the money which led to a shortfall in East Bedfordshire and also in South West Hertfordshire.

The chairman of East Hertfordshire health authority is convinced, as I am, that had the exercise been conducted on the basis of actual cost there would have been enough resources to go round. The irony is that East Hertfordshire undertook the task more effectively than virtually anyone else, completing the exercise back in May last year, several months ahead of other authorities, some of which are still hearing appeals today.

The success and efficiency of the regrading process in East Hertfordshire has been recognised and acknowledged by the chairman of the regional health authority, yet it is his actions that have helped to bring about this shortfall, a shortfall that could have disastrous implications for an already overstretched authority such as East Hertfordshire. The effect of years of incompetence and mismanagement is being felt every day in East Hertfordshire.

Mr. Robert B. Jones (Hertfordshire, West): I am grateful to my hon. Friend and I apologise for interrupting his catalogue of the iniquities of North West Thames region, but it is true not only of East Hertfordshire but of the other shire districts. In North West Hertfordshire, such projects as the Marnham ward as part of the waiting list initiative are having to be cut back because the inefficiency of the region in distributing money to the districts. I hope that my hon. Friend will press this home to the Minister and make sure that action is taken soon.

Mr. Evans: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention —it only underlines what I am saying about East Hertfordshire.

We have a loss of new out-patient appointments, fewer operations, a reduction in the number of respite beds, the suspension of some sessions and a freeze on many current vacancies throughout the district. How long will this go on? I repeat: it is not more money that is sought, but rather a more equitable distribution of available funds based on capitation. Why should £1 in Brent be worth only 75p in

[Mr. Evans]

Hatfield, Watford, Hemel Hempstead, St. Albans, Stevenage, Broxbourne, Hertford, South West Hertfordshire, or East Bedfordshire? The list is endless.

The Health Service in East Hertfordshire can no longer survive. What is needed is a solution. One was proposed by the National Health Service management board to North West Thames in July 1988, when the situation in East Hertfordshire was analysed. I hope that the Minister will be able to tell us whether these recommendations were pursued by the management board and whether they have been acted upon by North West Thames, because we see precious little evidence of it in East Hertfordshire.

The South Bedfordshire community health council concluded its motion of no confidence by calling upon the Secretary of State

"to review the activities of the North West Thames regional health authority and to take the measures necessary to remedy the situation".

I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will tell me that that is exactly what he intends to do. If not, why not? I call on him to instruct the Audit Commission to investigate this serious matter. Does he not realise that the National Health Service in the North West Thames health authority area will never have enough money while financial incompetence prevails?

10.28 pm

Mr. Bowen Wells (Hertford and Stortford): I am deeply grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) and to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for allowing me just two minutes to speak on this very important issue. The Minister will realise how angry are the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield and I and other hon. Members representing constituencies in the region and here tonight.

This has been going on not just for the past three years; we have been battling with the problem for the 10 years that I have been connected with it, and longer.

When Riverside was designed, it was said that, once it was built, money could be put into the districts. Instead, less money has come to them. East Hertfordshire has been closing beds, hospitals and family planning clinics for the past three or four months, while the North West Thames regional health authority indulges itself with another expensive scheme called Parkside. There, the number of nurses attending each patient will be four times, and the community nursing will be 10 times, that provided in East Hertfordshire—and that is just an estimate.

We are angry at the way that the Department of Health treats us. Ministers say, "Go back to the regional health authority and the district health authorities." When we complain to the regional health authority it says, "Go back to the Ministers." That leaves my hon. Friends and me in an impossible position in trying to get anything done.

Unless my hon. Friend the Minister can sort out the regional health authority in the way suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield, he must take out the whole of the shire county districts from the London regional health authorities. Let them be funded separately so that our areas can obtain a proper allocation to take care of patients in our hospitals, near their homes. That is the only solution unless my hon. Friend the Minister agrees to undertake a proper inquiry and to ensure that the chaos, inefficiency, stupidity and lack of care by the North West Thames regional health authority—which, unfortunately, is supported by some of the most senior medical consultants in the London hospitals—is sorted out. I hope that he will make a robust reply.

10.31 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Roger Freeman): My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State and I are left in no doubt about the strong feelings of my hon. Friends the Members for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans), for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) and for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells). They and their colleagues met my right hon and learned Friend and me on 16 and 17 January and expressed their strong feelings in forthright and trenchant terms. There is no doubt in Richmond house about the strength of feeling in the shire districts of North West Thames about the relative allocation of funds.

My right hon. and learned Friend and I have total confidence in the integrity and competence of the chairman and the regional general manager of the North West Thames regional health authority. They work extremely hard for the benefit of patients in the region. They, my right hon. and learned Friend and I recognise that there are very sharp differences of opinion on the issue, and in the 10 minutes available I shall try to deal with some of the points raised.

I welcome the acceptance by my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield that the present level of funding in the National Health Service is adequate. Indeed, he recognised the substantial advances made in recent years in funding the NHS, and I am grateful to him for his remarks. The case is not often put so trenchantly and clearly. Health Service funding for the hospital and community health services stands at £15 billion, and substantial and real rates of growth have been enjoyed in recent years.

My hon. Friend is quarrelling not about the total funding, but about the basis of allocation. The record shows that there has been a shift from the London districts to the shire districts of North West Thames during the past few years. I accept that it is not enough for my hon. Friend. However, it is important to put on the record the fact that between 1982-83 and 1988-89 the region enjoyed a cash increase in revenue resources of 48 per cent.; the outer London districts enjoyed a cash increase of 44 per cent.; the inner London districts had an increase of 42 per cent.; and East Hertfordshire health authority had an increase of 60 per cent. I do not have the figures for the other districts.

Mr. Wells: What about population?

Mr. Freeman: I shall deal with population in a moment. There has been a relative shift over that six-year period. We calculate that, at 1988-89 prices, about £20 million has been moved out of London to the shire districts. I take the point that, although there has been a shift, my hon. Friends are not satisfied with its extent.

I shall now deal with what my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield said in connection with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's statement on nurse regrading. We should be clear that the Prime Minister's statement related to full funding on what the estimated cost was said to be of the nurse regrading exercise. She made that statement before the exercise was launched. Her statement

stands. No Prime Minister or Minister could give a blank cheque offering to pay the full cost of the nurse regrading exercise. That exercise is under way. She gave the undertaking that the full estimated cost based upon the estimates for the districts and regions would be paid.

There are two points in our White Paper about weighted capitation which I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield will welcome. We have started for the regions the process of allocating funds in a more equitable way, which is weighted capitation. We have started for 1990-91 and in the two subsequent years we shall fund all the regions on the basis of capitation. that means that the number of residents in each region will be weighted for demography and morbidity. In the Thames regions there is an addition to that to take account of the relatively higher cost of providing services.

I now come to the vital point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield. We are saying to all 14 regions in England and Wales that they must make a positive start in 1991-92, the first year of our reforms, to allocate resources within each region on the basis of weighted capitation. That will take some years. I understand that the North West Thames region has started that process, albeit in a modest way. No doubt that is the result of pressure by my hon. Friends. I understand that, for 1990-91, some £3·5 million out of a total increase of resources to the region of £27 million is being allocated essentially on the basis of weighted capitation.

I could quite understand my hon. Friends saying that that is only £3·5 million and what about the rest of the funds allocated, as my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield rightly said, on the basis of inflation. North West Thames has begun the process and, like all the other regions, it will have to continue the process next year. I am told that the East Hertfordshire region will enjoy an increase of 9·91 per cent. next year, compared with the figure for the regions of 7 per cent.

My second point about the White Paper is perhaps more significant in terms of 1991-92, the financial year that begins in about 12 months. We have said that all districts, including East Hertfordshire, will be funded on the number of residents in each district, and not upon historic activity. I do not think that many hon. Members have yet appreciated the significant basis of funding that will occur in that year. For the first time, the health authority of my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield will have under its control sums related to the residents in the district.

I suspect that my hon. Friend's district is an exporter of services, possibly to the London teaching hospitals and to surrounding hospitals. Through the process of negotiating and agreeing contracts between itself and other hospitals, the district health authority will be able to control the flow of resources to outside hospitals and districts. Candidly, we expect that, in the first year, the district health authority will broadly validate the existing flow of patients because we do not want a great disturbance in the pattern of patient care. However, it will, for the first time, be possible for the district health authority to control its own destiny and the flow of patients.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: My hon. Friend must not pretend that people go for treatment in London because that is what they choose. They go because the waiting lists are shorter there. They would much prefer to be treated in the hospitals in the shire district, and if we had our share of the money we could treat more patients there because it is cheaper to do so.

Mr. Freeman: My hon. Friend is right, and that is why we must all agree that our proposals for weighted capitation in the White Paper will benefit all shire districts. He must also accept that, with our concept of money following the patients, if we give the district health authority the funds, although the patients may be going to the London teaching hospitals, it will be able to decide whether those resources should be spent within the district. That will enable patients, perhaps for elective surgery, to get those services performed locally and as quickly. That is a major change in the basis of funding, and we believe that it will be welcomed by my hon. Friends.

My hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield also mentioned the Riverside and Parkside district health authorities. I am disturbed by the figures of the increased costs of the new hospital that he quoted tonight. I shall look into that, and he is right to remind me of them. However, as a result of the Riverside reorganisation, we anticipate revenue savings of £15 million per annum by 1993-94. The Parkside proposals look like releasing some £7 million of revenue savings, and they will be available for reallocation.

I share the aim in whose direction my hon. Friends have pointed me. It is of a fairer, more equitable distribution of funds within the region. Our proposals in the White Paper, and our understanding of the strength of feeling of my hon. Friends, will ultimately lead to that goal.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nineteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 8 February 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF LONDON (SPITALFIELDS MARKET) BILL *(By Order)*
Order for consideration of Lords amendments read.
To be considered on Monday 19 February at Seven o'clock.

REDBRIDGE LONDON BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*
Order for further consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday 15 February.

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL (No. 2) BILL *(By Order)*
Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday 15 February.

CITY OF LONDON (VARIOUS POWERS) BILL *(By Order)*
Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Monday 19 February at Seven o'clock.

Mr. Speaker: As the 16 Bills set down for Second Reading have blocking motions, with the leave of the House I shall put them as a single group.

VALE OF GLAMORGAN (BARRY HARBOUR) BILL *[Lords] (By Order)*

ADELPHI ESTATE BILL *(By Order)*

EXMOUTH DOCKS BILL *(By Order)*

HYTHE, KENT, MARINA BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (VICTORIA) BILL *(By Order)*

PENZANCE SOUTH PIER EXTENSION BILL *(By Order)*

SHARD BRIDGE BILL *(By Order)*

TEES AND HARTLEPOOL PORT AUTHORITY BILL *(By Order)*

VENTNOR HARBOUR BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON REGIONAL TRANSPORT (PENALTY FARES) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND BILL *(By Order)*

MIDLAND METRO BILL *(By Order)*

SOUTH YORKSHIRE LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT (No. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

CATTEWATER RECLAMATION BILL *(By Order)*

HUMBERSIDE COUNTY COUNCIL BILL *(By Order)*
Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 15 February.

BRITISH RAILWAYS ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL *(By Order)*
Order for consideration read.
To be considered on Thursday 15 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Farm Animals (Welfare)

1. **Mr. Janman:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what policies he is considering further to improve farm animal welfare practices.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Gummer): Yesterday I announced a major initiative, which aims to achieve significant improvements in the welfare of all farm animals in Europe. The important features are to set proper standards for animals in transit and for export, to achieve high standards on farms and at slaughter and to ensure that Community welfare legislation is rigorously enforced.

Mr. Janman: I welcome my right hon. Friend's initiative. He knows that I have written to him on several occasions about animal welfare. Will he confirm that unless action is taken on a Communitywide basis, we could well be in danger of importing substantial amounts of food from other countries in the Community where the increasingly high standards that we are adopting in the United Kingdom are not being adopted?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is perfectly right. If we do not get Europeanwide standards at least to the level that now applies in Britain, our farmers meeting those higher standards will be undercut by other countries producing foods at standards that we would not tolerate here.

Mr. Duffy: In introducing his charter last night, the Minister accepted that he had a moral duty to ensure that the highest standards of animal welfare are met. How does he square that with his continued tolerance of ritual slaughter?

Mr. Gummer: I intend to make a statement about ritual slaughter in the not too-distant-future. The hon. Gentleman's religious position is well known. In a civilised society we have to bring together two imperatives: first, the proper care of animals and secondly, the proper rights of individuals with strong religious views to carry out those views.

Mr. Hunter: Bearing in mind the EC directive on battery hens, in which arguably, standards are set too low, will my right hon. Friend ensure that EC harmonisation on animal welfare does not take place at the lowest common denominator?

Mr. Gummer: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right. The current level of 450 is unacceptable. We fought for a higher level in the original negotiations and discussions in which I took part a couple of years ago. We are now insisting that the Commission brings forward recommendations to raise the level significantly.

Dr. David Clark: Will the Minister confirm that over the past few years there has been no trade in or export from Britain of live horses for slaughter—a practice which British people find particularly abhorrent? In view of that, why in his announcement yesterday did he throw in the towel to the EEC and accept the introduction of that unpalatable trade? Why has not the right hon. Gentleman sought a derogation to stop the trade in live horses for slaughter, on the ground that our horses suffer extra distress due to a sea crossing?

Mr. Gummer: I did not throw in the towel and I would not have dreamt of doing so. I said clearly that we shall fight in the Community to retain the present arrangments to stop the export of horses or for an alternative that meets the same requirements. The hon. Gentleman should read the statements that I make rather than make them up for himself.

Energy Efficiency

3. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the contribution agriculture can make to the efficient use and generation of energy.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): My Department gives grants under the farm and conservation grant scheme to encourage the use of renewable sources of energy, to cut energy loss or to recover energy that would otherwise go to waste.

Mr. Bruce: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply, but will the Ministry do more to encourage the use of farm waste products to generate energy? I noticed in the press that a farm near Eye in Suffolk generates electricity from the methane that chicken manure creates. The slogan for farmers in the 1990s should be not, "Power to the people" but, "Power from the pullets".

Mr. Curry: The Ministry assists the purchase of equipment for waste recovery. The recovery of methane from waste has generally not proved economic, but should it prove so we should certainly wish to accelerate that process.

Mr. Key: Now that my hon. Friend has reached the difficult but balanced view that it is necessary to ban straw burning, will he take all possible steps to ensure that farmers are encouraged to use surplus straw in an energy-efficient manner and, furthermore, that the necessary technology is available to them at an economic price?

Mr. Curry: We offer assistance for equipment to treat straw to make it more digestible and more usable as an energy source. My hon. Friend will be aware of a large-scale project that uses straw, which would be extremely helpful.

Egg Imports

4. **Dr. Moonie:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the incidence of salmonella contamination in imported eggs.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Maclean): Eight consignments of imported eggs have been found to be contaminated with invasive salmonella since April 1989, and on each occasion we have asked the member state concerned to take remedial action. In addition, my right hon. Friend pressed the European Community at the

last Agriculture Council speedily to introduce on an EC wide basis measures similar to those adopted by the United Kingdom.

Dr. Moonie: That sounded a most impressive answer, but I am sure that the Minister will agree that the welcome increase in standards of egg production in Britain has not been matched by a fall in the number of cases of salmonellosis in humans. Will he therefore consider introducing a regulation similar to the one that the Germans are applying to stop imports of our beef?

Mr. Maclean: We have no justification under EC law to slap a ban on all imported eggs, just as other countries did not slap a ban on our eggs when the salmonella crisis was at its height.

Mr. Alexander: I accept all that, but if a farm in this country shows the slightest trace of salmonella, is not it the case that its entire flock must be destroyed, yet testing at the ports of entry is minimal and by the time we have decided that there is salmonella in eggs, they have already been distributed?

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend points to the absolute necessity of an EC wide regime. That is why we have accepted the advice of the Select Committee on Agriculture and redoubled our efforts in Europe to achieve a system of salmonella testing across the EC.

Mr. Morley: The Minister well knows that the Germans have used article 36 of the treaty of Rome to stop British beef entering Germany. Why cannot he use the same article to hold imported eggs until they have been proved to be safe? Our producers are suffering from the rightly strict safeguards and assessments while imported eggs are being let off scot-free.

Mr. Maclean: The one little point that the hon. Gentleman did not mention was that the Germans used the treaty illegally, contrary to the advice of the standing scientific committee and contrary to the view of the European Commission. It is not appropriate for Britain to try to use EC rules illegally to place a totally unjustified ban on eggs.

Mr. Lord: Nevertheless, when all the explanations are given, does my hon. Friend agree that for too long, we have been playing the game straight? Is it not true that we must either learn to bend the rules in the way that the foreigners are doing, or otherwise—[HON. MEMBERS: Play the game.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lord: In a nutshell, are not our farmers entitled to feel angry? The bottom line is still that eggs may be imported to compete with our eggs, but our quite acceptable beef is banned from Germany.

Mr. Maclean: The bottom line is that we should learn from other countries how to market produce. We have all seen the words of the Select Committee that British eggs are safer than imported eggs. We all know that, as the Select Committee pointed out, it is perfectly legitimate for every producer in this country to mark on the pack where the eggs have been produced, whether in Britain, Scotland, England, Wales or any county. That is a marketing initiative that our producers can take.

Hormones

5. **Mr. Gareth Wardell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many prosecutions there have been in the United Kingdom for illegal hormone use by United Kingdom livestock farmers.

Mr. Maclean: In 1989, four prosecution cases were taken and two resulted in convictions. This Ministry will prosecute whenever we have sufficient evidence of law breaking.

Mr. Wardell: When will the Minister listen to the staff of his Ministry and act with his Home Office colleagues to close the gap in United Kingdom law that allows the illegal implanting of hormones to go unpunished because of the requirement that prosecutions have to be brought within six months of the hormones being implanted?

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman does a great disservice to those who are enforcing the regulations in this country and to those who are producing beef. He is right to demand that any who break the law should be brought to justice. We have the most rigid surveillance system on the illegal use of hormones of any country in the European Community. We have found such a tiny sample that the hon. Gentleman should direct his attention to other European Community countries, where there are official reports of 10 per cent. hormone abuse, and not to this country.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the Minister tell the House in rather more detail how the use of illegal hormones in cattle is detected, so that we can see whether the number of prosecutions that have been brought match the amount of testing? As it is easy enough to discover the illegal use of hormones among Welsh weightlifters, we should be able to discover it among cattle.

Mr. Maclean: I am delighted to reply to the gentleman farmer from Newham. Hormones would usually be administered behind the ear and our veterinary officers are more adept at detecting traces on the surface of the animal if it has suffered from illegal hormone use. One can also pick up such use in the meat at slaughterhouses. We carry out about 40,000 random tests of meat products in this country for many residues and contaminants. Those are the technical details of how it is done. I am convinced that our surveillance system is the most comprehensive. If there is hormone abuse, we are catching it, and at present, we are catching a tiny amount. The hon. Gentleman should look to other countries for hormone abuse.

Farming Diversification

6. **Mr. Kennedy:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on progress towards farming diversification.

Mr. Gummer: Two Government-sponsored reports published recently give, for the first time, a clear picture of farm diversification in the United Kingdom. Those reports show that about one third of the farmers who responded have developed some form of farm-diversified business activity. That result gives a clear demonstration of the success of the Government's policy in this area.

Mr. Kennedy: Does the Minister agree—the flooding of the past few days has confirmed the fact—that in an area

such as the Scottish Highlands, there are practical problems in diversification because, in much of the agricultural activity, there is simply no alternative? Will he bear in mind, as he pursues the diversification policy, the problems of diversifying in an area such as the Scottish Highlands? Will he also bear in mind the worry that diversification into other sectors elsewhere in Britain, especially the sheep sector, may have a resultant knock-on effect on prices and on the economic basis of agriculture in the north? Will he, therefore, be sympathetic and sensitive to those problems in the years to come?

Mr. Gummer: That is why I agreed to announce a week or so ago an increase in the hill livestock compensatory allowance payments to the highland areas. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman agrees with me that it was a disgrace that a Labour Front-Bench spokesman referred to that statement as "footling", as if the hill areas do not matter. We now know what Labour thinks about the hill areas.

Mr. Boswell: Will my right hon. Friend confirm his affirmative nod to me in the debate on Tuesday when I said that although farm diversification was welcome and that he was to be commended for it, it could make only a marginal contribution to farm incomes? Will he warn farmers that this place would simply not be big enough if all of them followed me by diversifying into Parliament?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend has diversified extremely effectively. Many farmers find alternative ways of using their capital and land. Clearly, the main business of farming is and will continue to be the production of food. Every farmer who diversifies helps to take the pressure off farmers who are unable so to do.

Mr. Hardy: Which adjective would the Minister prefer to footling—mischievous, irresponsible or misleading?

Mr. Gummer: Now it appears that the Opposition think that the hill farmers of Britain are mischievous, irresponsible and misleading, as well as footling.

Animal Health

7. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to compensate farmers at 100 per cent. of the market value for beasts which he requires to be slaughtered on animal health grounds.

Mr. Maclean: Different levels of compensation are payable according to the disease control measure concerned. In some cases, an owner may receive more than the value of the slaughtered animal. I keep all aspects of my compensation policy under constant review.

Mr. Speller: Does my hon. Friend agree that at a time when farm incomes are falling and the green pound is grossly overvalued in Britain, we should at least compensate farmers, if only to avoid the remote possibility of people seeking to evade the law, thus spreading the disease problems that we already have?

Mr. Maclean: I hear what my hon. Friend says. I have great sympathy for farmers whose cows suffer from bovine spongiform encephalopathy, particularly farmers who have more than one animal affected by it. The mechanism for preventing BSE from getting into the food chain is not compensation, which is intended to help farmers suffering financial loss. We protect the food chain by the host of other measures that we take, particularly the offals ban.

Mr. Martlew: Will the Minister extend the compensation scheme to sheep suffering from scrapie? Under the present system a sheep suffering from scrapie is slaughtered, its head is cut off and condemned and the rest of the carcase goes to the butcher. Is it not a fact that BSE has been caused by the scrapie virus?

Mr. Maclean: No, Sir. Scrapie has been well known and recorded for the past 250 years. It is present in many other countries. There has been no risk to human health whatever. I keep all aspects of my compensation policy under review, but this is not a matter which I am currently considering.

Mr. Neale: Will my hon. Friend confirm that there is no evidence that the National Farmers Union has encouraged its members, or the Minister, to avoid public health requirements? Does he accept that in the lead contamination incident, which affects part of the west country, innocent farmers may suffer financial hardship as a result of the blanket application of such precautions? Will he make sure that in future he supplies sufficient resources for such incidents, so that hardship is minimised?

Mr. Maclean: Of course, we want to minimise hardship to farmers or others who suffer through no fault of their own. The restrictions that my Department put in place in the lead in feed incident in the west country were based on the best scientific advice and were intended to protect the human food chain. Where we had information that feed may have been given to farmers, we applied restrictions. As soon as we had information that human health was not in jeopardy, we removed those restrictions.

Mr. Ron Davies: Why is the Minister so obstinate in rejecting the demands from hon. Members of all parties for 100 per cent. compensation for BSE? As he knows that it is impossible to find a farmer, a vet or a local authority inspector who will deny that BSE-infected animals are entering the food chain, will he now reconsider his decision? If he introduces 100 per cent. compensation, at least he can start to deal with the problem of clinically infected animals. If he is then prepared to accept the recommendation of the Tyrrell committee to introduce random sampling of all bovine brains, at least the public will have some idea of the extent of the epidemic, or does he simply not want the public to know?

Mr. Maclean: That last remark is outrageous. The hon. Gentleman is right to advance an argument for farmers receiving more compensation because they have suffered financial loss, but that argument is totally separate from protecting the human food chain. It is not right to suggest that BSE-infected animals are getting into the food chain, because we have taken all preventive measures. The recent record of the British Veterinary Association states:

> "But, there was no evidence that the current compensation level was encouraging farmers to shed off animals for slaughter and inclusion in the food chain."

I keep my compensation policy under review and I am concerned about financial loss for farmers. However, our compensation policy has nothing to do with protecting the human food chain. We have other measures to do that.

Mr. Hague: I accept many of my hon. Friend's arguments, but does he at least accept the principle that no farmer should be worse off because of reporting a suspected instance of BSE? Is he confident that 50 per cent. compensation is sufficient to ensure that and will he consider whether a higher percentage many be necessary?

Mr. Maclean: Of couse, I reaffirm that I keep my compensation policy under review. There is nothing to deter a farmer from reporting a suspected case because, as everyone should know, if we destroy an animal and later discover from veterinary analysis that it does not have BSE, we pay 100 per cent. compensation in any case.

Loan Interest

8. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the burden of loan interest which is being carried by the agricultural industry.

Mr. Curry: We do understand the problems of farmers facing difficulties, but I must point out that the total income from farming increased by 11 per cent. last year, after the effect of interest payments had been take into account. The fight against inflation must remain the major priority for the Government and is very much in the interests of farmers.

Mr. Home Robertson: The Minister has conveniently avoided explaining exactly how much the industry is paying in interest rates at the moment. However, I am grateful to him for confirming in a written reply earlier this week that the industry is paying out as much in interest rates as he is paying into it for market regulation and price guarantees in the current year. Will he acknowledge that the £1,000 million cost of interest to farmers this year is more than five times what it was when the Labour Government left office? How can the industry adjust to its changing priorities and invest for the future after 1992 if the Government continue to maintain the highest interest rates in Europe?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman was highly implausible on the subject of interest rates when he spoke in the debate two days ago and he has got worse since. No farmer listening to those remarks is likely to conclude that a Labour Government would be of any benefit to him. Indeed, once farmers have listened to the remarks that the Leader of the Opposition is likely to make to the National Farmers Union next week, I am sure that they will conclude that they are entirely right to vote Conservative and that they will continue to do so.

Mr. Quentin Davies: Does my hon. Friend recognise that high interest rates are only one of the burdens that farmers face at present, the others being the overvaluation of the green pound and falling real output prices? Does he further recognise that the improvement in farming incomes to which he alluded was largely the result of good weather last year in both the drilling and the harvesting periods and that, in the nature of things, one cannot count on the weather for ever? When he is next contemplating moves, whether in an environmental context or in relation to straw burning, that would place additional burdens on the farming industry, will he consider very carefully this complex of burdens that the farming industry faces?

Mr. Curry: It is a fact that high interest rates create problems for all people in the business community. In that regard, farmers are no different from other business people. We are certainly at pains to minimise unnecessary burdens on farmers. That is why we are going to Brussels determined to achieve a green pound devaluation that will represent a substantial boost to the prices received by farmers in this country.

Mr. Wilson: Does the Minister recognise that high interest rates force people in rural communities to find other means of earning a living and that in many rural areas, particularly in Scotland, a traditional way of ekeing out a living is by catching wild fish, including salmon? Does the Minister realise that many people in Scotland have never accepted, and will never accept, the ludicrous proposition that wild fish that swim the Atlantic become private property the moment they enter a river system? In that spirit, will the Minister accept my congratulations on the Government's humiliating climbdown this week when they finally abandoned the salmon dealing licensing scheme and the absurd idea——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Does this relate to loan interest?

Mr. Wilson: Yes, Sir.

Does the Minister accept that having wasted the time of Parliament for two years and the time of civil servants for four years in their attempts, at the bidding of landlord interests, to create this scheme, they have finally admitted defeat and abandoned it?

Mr. Curry: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will wish to congratulate the Government on taking an extremely sensible decision not to erect a vast bureaucratic apparatus which would not work. That is a matter for congratulation, and I accept the hon. Gentleman's congratulations with pleasure.

Mr. Speaker: I still think that that has nothing to do with loan interest.

Eastern Europe

9. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what initiatives his Department is taking to assist the agricultural needs of eastern European countries.

Mr. Gummer: My Department is actively involved in building closer links with east European countries. As part of this involvement, I recently met the East German Minister of Agriculture in Berlin, and I hope soon to lead a group of business men on visits to Hungary and Poland.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the most effective ways of assisting eastern European agriculture is the kind of joint venture entered into last October by the British Sugar Corporation and the Polish foreign trade organisation on sugar? Such an arrangement increases the amount of capital going into east Europe's industry, increases its expertise, and increases its vital foreign exchange earnings. What action will my right hon. Friend take to ensure that more British firms invest in that sort of venture?

Mr. Gummer: Several of the business men who will accompany me to those two countries are already engaged in joint ventures, and I hope that the number of such

ventures will be increased. I have also got together a number of farming groups, farming co-operatives and farmers who hope to help those countries to re-equip their farms and run them in the efficient way of the capitalist West, as against the Socialist way that they have had up to now.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Although it is wise to help to improve agriculture in eastern Europe and make it more efficient, will the Minister always bear in mind the danger to agriculture in the European Community and the United Kingdom should the eastern European countries reach a position of having surplus agricultural produce?

Mr. Gummer: It would be wrong for us to rely on the continuation of inefficient Socialism in eastern Europe to prevent surpluses there. That has been done very satisfactorily for 40 years, but now we hope that, with the coming of freedom, east European countries will begin to feed themselves. We must take measures to protect the interests of our industry, one of which will be for industry to take a real part in the development of those countries. We should not deny them that chance. We certainly do not want the opportunities to be taken only by other countries.

Mr. Dickens: When my right hon. Friend is next in eastern Europe, will he reflect on the fact that Socialist economies never produce enough food even to feed their own people?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is living proof of this country's ability to produce enough food. He is absolutely right: Socialism always produces shortages because it always prevents the excellent from achieving, and pushes the poorest to make them poorer.

Dr. David Clark: Does the Minister appreciate that probably the greatest threat to the fledgling democracies in eastern Europe is a shortage of food on shop shelves? Therefore, will he give a pledge to the House that he will do everything he can at the next Council of Ministers to further the proposal to divert food in the short term to eastern Europe? Remembering that we must help those fledgling democracies to feed themselves, will he press the EC to make money available so that they can have long-term development aid, for production and marketing, to help them achieve that objective?

Mr. Gummer: I did exactly that at the latest Council and I shall continue to do so. I also intend to visit Romania and Bulgaria, as well as Czechoslovakia, to see what we should be doing directly, because we have a responsibility. All that we do must be against the background of ensuring that our producers are not unfairly disadvantaged by the arrangements introduced by the European Community. I believe that British farmers must be treated in the same way as the other farmers in the Community.

Conservation

10. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he is taking to stimulate conservation by farmers in upland areas.

Mr. Curry: The environmentally sensitive areas, farm woodlands and farm and conservation grant schemes provide financial help for conservation projects in the uplands and elsewhere.

Mr. Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that the time has come to look afresh at our policy for upland areas and to devise new policies that recognise that the hill farmer is very much the engine of conservation in upland areas? Does he agree that a new policy such as the North Yorkshire moors national park farm scheme, which I hope he will launch in the spring, has a great deal to recommend it because it will link much-needed financial support to hill farmers with specific conservation measures in the uplands?

Mr. Curry: I am looking forward to opening the scheme in the North Yorkshire moors in my hon. Friend's constituency. I entirely endorse his view that economic activities and viable agriculture are the best way to conserve the uplands. I have always believed that bolting on all sorts of gadgets, environmental or otherwise, comes a long way behind a sensible cash flow in the uplands for maintaining conservation.

Mr. Geraint Howells: Does the Minister agree that farmers find it very difficult to pursue any policy because of high interest rates? Will he give a glimmer of hope to farmers that interest rates will be lowered some time this year?

Mr Curry: Interest rates are for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. However, we are seeking a green pound devaluation to help farmers. Of course, if interest rates were to come down prematurely and the pound were then to decline, it would reopen the green pound gap. The hon. Gentleman should let me deal with what is in my parish—the green pound rate which we hope to devalue—and I shall refer his question about interest rates to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. David Nicholson: Is my hon. Friend aware that hill farmers in my constituency and elsewhere will be appalled, although not surprised, by the attitude of the Labour party as shown yesterday by the "footling" comment of the Labour social security spokesman, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher)? Will my hon. Friend speculate on the ability of hill farmers to undertake conservation if their farm buildings and land were to be brought within the rating system, as proposed by the Labour party and, on occasion, by the Liberal party?

Mr. Curry: It is clear that farmers in the uplands face much natural handicap from the climate. They can do without the unnatural handicap that a Labour Government would impose upon them.

Veterinary Product Licensing

11. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his Department's policy on the fourth criterion in veterinary product licensing.

Mr. Gummer: Public and animal health are well protected by our licensing system based on a rigorous scientific scrutiny of safety, quality and efficacy. There is no other criterion of equal value and objectivity, and to suggest otherwise is misleading.

Mr. Jones: Will the Minister explain to the House why his Department's policy seems to have changed since his

predecessor said in March 1989 at the Hannah research institute that he would consider evidence of the need for bovine somatotropin?

Mr. Gummer: The question is about the fourth criterion. There is no fourth criterion of equal validity. The suggested criterion is merely the assumptions of various individuals' prejudices. That is not objective.

Irradiation

12. **Mr. Charles Wardle:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what response his Department has made to the women's institutes' representations on irradiation.

Mr. Maclean: Detailed replies have been sent to all the women's institutes that have contacted me. In addition, I and my expert officials, together with a member of one of the independent scientific committees that advise the Government, had a most useful meeting with representatives of the National Federation of Women's Institutes where all their questions were fully discussed.

Mr. Wardle: My hon. Friend will already have reassured some of the women's institute members who supported the conference resolution about irradiated food not long ago. Is not world scientific opinion almost unanimous about the safety of irradiated food? If there is clear labelling, cannot the consumer choose whether to buy it?

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. All world expert scientific opinion that has examined irradiation, along with the independent expert committee advising the British Government, has determined that irradiated food is absolutely safe. The crucial point is the consumer's right to choose. We have every bit as much right in this country to select irradiated food as French housewives have.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: Although there is no test to show whether food has been irradiated, and much concern that irradiated products may be harmful, the Government are thinking of introducing maximum doses 10 times those used in the United States. Why do not the Government listen to public opinion which is overwhelmingly against irradiation?

Mr. Maclean: We are taking public opinion into account. The hon. Gentleman's comment about doses 10 times greater than those in the United States is absolutely untrue. The doses recommended are perfectly in line with what the EC Commission has recommended. World scientific opinion states that irradiation is safe. Since only 2 per cent. of the public have the right—for which we fought—to buy green top milk, surely the 66 per cent. who might want to buy irradiated food have a similar right.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: My hon. Friend will be aware of the genuine fears and concerns of consumers about irradiated food. Does he agree that stringent labelling will, to a large extent, dissipate those fears, enable the consumer to make an informed choice and provide the marketing opportunity for good, fresh food?

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to stress that the crucial factor is our right as consumers to select a product based on informed choice. The Government are determined that any irradiated food should be clearly marked with the words "irradiated" or "treated with ionising radiation"—*[Interruption.]* Since we are determined that the labelling regime will be enforced and workable—*[Interruption.]*—consumers' fears are groundless.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to listen to agriculture questions and stop private conversations.

Nitrate-sensitive Areas

13. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on nitrate-sensitive areas.

Mr. Gummer: We are well advanced in determining the agricultural restrictions to apply in the areas concerned, and are currently examining their detailed costs. An announcement will be made as soon as possible.

Mr. Griffiths: Does the Minister believe that there is more than sufficient evidence to show that nitrate pollution damages the environment and humans? Should not the Government introduce regulations to cut massively the use of nitrates in agriculture? That would also help to deal with the problem of surpluses.

Mr. Gummer: There is no evidence that the amount of nitrates in the water damages anyone—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] There is no evidence whatsoever. It is because we wish to take extremely tough measures that we have introduced those proposals. The hon. Gentleman should not make statements that have no scientific base.

Sir Anthony Grant: Is my right hon. Friend aware that East Anglia is one of the most nitrate-sensitive areas in the country, yet is the most healthy? It is much healthier than many parts of Europe and almost certainly healthier than Wales. Will he reject all the humbug and hypochondriac statements that are uttered about this subject?

Mr. Gummer: In the past few days Labour Members have attacked British apples because they say they are poisonous, and now they say that British water is unsafe. I am surprised that they do not emigrate and eat apples and drink water elsewhere.

Irradiation

14. **Mr. Ashley:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any research evidence on the consumer demand for irradiated food.

Mr. Maclean: I have seen the results of several surveys on consumer demand for irradiated foods. A recent study by the Consumers Association found that about two thirds of consumers might wish to purchase some irradiated foods in the future. Our consumers must be allowed freedom of choice to buy any food they know is safe and must not be dictated to.

Mr. Ashley: Notwithstanding the paeons of praise for irradiation from the Minister some moments ago, may I ask him to confirm that there is great public hostility to rather than demand for irradiation? Will he also confirm that irradiation can expose food to doses of radiation up to 100 million times that of a single chest X-ray and that it can be used to hide contamination in otherwise unsaleable food?

Mr. Maclean: Irradiation cannot be used to disguise unfit food. It is illegal for unfit food to be sold now and it will be illegal in the future. I confirm that 98 per cent. of the public do not want to buy green top milk. We do not dictate to the other 2 per cent. that they cannot have it. They have a right to have it. The same applies to the 8 per cent. who are keen to buy irradiated food and to the 66 per cent. of us who might want to buy it sometimes.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 8 February.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today, including one with the president-elect of Brazil.

Mr. Maclennan: In expressing for the whole country our great joy at witnessing the unimaginable leap forward in the Soviet Union towards political pluralism and liberal democracy, may I ask the Prime Minister to give some thought to celebration by taking small steps towards reinvigorating our own democracy, although I do not suggest that she should submit herself for popular election as our president? Will she throw her weight behind greater openness and accountability by introducing a Bill of Rights and a Freedom of Information Act, by the decentralisation of government and by a fair voting system?

The Prime Minister: I share the hon. Gentleman's pleasure at the increasing democracy in the Soviet Union and hope that the decisions taken in the past few days will be speedily implemented. The hon. Gentleman will recall that there was a Bill of Rights in this country in about the 17th century.

As for decentralisation, this Government have done more to decentralise power from central Government to the people than any previous Government whether by reducing taxation, denationalising industries, allowing parents more say in schools or giving people more say in the running of their affairs.

Mr. William Powell: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the East German state is close to collapse, that mutinies have been reported in its army, that 3,000 people a day —or 1 million people a year—are leaving for the West and that over half its qualified doctors have left? Is not the only way in which that massive tide can be stemmed the unification of the two Germanys as quickly as possible? Will my right hon. Friend see that we do all we can to encourage the West Germans to assume responsibility for East Germany as quickly as possible?

The Prime Minister: I read the same reports as my hon. Friend about conditions in East Germany after so many years of Socialist Communism and about how it is near a state of collapse. Elections are due in March. They will probably be very decisive and will probably lead to the unification of Germany. It is absolutely vital that there be a transition stage between that decision in principle and sorting out the full implications for NATO, for the Helsinki accords and for Berlin so that the unification of Germany does not come about at the expense of security and stability in central Europe.

Mr. Hattersley: Will the Prime Minister give a categorical assurance that while she remains in office child benefit will be universally available to all families with children?

The Prime Minister: I stand by our commitment in the manifesto which I have repeated many times. This Government stand by their commitment about child benefit in the manifesto.

Mr. Hattersley: As the promise in the manifesto has been broken for the past five years, nobody must expect anything from that answer other than the preparation for abandoning universal child benefit. Is the Prime Minister aware that many low-income families are always penalised by means-tested benefits? Does she realise that many of the family benefits that are now means tested are taken up by only 50 per cent. of those who need and deserve them? Is she aware of those facts and, if so, does she care?

The Prime Minister: This Government have put more into helping poorer families than have previous Governments. During the past two years, the extra help has been deliberately concentrated on poorer families. Had those on income support or family credit merely had an increase in child benefit, it would not have profited them because it would have come off income support or family credit. By concentrating on increased family credit and increased help for those poorer families, we have done far better by them than have other Governments.

Mr. Hattersley: As the Prime Minister runs away from answering the question about the take-up of family credit, let me invite her to answer a question not from me but from one of her Back-Bench Members that was put to her last night. How does she reconcile a policy that gives tax concessions for free medical care but holds down child benefit? What does the Prime Minister have to say to the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison) who said that year by year the manifesto promises of his and her party look increasingly threadbare?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is talking nonsense. The manifesto stated:

"Child benefit will continue to be paid as now, and direct to the mother."

That has been upheld, as I said in my answer to the previous question. This year and next year we shall be making available an extra £70 million to the neediest families through income-related benefit. That will especially help the poorest families. Fortunately, because of our tax policies we have had far more to spend on social security than any previous Government. The figure is more than £50 billion a year—more than £1 billion a weelk. We win all ends up.

Sir Peter Emery: During her busy day, will my right hon. Friend make it absolutely clear that budgeted increases in spending of 10, 12 or 15 per cent. for next year, if carried through by local authorities, are bound to be inflationary and are entirely contrary to Government policy?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. They would be inflationary and would lead to enormous increases in rates and to a community charge higher than

it need be. The Government have given extra support to local authorities this year of 8·5 per cent. above the similar rate support grant and the business rate last year. That is sufficient for local authorities to plan well and economically.

Q2. **Sir Russell Johnston:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 8 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Sir Russell Johnston: The Prime Minister has just welcomed and praised President Gorbachev's extraordinary achievements, but does she agree that those could be swept away by the grim and accelerating deterioration in the Soviet economy? The logic that led us to help Poland and Hungary must make the West face up to the necessity of giving aid to the Soviet Union. Will she discuss that with her EC colleagues, President Bush and President Gorbachev?

The Prime Minister: I do not think that the increasing freedom of speech, discussion and movement will be swept away, but I agree that economic improvement is critical and that is much more difficult than securing political improvement, because it requires the full co-operation of people who have never had experience of running free enterprise or of taking responsibility for themselves. Any help that we could give would be only marginal. We are helping with some joint ventures, but the bureaucratic system there creates some difficulties. We are also helping by having people here for management training and by doing everything that we can in that respect. Commercial banks also have a line of credit which is not fully taken up.

Q3. **Mr. John Browne:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 8 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Browne: Does my right hon. Friend accept that of all the ideas for raising local government finance, the Socialist idea of a roof tax is the most unfair, uneconomic and unworkable? It will involve constant revaluation, the erosion of local democracy and the eviction of many elderly and council tenants—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot hear whether the hon. Gentleman's question is in order or not. He must relate his question to the Government's responsibilities.

Mr. Browne: Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that she will not react positively to that proposal, and will she remember that just as the window tax forced people to live in the dark, the roof tax is likely to force them to live in sentry boxes?

The Prime Minister: I assure my hon. Friend that we shall not introduce a roof tax, which is based on the capital valuation of houses regardless of whether they are owned or whether a tenant lives in them. It would be grossly unfair to tenants, and in particular to pensioners. Therefore, we shall never introduce it. Moreover, as a Thatcher I object to a roof tax.

Q4. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 8 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Clarke: Does the Prime Minister accept that her replies on child benefit this afternoon will come as a great disappointment to 7 million families and 12 million children in Britain? Does she accept that, far from helping the poor, this year the Government's policies have saved £250 million at the expense of £70 million? Since for the past three years the Government have failed to uprate child benefit, will the Prime Minister uprate child benefit in April, taking those lost years into account, or does she intend simply to save up more money for an even more generous Budget for the rich?

The Prime Minister: As today's family expenditure survey shows, people at all income levels throughout the United Kingdom have benefited from a higher standard of living gained by Britain's increased output under a Conservative Government. The social services have benefited, too. The poorest families would not benefit from an increase in child benefit because it would come off their income support and family credit. We have chosen the best way to help the poorer families and I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would prefer that, instead of which he seems to prefer child benefit going to the richest families.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: At my right hon. Friend's meeting with representatives of the New Zealand Government on Tuesday, did she take the opportunity to congratulate them on the lead that they have given to the West in abolishing agricultural subsidy? Does she believe that that excellent Conservative principle has brought benefits to the taxpayer and the consumer? Did she give the New Zealand Government the assurance that British housewives will still be able to buy New Zealand butter if they wish to do so?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, I did not exactly put that point to the representatives of the New Zealand Government, but they were very grateful for the stand that we have taken in supporting them in negotiations with the European Community. Subsidies on agricultural produce will have to be negotiated in the GATT, through the European Community and with other countries that pay heavy subsidies, such as the United States and Japan.

Q5. **Mr. James Lamond:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 8 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Lamond: Has the Prime Minister had the opportunity of looking at the front page of the *CBI News* for this month, where she will see a graph of investment intentions for next year which is plummeting even faster than the Tories' support in Mid-Staffordshire? Will she read the article inside by the director-general, who asks the Government to do certain things, including reducing interest rates, improving infrastructure and training and avoiding any more inflationary Government own goals? Is there any possibility of his being satisfied by the Budget?

The Prime Minister: I have not seen that article, but I may point out to the hon. Gentleman, that for the past

three years investment has been very high—a record in all industries and a record in manufacturing industry. That is very good. We do not take lectures from the Opposition on training. It was the trade unions who opposed the youth training scheme and the employment training scheme, both of which we have successfully brought in.

My advice to the CBI would be to keep their industries competitive, their designs good and their marketing sharp.

Q6. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 8 February.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Pawsey: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the policy adopted by successive British Governments over a considerable period of ensuring that we have a strong nuclear deterrent have had an influence on what is taking place in eastern Europe? Does my right hon. Friend further agree that, although everyone believes in peace, to ensure peace we need a strong defence in the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. A sure and strong defence, with an essential nuclear deterrent and American nuclear weapons in Europe, has made the Soviet Union realise that it could never win militarily, so it has turned round to negotiate. Had people bowed down before the Soviet Union and not kept up a strong defence, we should not have had the excellent results that we are now seeing in that country.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): May I ask the Leader of the House to tell us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Geoffrey Howe): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 12 FEBRUARY—Until seven o'clock, private Members' motions.

Remaining stages of the Property Services Agency and Crown Suppliers Bill.

TUESDAY 13 FEBRUARY—Debate on a motion to take note of the Government's expenditure plans 1990-91 to 1992-93 (Cm 1001-1021).

WEDNESDAY 14 FEBRUARY—Opposition day (7th Allotted Day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion entitled "Rail Fares and Services".

THURSDAY 15 FEBRUARY—Remaining stages of the Education (Student Loans) Bill.

FRIDAY 16 FEBRUARY—Private Members' Bills.

MONDAY 19 FEBRUARY—Opposition day (8th Allotted Day, 1st part). Until seven o'clock there will be a debate on a motion in the name of the Scottish National party on the ambulance dispute.

Motion on the Data Protection (Regulation of Financial Services etc.) (Subject Access Exemption) (Amendment) Order.

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at seven o'clock.

Dr. Cunningham: Given the gathering momentum of change in the Soviet Union and in other eastern European countries, will the Leader of the House find Government time for a foreign affairs debate on these changes, which are tremendously important for all of us and which are taking place with increasing speed?

Is not the House entitled to an oral statement from the Secretary of State for Education and Science on the report of Her Majesty's inspector of schools published a few days ago? Does not this report illustrate a quite disgraceful and totally unsatisfactory state of affairs in far too many of our schools? Would it not be appropriate for hon. Members in all parts of the House, since we are talking about the state education system, which affects more than 90 per cent. of our children, to have a chance to question his right hon. Friend on what the Government intend to do about this appalling state of affairs?

Has the Leader of the House seen the reports today forecasting increases in water bills of up to 70 per cent. for one in four people in this country? Does he recall that last year many consumers faced increases in their bills for water charges of up to 50 per cent? Does this not confirm everything that we in the Labour party said about the implications for bills of water privatisation? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman ensure that next week we have a statement from the Secretary of State for the Environment explaining to us and our constituents why Government policy has led to these enormous increases, which have effectively doubled people's water costs in less than two years?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: On the first point raised by the hon. Gentleman, the whole House will agree about the momentous quality of the changes taking place, not least in the Soviet Union itself, and join in welcoming what has been happening. I certainly agree that this makes the topic of foreign affairs a legitimate one for me to try to find time to debate as soon as I reasonably can.

With regard to education, the important thing to notice is that the report of Her Majesty's inspector of schools, which is now made available in a fashion which owes a great deal to the Government's initiative, says that the overall picture is of a service in which most of what is done is of reasonable quality or better and that that is a sound basis for improvement and should be recognised as such. The Government's reforms are already bringing about the improvements necessary to raise education standards.

With regard to water charges, once again the Opposition seek to have their cake and eat it. They are very ready to complain about shortcomings in the quality and availability of water services. The charges are necessary to finance the substantial investment programme that will follow privatisation in order to meet the problems of raising water quality, renewing water mains and overcoming water shortage.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Has my right hon. and learned Friend noted early-day motion 412 standing in the names of 142 right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House?

[That this House condemns the unprecedented taking of backbenchers' rare prime debating time by a Front Bench member, namely the presentation of a Ten Minute Rule Bill by the honourable Member for Livingston, Opposition Front Bench Spokesman for Health, thereby usurping a backbencher's customary prerogative; and notes that this was done on an Opposition day, when this subject could have been selected for debate at length by the Opposition.]

Does he appreciate that an Opposition Back Bencher handed over his ten-minute Bill slot to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) to propose a Bill from the Opposition Front Bench? Does he realise that this muscling in on Back Benchers' customary prerogatives is unprecedented in over 20 years?

Hon. Members: Reading.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must ask for a debate.

Mr. Arnold: Will my right hon. and learned Friend refer this disgraceful business to the Committee on Procedure?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The Opposition must be left to sort out their own problems. It is entirely a matter for them to decide whether they should muscle in upon each other in this way. Government Members can only look on with amazement and astonishment.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): What are the chances of a debate on early-day motion 448, calling for a wider inquiry into misuse of information by Crown servants?

[That this House calls on Her Majesty's Government to set up the fullest possible inquiry into allegations made by Right honourable and honourable Members of this House concerning the misuse of information by Crown servants apparently operating outside the rule of law; believes that the appropriate precedent for such an inquiry is the 1983 Review by a Committee of Privy Councillors into the circumstances leading up to the Falklands War; notes that such a committee in accordance with the Franks precedent

[Sir David Steel]

would have full access to persons and papers in the security services, the armed forces, and all Government departments; and urges the Government to replace the narrow Calcutt inquiry by this much wider and deeper review.]

Is the Leader of the House aware that the Secretary of State for Defence has told the press that the inquiry by the Select Committee on Defence will be limited in scope? Is he also aware that, moreover, Mr. Colin Wallace has questioned the accuracy of some of the statements made by the Secretary of State for Defence to the House only last week? Will he therefore realise the urgency of this matter?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: This is a field in which debates and inquiries seem to have proliferated to a large extent already. An Adjournment debate on the subject was initiated by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) on 6 February and it has been announced by the Secretary of State for Defence that two inquiries are already taking place and the Defence Committee has indicated its intention of making inquiries. We shall have to wait and see the terms of reference of that inquiry.

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): Bearing in mind the growing concern in this country and overseas about what is happening to the global environment, and in particular to the rain forests, highlighted by the remarkable address given by the Prince of Wales at Kew gardens to an audience which included hon. Members from both sides of the House, is it possible to have an early debate on that vastly important matter? It affects us all and it will affect our children and our children's children.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: As my right hon. Friend knows, that subject has concerned the House and the Government for a long time. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment took some important messages in respect of it during his visit to Brazil during the summer. We have also had the opportunity to discuss the issue during the visit to this country, yesterday and today of the President-elect of Brazil.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): May we have a debate on the proposal to establish a new forest in the midlands, to be situated in Leicestershire, which is the second bottom county in the country for its number of trees? If it is established in north-west Leicestershire, it will serve all our constituents in the county. May we please have a debate on this subject as soon as possible?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. and learned Gentleman has demonstrated characteristic ingenuity in drawing attention to this problem in the context of his constituency. I cannot promise to take the matter further at this stage.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Will my right hon. and learned Friend arrange for an early debate on the constitutional position of taxes raised in Scotland that differ from the taxes to be levied in England and Wales? In so doing, will he consider carefully the proposals for the roof tax, the effect that it will have on the unified business rates proposals, and the proposal for having regular revaluations done by computer, and all that that will mean for the people of Scotland?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I think that my hon. Friend has already done a service by drawing attention to the horrendous implications for Scotland of the roof tax proposed by the Opposition. Voters in the rest of the United Kingdom will view with anxiety the implications of that proposal.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): As the threat of war in Kashmir will not wait for a foreign affairs debate, will the Leader of the House arrange for the Foreign Secretary to make a statement next week outlining what initiatives the British Government may be able to take to bring the Governments of India and Pakistan together to try to resolve the dispute, which has caused great conflict between those two countries for more than 20 years?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman refers to a matter which is a cause of continuing anxiety to friends of India and Pakistan. I know that the Government, at every level, have always sought to do everything they can to promote peace rather than conflict in that area, and I am sure they will continue to do so. I cannot promise an early statement.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Would my right hon. and learned Friend allow an early debate on the criteria for setting the community charge by local authorities, bearing in mind the spiteful approach of Labour authorities, such as Southwark and Ealing, which intend to set the charge disgracefully and unacceptably high? In Ealing, the figure that the authority is proposing to set would mean a 300 per cent. increase in rates in four years. Is that not a disgrace?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The shape of the community charge has been frequently debated in recent weeks in the House. I am sure that my hon. Friend will appreciate that the most effective response to the matter about which he complains would be a vigorous response by the electors of Ealing to those complaints.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the Leader of the House provide an early debate in Government time on the plight of low-paid workers—for example, the fish processing workers in my constituency who are paid less than £100 for a 40-hour week and now face a zero wage round—that is, no wage increase in the current year? In such a debate, would it be appropriate, in the interest of equity and justice, to compare their position with that of the former Chancellor of the Exchequer who is coining £100,000 for a two-day week?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: If the hon. Gentleman attaches that much importance to either of those topics, it is surprising that his party has not chosen them for debate next week.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): When the Hetherington report was published, the Government said that they would listen to the views of the House. As it is nearly eight weeks since the House overwhelmingly endorsed the views of the Hetherington report, when does my right hon. and learned Friend expect that we shall be able to debate the Second Reading of a Bill on the matter? May we at least be promised a Bill this month?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I know the importance that my hon. Friend attaches to the matter, as I have already answered questions from him about it. The position remains the same. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is considering the form that legislation

might take in the light of the views expressed in both Houses. We must now await the announcement from my right hon. Friend that should be forthcoming shortly.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Leader of the House bear in mind that there will be a debate a week on Monday on the ambulance workers' pay and take into account the fact that there should be a statement before that debate to pay tribute to those ambulance workers who marched 200 miles from Barnsley to London today, calling at places such as Kegworth, where there was a major accident and ambulance workers played a part in rescuing the victims, and King's Cross? Will he also ask the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) to be in his place during that debate so that he and the other 200 Tory Back Benchers who are making money on the side—up to £200,000 on top of their parliamentary pay—can explain why they can march into the Lobby objecting to more than 6·5 per cent. for the ambulance workers while picking up large sums of money on the side?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman knows that the rules of the House permit any Member on either side of the House to accept employment in addition to that as a Back Bencher, provided that it is registered according to the rules of the House. That has been the position for many years. Everyone is always ready to pay tribute to those members of the ambulance service who are performing their normal duties or who respond to the call of duty. The most important call for them to respond to at present is the call to return to normal working on the terms that have been available to them for months.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): A few moments ago my right hon. and learned Friend sounded almost benign in response to a request for a debate on early-day motion 448, standing in my name and calling for the fullest possible inquiry into the Wallace affair. He seemed to be dismissing it simply on the ground that there were other inquiries in progress. Therefore, will he clarify one important aspect of Government policy on this matter? Will the Government fully co-operate with the Defence Select Committee's inquiry, and will that co-operation include granting immunity from prosecution to those Crown servants and former Crown servants who may be called to give evidence?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: In regard to my hon. Friend's initial point, the position was made clear in a debate earlier this week in the brief reply from my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces. In regard to the response to the Defence Select Committee's inquiry, any requests made by that Committee, once it has settled its terms of reference, will be considered in the ordinary way.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): May we have a debate on the newly published Register of Members' Interests, which does not list the lavish outside moonlighting of the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson)? As the Leader of the House is concerned about the rules, if we had a debate about the Register of Members' Interests and the way in which Tory Members of Parliament earn huge sums outside but vote against ordinary working people getting decent wage increases, we could expose them for their double standards and we might achieve a change in the rules so that people here worked full-time.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Full or part-time membership of the House has been discussed and debated many times. The form of the register is the consequence of decisions taken by the House, and it takes some time for it to record newly adopted occupations.

Mr. Michael Marshall (Arundel): Reverting to the first question asked this afternoon by the shadow Leader of the House, on a day when the House has welcomed an Inter-Parliamentary Union delegation from the Soviet Union that has been involved in remarkably frank and open exchanges with 90 hon. Members, including my right hon. and learned Friend, will he accept the urging from behind him that we should find time to discuss as soon as possible the important change in the international situation?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I join my hon. Friend in recognising the importance of the IPU delegation from the Soviet Union, the leader of which I had the privilege of meeting. That is one reason for attaching importance to the possibility of an early debate on foreign affairs. I shall do my best to keep it in mind.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Has the Leader of the House seen the petition that was presented to the Prime Minister yesterday by the Save British Science group? It was signed by 1,600 scientists who now work abroad because of the lack of Government commitment to science and because of the lack of money and facilities. As the future of Britain depends on science, and as we are not recruiting but losing scientists, may we debate the matter next week?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot promise the prospect of an early debate on that topic, but I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will understand that our ability to retain scientists and other experts has been enhanced substantially by the steady record of economic growth achieved under this Government in the past decade.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): Does my right hon. and learned Friend appreciate that many Conservative Members, and certainly many Opposition Members, do not understand the Government's reluctance to hold a wider inquiry into the allegations made by Mr. Wallace and by right hon. and hon. Members? Many hon. Members would like to see those fundamental allegations, which strike at our liberal democracy, exorcised, and we look to the Government to facilitate that. We suggest that a Franks-type inquiry, as used in connection with the Falklands war, would be the best way of exorcising those grave allegations.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I understand my hon. Friend's continuing interest in that matter and in the wider context. The fact remains that there have been, and there are now in progress, a series of inquiries into virtually every aspect of this matter.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): May I underline the plea made by my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) and by the hon. Member for Arundel (Mr. Marshall) for an early debate in Government time on eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and what is happening there? Some hon. Members have had the pleasure and privilege of meeting the Soviet delegation, who have been open and frank. I do not

[Mr. Eric S. Heffer]

necessarily agree with everything that it said, but we need a debate at the earliest possible moment to discuss eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and the future of Europe.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have already intimated my sympathy with that proposition. It was a proposition with which I had sympathy in my previous job; my change of job and, more important, the change of circumstances in the Soviet Union add force to the point made by the hon. Gentleman.

Sir Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that last Friday my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) introduced the Interest on Debts Bill, which was talked out? As its purpose was to help small businesses with the late payment of debts, and given the Government's commitment to small businesses, will he say whether the Government have any plans to help small businesses, which are very concerned about the present position?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: A range of Government policies are designed to help small businesses, but I cannot make any specific commitment in relation to that Bill. My hon. Friend will know that there is room for more than one view, even from the small business lobby, about the merits of that Bill.

Mr. Robert Parry (Liverpool, Riverside): Will the Leader of the House ask his right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary whether he has received a report on the recent disturbances in Toxteth? Will he ask his right hon. and learned Friend whether he will pay a visit to the area, where there have been three disturbances in fewer than eight years?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am not in a position to answer for my right hon. and learned Friend, but I shall bring the hon. Gentleman's points to his attention.

Sir John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware of the somewhat surprising decision by the Government to allow women to serve in warships and to take part in combat? Does he agree that the idea of women fighting is distasteful and abhorrent?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The topic was vouchsafed to the House only a few days ago, at the beginning of the week. My hon. Friend may not have had an opportunity to raise it in that debate, but I am sure that he will find another opportunity in one of the armed services debates which will be arranged in due course.

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): The Leader of the House is aware that there is concern among hon. Members of all parties about religious cults. Is he also aware that there is far more concern following the knowledge, acquired last week, that many of those organisations, such as the Moonies, will be exempt from paying poll tax, whereas pensioners, the unemployed and the severely disabled will have to pay up to 80 per cent.? Will he or his right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment make a statement so that the matter can be discussed in the House?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I know that the same problem created difficulties and anxieties under the rating system. The definition of the frontier has always been difficult. I shall bring the hon. Gentleman's point on the community charge to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Is the Leader of the House aware that there is great concern in Northern Ireland about the escalation of IRA violence in the past few days, including not only attempts on the lives of public representatives and of members of the security forces, but the third breach of security at Short Brothers? Does he realise that, if that continues, it will jeopardise the operation at Shorts, and will bring vast unemployment to east Belfast and to the rest of the Province? Is he aware that the IRA has now said that notice will no longer be given of bombs laid at Shorts? That has caused great anxiety among the work force.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Government have been concerned continuously about threats to human life and safety, and about security more generally in Northern Ireland. I shall take account of the anxieties that the hon. Gentleman has described and I shall bring them to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland so that he may take account of them in practice and in the regular reports on terrorist violence that he makes to the House.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): Although the House will welcome the news that there is to be a foreign affairs debate on the implications of improving East-West relations, may we also have a debate on the defence implications? Given the inevitability of reductions in arms procurement, we can then begin to plan a proper product conversion programme so that the skills of those who work in the industry will be preserved and so that the livelihoods of those who work in the industry and of their families will also be preserved.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: It may or may not be an important point, but it could have been raised in the Royal Navy debate earlier this week and it can also be raised in subsequent debates on the other services in due course.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): May we have a debate on early-day motion 345?

It was tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) and has been signed by 123 hon. Members. It is headed, "Concern over media freedom in Romania".

[That this House views with concern reports from Romania that democratic opposition parties in that country are being denied access to the nation's television network; calls upon Her Majesty's Government to make the strongest possible representations to the new Romanian Government in support of the right of access to the nation's media by the major opposition parties; and recognises the serious possibility of renewed bloodshed and turmoil if this basic right is not recognised.]

Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that today I spoke to John Kennedy, who is an expert on Romania? He made to me a number of disturbing points. First, President Iliescu has personally banned the publication of opposition newspapers. Secondly, a number of opposition politicians and parties, including those supporting the restoration of the monarchy, have been prevented from

appearing on television and on other media. Thirdly, the media have been used to call the population to take to the streets to stop anti-Government demonstrations. Surely any aid or assistance given to Romania should be tied to the condition that there should be free media. May we have a debate?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The whole House, with its continuing interest in the changes in Romania, will share my hon. Friend's concern, which was also expressed in early-day motion 345. Access to the media, whether printed or broadcast, in Romania should be available to all who seek to take part in the democracy which we hope to see emerge. Assistance undertaken by the European Community to countries such as Romania is related closely to the extent to which they are or are not moving effectively in the direction of democracy.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Defence to make a statement to the House on why he is allowing Ministry of Defence police to be removed from Bishopton royal ordnance factory and be replaced by a private security force? Does he realise that it is causing tremendous consternation in my constituency that an unarmed private security force will mount guard in a huge area of my constituency? We are worried about the proposals. Will he arrange for the Secretary of State to make a statement?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot instantly arrange for a statement by my right hon. Friend. However, I can make sure that the matter is drawn to his attention for his consideration.

Mr. Robert Rhodes James (Cambridge): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the anxieties expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) about the Wallace case are widely shared on these Benches? In our view, the proposal for an investigation by a committee of Privy Councillors appears to be the most appropriate course of action. Will he also consider widening the terms of reference of the inquiry by my eminent constituent David Calcutt? The matter will not go away, and many of us believe that it will not go away until it is cleared up.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: As I have told other hon. Members, a wide range of inquiries have taken place or are taking place. They include the inquiry being undertaken by the master of Magdalene college.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Why does Parliament have to wait for 11 days to debate the ambulance dispute? Is the Leader of the House aware of the great anxiety throughout the north-west of England in all towns and communities, both in rural areas and inner cities, about this long-standing dispute, which should have been resolved by the Government? Could not the Government, even at this late stage, make some move, particularly as the morale of the ambulance workers is extremely high, as witnessed today by those of us who met them outside the House? Why cannot we have an emergency statement next Monday and some flexibility and movement by the Government?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: For several reasons. First, the Government have already shown a great deal of flexibility in this dispute. Secondly, the overwhelming majority of Health Service workers have long since accepted terms consistent with those which have been available to the ambulance men for a long time. The best and only answer is for the ambulance men to recognise the growing reality of the need to return to work on those terms. Thirdly, if the hon. Gentleman had wanted to debate the subject, he could have persuaded his own party to do so on its Supply day next week.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): My right hon. and learned Friend will remember that last year the House took a great deal of time to consider a Government proposal, which was broadly welcomed by both Conservative and Opposition Members, to introduce a complaints procedure, a commissioner and a tribunal for the Security Service. Is he aware that the new Security Service tribunal has declined to accept or consider any complaint against the Security Service relating to events prior to 18 December 1989? Is he also aware that that is a mockery of the Act that was passed last year? Will he undertake to bring the matter to the notice of his colleagues and to arrange a debate in the House at the earliest possible moment? Some of us believe that that abuse is a deliberate attempt to prevent the Security Service commissioner and his tribunal from undertaking the duties set out in the Act.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I should hesitate to use the words "abuse" or "mockery" about the construction put on an Act of Parliament by those responsible for complying with it. All I can do is to draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the point that my hon. Friend has raised.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd): In the light of severe flooding during the past two weeks in many parts of Britain, and particularly the problems in my constituency of Pontypridd last night when dozens of my constituents were forced to abandon their homes and suffered damage, will the Leader of the House consider setting aside time to discuss measures to clarify who has responsibility to build defences against floods? My efforts to do so have resulted in the National Rivers Authority saying that it is the responsibility of local authorities, usually the highways authorities, whereas highways authorities say that it is the responsibility of the NRA. Will the Government enable us to clarify the position, because my constituents and thousands of others are sick of the damage that they have to endure every time there is heavy rain?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot comment on the damage caused in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, because we must await the detailed reports of the consequences of that outbreak of trouble. However, I shall certainly bring the hon. Gentleman's general point to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales for further examination.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): Although I welcome next Wednesday's Opposition motion on the railways—when some of us could take the opportunity to highlight the £37 million electrification scheme for the Birmingham cross-city line from mid-Staffordshire to Redditch—will my right hon. and learned Friend nevertheless have a quiet talk with the shadow Leader of the House with a view to changing the subject of that debate and perhaps sending out a search party to find the

[Mr. Roger King]

hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) so that he could present a debate on the English roof tax and some of us may have an idea of what we are up against?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I suspect that the hunt for the dreadful truth about the dreadful roof tax will leave even the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) with no hiding place from the truth.

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): In response to earlier questions about the Colin Wallace affair, the Leader of the House kindly informed the House that nearly every aspect of the affair was subject to some kind of inquiry. That is certainly true, but does he agree that one aspect of the affair that is not subject to any kind of inquiry is the existence and the scope of any Clockwork Orange? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman reconsider the question of setting up an appropriate committee of Privy Councillors?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: In response to earlier questions, I have said that many aspects of that matter have already been the subject of investigation and a number of investigations are still taking place. I am not in a position to offer any further inquiry beyond those already in prospect.

Mr John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Since it is from this House alone that the authority and legitimacy of Government derives, will my right hon. and learned Friend make it perfectly plain to his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence that it would not be acceptable for the Secretary of State for Defence to seek to prevent from attending any Crown servant whom the Select Committee on Defence may summon to give evidence on the Wallace affair?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Recognised rules and conventions govern the resolution of such questions and must take account of the potential danger to human life from certain aspects of the matter. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will be complying with those rules and conventions.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Is the Leader of the House aware of the extensive public support that has been expressed for my Protection of Badger Setts Bill? Do the Government intend to support the Bill when it comes up for Second Reading? Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman also aware that hon. Members of all parties receive a considerable amount of correspondence and have various representations made to them by their constituents about all areas of animal conservation, and especially about elephants, the ivory stocks in Hong Kong, whales and porpoises? All hon. Members know that to be true. Please may we have a general full-day debate in Government time on animal conservation so that all hon. Members can give vent to the various concerns that they have been expressing?

May I ask the Leader of the House not to continue to encourage me to put in for an Adjournment debate, because I have done that every week for the past 12 weeks and have got nowhere? Perhaps the right hon. and learned Gentleman could use some influence.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I must commiserate with the hon. Gentleman in that respect, because he will see that one of his hon. Friends has an Adjournment debate next Friday on Government policy on the ivory trade and the threat to the African elephant. In that sense, he will be shooting one of the hon. Gentleman's foxes. The hon. Gentleman continues to raise many such topics conscientiously in the House, and I shall certainly bear in mind his assiduity and the wider merits of the case.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): Bearing in mind the continuing turbulent weather conditions, will my right hon. and learned Friend find time for the House to consider some of the public safety issues that have become apparent during the storms? Is he aware of the dangers of improperly loaded commercial vehicles, badly fitted scaffolding and cladding, and loose metal signs, all of which have become potentially lethal missiles in high winds? They should have been made secure, but were not. Should not this matter receive urgent attention?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: It certainly should receive urgent attention—probably more urgent and more widespread attention than this House is likely to be able to give it. People who have property, equipment or vehicles to look after should be taking very careful note of it.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): As the Secretary of State for Scotland is sitting next to the Leader of the House, can the right hon. and learned Gentleman explain to us why, when the severe weather conditions were first experienced in England a couple of weeks ago, the Department of the Environment was able to furnish the House with an immediate oral statement —on the Friday—whereas, today, the Scottish Office, so far as we can see, has made no effort to make an oral statement? Indeed, there will be only a written answer to a question from the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) about his part of the country. May we have from the Scottish Office an early oral statement about the severe conditions being experienced in many parts of the country, not least the Highlands, with specific reference to the fact that the so-called Bellwin formula for recompensing local authorities fails to take account of the distinctive geographical problems that the Scottish Highlands are experiencing?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: While I was receiving the hon. Gentleman's question through one ear, I was receiving the answer from my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland through the other. The heart of that answer is that the criteria that apply in Scotland are exactly the same as those that apply in the rest of the kingdom, and they will be upheld by my right hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): Has my right hon. and learned Friend received through the normal channels any representations from the Opposition Front Bench concerning early-day motion 447?

[That this House views with horror the statement of Mr. Kuomba Balogun, Chairman of the Bristol West Labour Party, reported in the Bristol Evening Post of 2nd February, as follows: 'We make a public plea to the IRA to consider ways of strongly giving some assistance to the armed wing of the ANC in the same light as Colonel Gaddaffi sought to assist in the liberation of the people of Ireland'; calls on the Leader of the Opposition to condemn this incitement to

violence in South Africa and its implied support for Libyan and IRA terrorism in the United Kingdom; and calls on him to expel Mr. Balogun from the Labour party forthwith.]

It alleges that, in the *Bristol Evening Post*, the Bristol, West Labour party has been supporting IRA and Libyan terrorism. I should have thought that Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen would like to deny that allegation and to repudiate that constituency party.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The fact that my hon. Friend has drawn attention to this matter will give the Labour party an opportunity to answer the allegation one way or the other.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): With fares rising faster than the rate of inflation, and with the threat of continuing cuts in bus services, including services in my constituency of Leyton, may we have a debate on London Regional Transport? It is now a year since the debate on the LRT levy order. The Government seem to be using the disappearance of the levy order as an excuse not to have a debate, even though it is still reflected in the poll tax that Londoners have to pay. During the passage of the London Regional Transport Act, commitments were given by the Government. I was a member of the Committee that considered that Bill, and I can tell the House that the Government, when they took power away from the GLC, said that there would be accountability to this House. May we have a debate?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I should be surprised if the hon. Gentleman could not bring himself within the rules of order to enable him to deal with those topics in the debate that is to take place next week.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): Will my right hon. and learned Friend please avoid wasting the time of the House? Will he avoid over-burdening further an already heavy legislative programme by attempting to implement the recommendations of the Hetherington inquiry? Is he aware that opinion against that inquiry and its recommendations has hardened since the matter came before the two Houses of Parliament? I assure him that if he attempts to get it through this House the opposition will be very strong indeed.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding the House and me of the strength of his own insight into this matter. It is not to be dismissed; it has to be taken seriously. On the other hand, I have to take seriously the fact that a very large majority in this House voted in favour of the motion that dealt with this matter before Christmas. As I have said already, we must await the announcement that will come shortly from my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware of the two private Bills that are currently blocked—the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill and the Clyde Bill? They relate to two of the 60 trust ports whose level of operation is restricted by their legal basis. Those two ports are trying to change that, following the abolition of the dock labour scheme, in order to meet the challenge of 1992. Do the Government have it in mind to bring forward in the near future legislation to enable ports to convert to the private sector so that they can maximise their expansion plans and have a much better ports industry ready for the challenge of 1992?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I understand the importance of the general request made by my hon. Friend. On the other hand, as Leader of the House, I have no direct responsibility for private business, which falls within the empire of the Chairman of Ways and Means. He will no doubt take account of his responsibility in the matter.

Ms. Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): May I remind the Leader of the House that barely a week goes by without a complaint being made about the way in which the Palace of Westminster is run? The last time it was necessary for me to rise during business questions, I spoke about masonry falling off the House of Commons. This week I have been down to the cellars. Will the Leader of the House liaise at the earliest opportunity with the Serjeant at Arms? Will he investigate the toxic paint which is being used on some paintwork in the cellars? Will he investigate the fumes which are going into the kitchens and the conditions in which the House of Commons catering and refreshment staff are working? Will he then allow Government time for a debate on the urgent need to remove Crown immunity from the Palace of Westmister?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Obviously I cannot be expected to deal with all those matters with promptitude, but I share the hon. Lady's concern about many aspects of the management of the Palace of Westminster which, as I have said before, owes a great deal to the long history and limited geography of the place. I shall investigate the matter that she has raised this afternoon.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I will put together the six motions relating to statutory instruments.

Ordered,

That the draft Representation of the People (Amendment) Regulations 1990 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft European Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Regulations 1990 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Local Elections (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Order 1990 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 1990 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft European Parliamentary Elections (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 1990 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the draft Representation of the People (Scotland) (Amendment) Regulations 1990 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

Opposition Day

[STATE THE ALLOTTED DAY]

Scottish Economy

4.16 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): I beg to move,

That this House condemns the failure of the Government's economic policy in Scotland which has resulted in relative economic decline, unacceptable levels of unemployment and inadequate industrial investment, has involved a perverse determination to reduce regional incentives, and has neither protected vital areas of Scottish industry and commerce from the effects of high interest rates, nor properly prepared for the testing challenge that will come with the Single European Market in 1992.

Mr. Speaker: I must announce to the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Dewar: The debate has been called for by the Labour party to reflect the widespread concern and anxiety about the state and performance of the Scottish economy. I make that point because I understand from almost every member of the Scottish press to whom I have spoken today that they have been enthusiastically briefed by the Scottish Tory Whip to the effect that the Secretary of State is hellbent on a debate about local government finance. I hope that he will think better of that. The vital issues of investment, jobs and the country's economic performance are the subjects of today's debate.

The Secretary of State ought also to think of the workers who have been involved over the last two or three months in redundancies or threatened redundancies; many of them have been in contact with hon. Members. I am thinking of what has arisen in Philips of Bishopbriggs, Weir pumps, Lowndes Queensway plc, House of Fraser administration offices, Peterhead Engineering and Redpath Dorman Long. In almost every area there has been bad news as high interest rates bite. We owe it to those people and to their communities to take a serious look at our economic performance.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): If the hon. Gentleman believes that the economy is in crisis and that this is a major debate, can he explain why only 10 of the 49 Scottish Labour Members are in the House?

Mr. Dewar: There are several places where hon. Members may be legitimately, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows. Of course, he is very strongly supported by two Scottish Conservatives. I have no doubt that that was a good point in the right hon. and learned Gentleman's new smart-Alick role with which he has been entertaining the Scottish public, but I do not think it does much for the seriousness of the debate.

If, at some future date, the right hon. and learned Gentleman wishes to have a debate about the poll tax, the division, bitterness and injustice that it has brought in its wake, and how to replace it with a sensible and solid scheme, I should be delighted to have one, and would look forward to it and to coming well out of it.

Economic forecasting is always a subjective art. There is a traditional flurry of reports on a quarterly basis. In recent months I have had some amusement from seeing, within a few brief weeks, the Fraser of Allander Institute being attacked with vim and vigour by the Minister and then, almost immediately afterwards, being clutched to him as a shield and buckler because another document happened to suit his brief at that time.

I accept that, because such forecasting is subjective, one can usually find something to give comfort in almost any of the reports. The one on which I wish to concentrate today comes from a good pedigree and a longer perspective. The report was produced by the industry and enterprise development directorate of the Scottish Development Agency in November 1989. It is an authoritative substantial description and analysis of our economic performance. It was not written with any wish to embarrass the Government. It is written with a degree of objectivity which makes it of particular interest to the House.

The report flatly contradicts many of the Minister's assumptions about the health of the economy about which we have heard so much in recent months. I shall summarise its main message:

"While aggregate output has increased, the Scottish economy has experienced a prolonged period of relative decline. There is no evidence that this has been reversed during the 1980s. Indeed, it is not fully participating in the UK's economic recovery and its relative position has further deteriorated during the 1980s. For example, over the period 1983-88, UK output rose by 21 per cent. and employment by 8 per cent.; the equivalent figures for Scotland are 15 per cent. and minus 0·1 per cent. UK growth is heavily concentrated in Southern England. As job opportunities have appeared in the South, so net out-migration from Scotland has increased reaching over 20,000 in 1988."

The report goes on to comment on the disappointing position of Scotland in a number of the league tables on unemployment and productivity with which we are so familiar. It comments on the fact that the average household income is 86 per cent. of the UK average.

The following amazing sentence, underlined in my copy, states:

"Scotland remains locked into the process of relative economic decline compared to the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe."

I shall give another quote, from near the end of the paper, which also summarises its theme:

"The paper demonstrates the long-term relative decline of the Scottish economy. It has been unable to generate sufficient new output in employment to match the available labour supply. Consequently, Scotland has experienced high net out-migration, population decline and high unemployment. The contribution of indigenously based industry has been particularly disappointing.

There is no evidence that Scotland has or is about to break out of this process of relative decline."

That is put in restrained terms that are sober but contain an unmistakable message: we face major difficulties, there are worrying long-term trends and the Government's policy has failed on a series of vital objectives and issues.

The Opposition believe that there has to be a partnership between Government, industry and the community. The Government cannot stand back, take a hands-off attitude and leave it to the market. To the credit of the Secretary of State, I believe that he is a reluctant convert to that attitude. However, these days he is surrounded by zealots and has succumbed. In the key parts of the report, the case for concern and for the prosecution is substantial.

Mr. Rifkind: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the substance of the report, which is by an official within the SDA, was reported in, I think, the *Glasgow Herald* on 12 December last year? It was not endorsed by the SDA board, precisely because it disagreed with many of its views. Is he aware that the period of economic decline to which he referred started, according to the report, in 1955, not 1979?

Mr. Dewar: I welcome the fact that the right hon. and learned Gentleman agrees that this is a genuine document that represents research done in the Scottish Development Agency. As the Secretary of State knows, the SDA is an organisation which he and his Ministers often laud as an important part of the Government's machinery. Its expertise is something on which they often rely. I am delighted to know that this represents the position of officials in the SDA, at whom I do not sneer. Naturally, it looks at long-term trends. I do not disguise that; indeed, that is one of its virtues. I said that it had wider perspectives, which gives it a certain objectivity and authority, and I hope that the Minister recognises that.

The investment figures for Scotland are not good enough. I quote from that document again, and I assume that the Secretary of State, who may have disagreements about the interpretation placed on the facts, will not quarrel with the facts themselves:

"Despite the recovery since the early 1980s, manufacturing output remains below the 1973 peak. Output has risen dramatically in electronics and instrument engineering, but few other sectors have yet surpassed their 1973 production levels. Some, including metal manufacturing and mechanical engineering, have shown little sign of recovery."

That is a different interpretation of the facts and figures than we normally get from Ministers and it is cause for concern.

I was told in a written answer on 31 January that gross domestic fixed capital formation was running, in cash terms, in 1985 at £861 million; in 1986 at £788 million; and in 1987 at £738 million. For reasons that are not clear to me, I was told that it was impossible to apply the inflator and produce the figures in constant prices. But even in cash terms, they are alarming enough.

We have the extraordinary situation that regional preferential assistance to industry in Scotland—I am now dealing in constant, 1988-89, prices—has more than halved since 1978-79, when it was £349 million. In 1988-89 it was £151·2 million. It is sad to note that, according to the public expenditure White Paper, the intention is that that decline should continue.

My hon. Friends and I do not see the point of asking industry to do more with less. The problems will mount because in Europe we shall have difficulties, with the new arrangements for objective 1 areas—none of which are in Scotland—creaming off about 80 per cent. of the structural funds. That puts a premium on Government effort, and that effort has not been forthcoming. From the way in which regional incentives have been ruthlessly dismantled, the Government's policy amounts to a dereliction of duty.

The impact of all that, as hon. Members in all parts of the House know—even some who are comparative strangers to Scottish economic debates—results in our having an unemployment rate which remains persistently 50 per cent. above the British average.

Another index about which Ministers often talk is wages. The rates for full-time male employees on adult rates, taking weekly wages in Scotland as a percentage of those in the south-east of England, reveal a stark picture. In 1984—I take that base year because I am advised by the Library that before then there was a difference in the basis of compilation, so in fairness 1984 is the best starting point—the Scottish wage was 90·2 per cent. of that in the south-east. In 1989 it was 80·4 per cent., a drop of about 10 per cent.

Compared with Britain as a whole, the Scottish rate was 99·9 per cent. in 1984—almost certainly due to the impact of oil wages, but at least satisfactory in that it was almost at the British average—but by 1989 it had tumbled to 93·2 per cent. Net migration is also a constant source of worry to all who have the interests of the Scottish economy at heart.

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood): The hon. Gentleman seems to have left the question of investment without referring to inward investment. In particular, he did not refer to a written answer that he received on 1 February from the Department of Trade and Industry which, in a table, showed under inward investment in 1979 in Scotland new and safeguarded jobs totalling 2,757. I presume that he made no reference to the figures given in that answer because they did not fit his case, for by 1988 the figure of new and safeguarded jobs had reached 7,370.

Mr. Dewar: I am flattered and delighted that the hon. Gentleman reads my parliamentary questions with such interest. If I were not a man of trusting faith, I could almost have imagined that someone had drawn it to his attention. In case that is so, I draw to his attention the excellent debates in the Standing Committee on the Enterprise and New Towns Bill, when we dealt with that issue at some length. Perhaps he would like to read also the report of the National Audit Office, which strongly criticised the presentation of the figures by the Scottish Office. He might then have a more rounded, balanced view of those matters than one can obtain from reading a slip of paper from the Whips' Office.

I was about to refer to net migration. The Scottish Development Agency report stated:

"It is widely expected that in Scotland manufacturing employment will continue to decline, private services will grow more slowly than the UK average and that the economy will underperform UK growth rates. Based on past relative performance within a UK annual growth rate of 2-3 per cent., Scotland would not generate sufficient employment to bring any substantial fall in unemployment. Nevertheless"—

this is the good news, I suppose—

"unemployment would fall to somewhere near 7·5 per cent."—

now the bad news—

"due to continuing out-migration to Southern England."

It is a mark of concern that the Registrar General's projections—which I admit are raw statistics—for the population of Scotland in the year 2027, which is not far away, is about 500,000 lower than at present. I accept that many things will distort that projection, but there is no doubt that we are in danger of paying a high price for our failure to hold our own population and to attract the type of industry that gives us a base for future prosperity.

Mr. Rifkind: We are all concerned about migration, but is the hon. Gentleman unaware that in 1988-89, the last financial year, net migration from Scotland was the lowest of any year since 1975? If the hon. Gentleman wishes to comment on migration, should not he refer to that fact as well?

Mr. Dewar: I am perfectly prepared to accept that correction from the Secretary of State for that one year, if he will accept the general picture that I have recorded. We are in a serious position, and the long-term trend is still of the type that I have described.

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Mr. Ian Lang): Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would also draw to the attention of the House the fact that, during the two periods of Labour Government in the 1960s and the 1970s, net migration—not just to the remainder of the United Kingdom but overseas—totalled 150,000.

Mr. Dewar: The Minister makes an extremely valid point. The problem has been running for a long time. I object to the fact that we are constantly told by Ministers that we have nothing to worry about and that the corner has been turned. There is a complacency that borders on folly about the way that Ministers deal with those matters. We are right to point to the results of Government policy and high interest rates. Yesterday, the National Farmers Union of Scotland was worrying about investment in its industry—a different but nevertheless important industry, but it could be almost any sector of the Scottish economic scene.

There is also the problem of geography. That is not a fatal impediment to success in these days of high technology, but it must be overcome with Government help for the infrastructure of the country. We hear a great deal of the challenge of 1992. I sometimes think back to the days when we were campaigning—and I was campaigning for the yes vote—in the referendum on the Common Market. We talked about the challenge and the opportunities. However, what has happened is that the United Kingdom is now running a balance of trade deficit with the other members of the EEC of about £14,000 million. Clearly, if we are to put that right after 1992, we shall have to take a tumble to ourselves.

There has been reference to a report produced by the university of Louvain for the European Commission. It is of particular interest to Scots because one area that it studied was the Strathclyde region. It makes depressing reading. It talks about technological backwardness, of training not in touch with technical developments and of the dangers of areas such as Strathclyde being marginalised. From the report it was obvious that Britain and Spain were at one end of the scale while France, Germany and Belgium were at the other. That is a great worry for people such as myself, and I hope for Ministers also.

The SDA report spoke of the shake-up that may come and the fact that we have already had an enormous loss of control over industry and commerce in Scotland. It said:

"The corporate base and therefore growth capacity has been continuously eroded by the external acquisition of Scottish companies. Between 1983 and 1986"—

part of the time when the Conservative Government were in power—

"321 Scottish companies were taken over by non-Scottish companies. They tended to include the faster growing and better performing companies. In total these companies accounted for about 7 per cent. of the Scottish GDP."

On the basis of those statistics, we have a real problem.

Nothing that we heard from the Minister in Committee leads us to expect that our problems will be solved by the restructuring and emergence of Scottish Enterprise, particularly a Scottish Enterprise working, apparently, a standstill budget.

Under-investment in transport is particularly highlighted in the Louvain university report, and there are the problems of the Channel tunnel. There are obvious worries and no guarantees of the kind of investment that will give us the links we need if we are to get into the European markets efficiently and effectively. If we do not, the long-term trends to which I have been referring will be very worrying indeed

I put it no higher than to say that I sometimes think we are a little complacent about our export record. The SDA report says:

"The real value of manufacturing exports remains below the 1978 peak, and outwith whisky and office machinery/data processing equipment Scottish industry remains less export orientated than the UK as a whole."

We tend to sit back on the basis of some rather superficial figures and to think that all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

In particular, will the Minister turn his attention when he replies to the anxiety about the steel industry? That is not just of symbolic importance; it is part of Britain's core manufacturing industry. Our fear is that the Government have not so much abandoned responsibility—that might be unfair—as that they abandoned their ability to influence events when they privatised the industry.

I do not doubt for a moment that the Secretary of State is concerned—he has good cause for concern—but it is not so clear that he speaks for his colleagues. There was a now well-known and rather notorious exchange during questions to the Department of Trade and Industry the other day when the Secretary of State made it clear that he believed that the only test that should properly be applied is the commercial interests of British Steel. I hope that the Secretary of State for Scotland will take this opportunity of dissociating himself from that narrow view. We cannot have a Government who assume the role of a curious, even if anxious, spectator to what is happening to such an important industry.

As we know, there are pressure points in the strip mill at Ravenscraig, the plate mill at Dalziel, tubes at Clydesdale and at Imperial. This would be a good opportunity for the Government to give us a progress report. There is a strong case for the industry. The market in steel will recover and we need that capacity.

My opinion may not be persuasive on that and on a number of other issues, but let me draw the Secretary of State's attention to the autumn report of Cambridge Econometrics which refers to a net output stagnation in the steel industry during 1990, but suggests that output growth will be strong in 1991 as export markets revive. The long-term forecast talks about output growing steadily.

There is a good deal of evidence that the United Kingdom, and perhaps even Europe, will need the capacity in the Scottish steel industry in the period that lies ahead. It will be a tragedy if the narrow commercial and perhaps short-term interests of British Steel were the only test to be considered in deciding its fate.

We remain convinced that there is a need for investment, particularly in the mill at Clydesdale. Great efforts have been made to find new markets and it would be a scandal if we were to go out of tubes, and the North sea were to be supplied not only from outside Scotland but from outside the United Kingdom.

There are many rumours about a French connection. We should like to know whether the Government are monitoring the situation. Are they involved? Are they

pressing for investment, not only in the mill but in the more immediate modest package that has been urged by the plant which would give it a competitive edge and boost morale? Has it been made clear to British Steel that regional incentives would be available for such investment?

The point—I do not want to go into too long a passage when my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) is here—also applies at Ravenscraig, where a proposal for automatic roll change gear and other relatively modest but very important and competitive investments is on the table, and the best that we can get out of British Steel is that it may be considered; this has not been said in as positive a tone as we should like. I very much hope that the Secretary of State is pressing hard for that investment and that he will make that clear during the debate.

We recognise the importance of the guarantee on steelmaking until 1994 at Ravenscraig, but it would be of little comfort if this were a bridging operation for the convenience of British Steel, leading nowhere. At Dalziel, too, there are concerns. We hear reports of the possibility of a one plate mill strategy, that decisions may well be imminent on that, and that it may be a case not so much of "if" as of "where". We are anxious that the Scottish Office should have a positive input into the argument.

Much manufacturing industry has changed or contracted. We make no bones about it. We accept that it was bound to happen. It is true to say, however, that we in Scotland have borne an unfair share of the burden. Perhaps I can take as a statistical basis for that assertion the view expressed in the Scottish Development Agency report:

"While Scotland's manufacturing output was still below its 1975 level in 1987, elsewhere in Europe over this period output had risen substantially (e.g., Germany—28 per cent., Italy—31 per cent., France—15 per cent.). With higher output the relative fall in manufacturing employment was much less than in Scotland."

That, again, is a mark of our failure. We should not just write off that comparative gap as something about which we can do nothing and say that we must just watch and wait. New industries are important. I do not want to talk just about the steel industry and the old, traditional sector. Electronics has a future, but, again, it is a future bedevilled by lack of investment, research and development, product innovation and long-term economic development. Those points are forcefully put in the SDA report; it concludes its discussion of electronics by saying:

"the indigenous Scottish industry remains small and embryonic".

The report is damaging because it undermines many of the Government's assumptions and supports the doubts and worries that are expressed, sometimes to derision or almost to the suggestion from Conservative Members that such doubts are unpatriotic or panic-stricken. It reinforces our fear that complacency has got out of hand and that we are not facing up to the problems that lie ahead.

Scotland has a great deal to offer, but even in the service sector, where there has been growth, it has tended to be slower than in other parts of the country. The SDA report says:

"It is in consumer orientated services—reflecting Scotland's falling population—that underperformance is most apparent. While Scotland has been losing jobs in distribution during the 1980s, employment has continued to grow rapidly in the UK. Perhaps more surprising is the performance of tourist related employment, which now accounts for some 130,000 jobs. In contrast to a 33 per cent. growth (1983-1987) in Great Britain, Scotland's growth is only some 12 per cent.; the difference has been most obvious during the 1980s when the Scottish industry contributed few additional jobs".

That cannot be a reason for satisfaction; it must be a cause for worry and for an anxious re-examination of what the Government have been doing.

I found the report a deeply depressing and worrying document. The Secretary of State for Scotland has tried to pass it off as the work of an official. The SDA is an official body with expertise, playing a very important part in the economic planning of the Government, as we have always understood it. The Secretary of State tries to brush it off by saying that some of it has already been published. If it has, it was presumably not all that unimportant or meant merely to moulder in a drawer. It seems to me a thoughtful, thought-provoking and, from the Government's point of view, damaging document.

Scotland has a great deal to offer, and I agree that there are major opportunities, but those opportunities must be taken. We cannot afford a neutral Government who simply hold the ring. That has increasingly been the Government's role, and the Secretary of State must take much of the blame for it. There has been a lack of commitment, imagination and basic will. If it is not put right, the long-term trends and the habit of decline will be entrenched, to our cost. The battle for tomorrow must always be fought today. There is precious little sign that the Government are prepared to accept that responsibility. That is why we tabled the motion and will vote for it.

4.44 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

"congratulates the Government on the success of their economic policies in Scotland which have resulted in higher living standards, greatly reduced unemployment, a substantial increase in the workforce in employment, and record levels of manufacturing productivity and output; have promoted the competitiveness of Scottish industry and its readiness to meet the challenge of the Single European Market; have encouraged the growth of investment, of enterprise and small businesses, and have provided a basis for sustained growth and development across the economy as a whole; and notes that unemployment is now falling faster in Scotland than in the United Kingdom as a whole."

I ought in all politeness to begin by welcoming the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) back to the House of Commons after his dramatic flight to Glasgow yesterday for a press conference to try to save the tattered remnants of the roof tax. I assure him that I do not intend to speak on that subject today, and I am delighted that he is anxious to defend his proposals at the first opportunity; I am sure that that is something that we can easily accommodate.

There is one respect in which what the hon. Gentleman said yesterday is relevant to our debate today and to the Scottish economy. I understand that the hon. Gentleman gave various reasons why the Labour party has decided that a local income tax would be highly undesirable in the interests of the Scottish economy, and I hope that it will not embarrass the hon. Gentleman if I say that I agree with his analysis and conclusions.

I must add that if the hon. Gentleman believes, as I do, that the consequence of a local income tax would be to add some several pence, perhaps up to 10p, to the standard rate of income tax in Scotland, and that it would be undesirable

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for the people of Scotland to face a level of income tax higher than elsewhere in the United Kingdom, we can only express some puzzlement as to why the hon. Gentleman's party has failed to reach a similar conclusion about the consequence of giving a Scottish assembly power to alter the rate of income tax.

As we have identified before, it is the implications for the Scottish economy of a higher rate of income tax in Scotland than elsewhere in the United Kingdom which is one of the prime arguments as to why those proposals would damage Scottish jobs, Scottish employment and Scottish industry. It is therefore appropriate that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues should at least try to be consistent.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The Secretary of State referred to fiscal powers that many of us would like to see vested in a Scottish parliament. Does he agree that if, in the forthcoming Budget, the Chancellor thought it improper for the United Kingdom as a whole, because of overheating in the south-east, not to reduce corporation tax on small businesses, for example, but felt that it might be an important and useful measure for small businesses in Scotland, he would effectively not be allowed to do so? If we had a Scottish parliament with fiscal powers, such a tax-cutting measure could be undertaken.

Mr. Rifkind: To listen to the hon. Gentleman, one would not think that he was a member of a party that wishes to see fiscal integration in the European Community. His party's whole wish is to see a harmonisation of taxes throughout the Community. It is therefore a slightly curious way of bringing that about to wish to see fiscal disintegration in one part of the Community. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should try to reconcile that curious anomaly in his position.

I should like to pay a compliment to Opposition Members, which the hon. Member for Garscadden did not pay, by responding to the terms of the motion. I always think that, where possible, we should allow these debates to concentrate on the motion on the Order paper. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, at least in principle, does not disagree with that observation.

As I read through the motion, I saw several allegations made against the Government, to which it is appropriate for me to seek to respond. The first is that we are responsible for what the motion refers to as "relative economic decline" in Scotland. The word "relative" is important: "relative economic decline" is Labourspeak for "actual economic growth", and that is precisely what Scotland is experiencing and has experienced for some time.

It is important that that point be fully registered. It is something that the House should already be aware of, that over the past year Scotland has enjoyed the highest output, including manufacturing output, that it has ever known in its economic history. I recall, as I am sure the House will, that two or three years ago——

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde) *rose——*

Mr. Rifkind: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to continue for a moment.

I recall the Government and the House constantly being told by Opposition Members and by various learned commentators that Scotland was experiencing de-industrialisation and that the whole of Scotland, as an industrial economy, was disappearing like snow off a dyke. Yet we find that in the past 12 months manufacturing output not only has been maintained, but has been the highest in our economic history. That does not refer to the service sector only; it includes the manufacturing sector.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): This is a point that affects a great many of my constituents. On manufacturing output, can the Scottish Office look very carefully—that is all I ask—at the operation now of Mr. Kerry Packer and his associates, after two, if not three, Australian takeovers, of the north British Steel foundry in Bathgate, coupled with the Atlas Steel foundry in Armadale? I know that those are important sectors of any economy. I know that there are problems. I think that the Scottish Office has tried to be helpful. Could this have the attention of both the right hon. and learned Gentleman and his Minister of State? It is a very complex matter.

Mr. Rifkind: I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that we shall certainly look at the point that he raises.

Not only is Scotland experiencing the highest manufacturing output of its economic history, but output there is now growing faster than that of the United Kingdom as a whole. For example, in 1988-89, the last year for which we have figures available, the level of growth of industrial production in the United Kingdom was 2·2 per cent. In Scotland it was 4·5 per cent. Faced with those figures and the present record manufacturing output, the reference in the Opposition motion to "relative economic decline" shows a disregard for the facts that is not to the credit of the hon. Member for Garscadden.

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman suggesting that we are suffering from overheating of the Scottish economy? If this has been such an economic miracle, why are we still losing young skilled people, who have to go south to find jobs?

Mr. Rifkind: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was in the House a few moments ago when I intervened during the speech of the hon. Member for Garscadden. The question of migration was raised at that time and I was able to inform the House that the net migration figures last year were the lowest of any year since 1975. That is something which I am sure the hon. Gentleman will welcome as much as I do. I am not saying that we do not have economic problems in Scotland, or that the economy in Scotland is overheated. I am saying that the Scottish economy at present is growing faster than that of the United Kingdom as a whole, and not to recognise that is to do a disservice to Scotland's interests.

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): As the Secretary of State knows very well, Scotland's largest manufacturing employer is Ferranti. I put it to him, as the Minister with responsibility for the Scottish economy, that we welcome the support that the Government have given to the GEC acquisition of Ferranti Defence Systems in Edinburgh, but to achieve the benefits of that we need to win the radar contract, which will be achieved only if that acquisition is not referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

I know that the right hon. and learned Gentleman cannot anticipate the decision of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, but, if the acquisition is referred to the MMC, it will jeopardise not only the radar contract but the whole European fighter aircraft project, which involves thousands of jobs. Will he take that on board and ensure that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry fully takes account of Scottish economic interests in this matter?

Mr. Rifkind: I note what the hon. Gentleman says; I am sure that he will acknowledge that recent developments regarding Ferranti have been beneficial to the interests of the thousands of members of its work force in Edinburgh. I shall be happy to give the hon. Gentleman the support he seeks if he will support the maintenance of proper levels of defence expenditure, as without that, Ferranti would have a pretty grim future.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Will my right hon. and learned Friend remind the Opposition that the EFA programme depends vitally on a pledge from this Government and any future Government, and that we should be interested to know what Labour's view is on that?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct in saying that it works both ways, as I am sure the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) will recognise.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): There has already been a reference to the importance of Ravenscraig, which must account for about 5 per cent. of Scottish manufacturing output. Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that the cuts in output of steel in Scotland, which have not taken place in Wales, must have reduced manufacturing output in Scotland by at least 1 per cent.?

Mr. Rifkind: This is becoming more like Question Time and less like a debate than I had originally intended. Obviously, we have expressed our concern about recent decisions in that respect. It is encouraging that, since Christmas, Ravenscraig has resumed its output of steel products. I know that the hon. Gentleman will welcome that.

The charge of "relative economic decline" is difficult for the Opposition to sustain, certainly when one looks at developments in the Scottish economy over the past year.

The next charge is of "unacceptable levels of unemployment" and I must ask the hon. Member for Garscadden what he means by that. If he means that unemployment is too high, I agree; that would be true of any time in the past 30 years. There has never been a time when hon. Members on either side of the House have been complacent about the levels of unemployment.

However, if the hon. Gentleman is trying to discern the current trend of the problem of unemployment, he should at least acknowledge that over the past year unemployment in Scotland has fallen by no less than 50,000, which is the largest fall since records began in 1948. Not only has unemployment fallen by 50,000 in one year, but the rate at which unemployment is falling in Scotland has, over the past few months, been significantly higher than in other parts of the United Kingdom.

If the hon. Gentleman looks at those matters not from the perspective of unemployment but from the perspective of total employment in Scotland, the situation is equally encouraging. Employment in Scotland increased by no less than 100,000 in 1987, the latest year for which we have figures, and that included the manufacturing sector. That is something of which the hon. Gentleman should be aware. The total number of people in employment is the highest that it has been for 10 years.

Mr. Dewar: Why, if the record is so good, has the gap in average earnings to which I referred opened as it has? If the right hon. and learned Gentleman goes back two or three years, he will see that in the league table of unemployment we were in the middle. We are now, on the British mainland, the second highest, behind only the north. It seems to me that our record has been deteriorating quite clearly against the record in other parts of Great Britain over the past two or three years.

Mr. Rifkind: I do not accept that there is any such trend to which the hon. Gentleman is entitled to refer. He will know that, when we pointed out that Scotland had very high levels of earnings a few years ago, he immediately dismissed that as somehow irrelevant to his argument. Now that there has been a relative change in respect of certain areas of England, he immediately says that this is decisive and conclusive. The hon. Gentleman must make up his mind about the importance that he attaches to these matters.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Rifkind: The House will forgive me; this is a short debate and I have already given way a considerable number of times.

The next charge made against the Government is on the alleged inadequate levels of industrial investment and the alleged reduction in regional incentives. I happily concede that we should all like to see higher levels of industrial investment. That has been a problem in the United Kingdom as a whole probably for the past 100 years, never mind the past 10 or 30 years. But it is important also to recognise that the level of industrial investment in Scotland matches very well the United Kingdom level as a whole. While we would all wish to see it increased substantially, that is something that is ultimately within the control of industry itself.

On regional incentives, I accept that we have quite deliberately and consciously abolished the regional development grant. We did so with considerable support from the Scottish Council (Development and Industry) because it acknowledged in its study of the matter that automatic grants of that sort did little to encourage investment and that it was far more sensible to concentrate investment and support on companies that would not otherwise wish to invest in Scotland. That is, I believe, a much more logical and sensible basis.

We are accused in the motion of not having prepared properly for 1992. That is pretty rich from a party that opposed our membership of the European Community until very recently, although I exempt the hon. Member for Garscadden from that charge. However, he cannot allow his own party to be exempt from it, because it was passionately hostile to our membership of the Community until the British electorate persuaded it otherwise.

As the single most important preparation that we can make for 1992 is to improve our training and business support in Scotland, it is pretty ironic that the Labour party, alone in Scotland, is opposing Scottish Enterprise, and that it cannot even call on the support of the Scottish

[Mr. Rifkind]

TUC or Scottish local authorities in its lonely, isolated opposition to the measure. It is pretty rich for Labour to say that we are not preparing for 1992. It is widely recognised by the Confederation of British Industry, by the STUC, by Scottish local authorities and by the whole Scottish economic community that Scottish Enterprise offers an exciting new opportunity, as does its counterpart in the Highlands and Islands. If the Opposition are concerned about those matters, they should tackle their own failure to support this important change.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West) *rose*——

Mr. Rifkind: I shall not give way at the moment, but perhaps later on.

On the charge that we have failed to protect Scotland from high interest rates, the hon. Member for Garscadden clearly has not examined recent trends in the Scottish economy. Several recent reports and studies acknowledged that Scotland was faring much better than any other part of the United Kingdom with regard to high interest rates.

Mr. Dewar: Not true.

Mr. Rifkind: I shall respond to that allegation. The forecast of growth for the United Kingdom for 1990 is 1·25 per cent. The report by Cambridge Econometrics to which the hon. Gentleman referred projects that growth in Scotland will be not 1·2 per cent., but 1·6 per cent. Fraser of Allander is projecting growth of 1·9 per cent. and is even more optimistic, and Business Strategies, in its recent reports, said that Scotland can expect to be second only to East Anglia in economic growth levels in the early 1990s.

The studies of the CBI in Scotland present a more optimistic picture than that painted by the CBI in the United Kingdom as a whole. In its surveys, the Scottish CBI shows that output in Scotland is growing faster than in the United Kingdom as a whole. Manufacturers are less pessimistic, exports are increasing faster and employment is growing, although it fell elsewhere in the United Kingdom in the last quarter of 1989.

Those are the views of outside spokesmen, including the Fraser of Allander Institute, which is a body that has never been hesitant to criticise the Government in the past when it thought it appropriate.

Mr. Dewar: As a corrective to those remarks, does the Minister remember the National Westminster bank report of 20 December 1989, which said:

"After a brief interlude next year, when Scotland will suffer less from a slowdown than the more prosperous parts of the United Kingdom, Scotland will again grow more slowly than the UK as a whole for the following five years."?

I shall also quote the chairman of the CBI's economic committee in Scotland, Mr. Wrigglesworth, who said in October—so this is two or three months old—that:

"The outlook has deteriorated since summer, with orders and employment falling and output at a standstill."

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman can easily see from the overall economic situation that Scotland is coping far better than the United Kingdom as a whole at present.

For example, let us consider the construction industry in Scotland—73 per cent. of those who responded to the survey by the Scottish Building Employers Federation say that they are expecting increased orders in the next year. That is the highest response of that kind in the United Kingdom.

We know that the Scottish economy has been less affected by high interest rates, it is more export-oriented and the oil industry in Scotland is booming at present, with an increase in employment of no less than 11 per cent. over the past year. We should warmly welcome that.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The Secretary of State was telling the House—and it was received with some incredulity—that the Scottish construction industry is undergoing a boom. I am looking at the index of industrial production, from which the Secretary of State quoted a few moments ago. It says that, since 1985, the Scotish construction industry has grown by 2·5 per cent., and in the same period the construction industry in the United Kingdom as a whole has grown by 23·5 per cent. Where is the boom?

Mr. Rifkind: The whole point that I am making, if the hon. Gentleman would be good enough to listen, is that in the past couple of years Scotland has overtaken the United Kingdom position, which has fallen back. The Building Employers Confederation's recent survey shows that 73 per cent. of Scottish firms expect an increase in their work load in the coming year. In no other part of the United Kingdom do firms expect anything like that. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would welcome that.

The hon. Gentleman is right in that, between 1985 and a year or so ago, the balance was the other way round. I have not sought to suggest otherwise, but in the past couple of years the situation has been reversed.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Rifkind: I shall continue because many hon. Members want to take part in the debate.

Finally, I wish to refer to non-domestic rates, which are of equal importance to the Scottish economy and to the prospects of Scottish industry and employment. Opposition Members will be as anxious as I am to ensure that that important area of taxation, which has a material effect on commerce and industry in Scotland, should be properly protected. The hon. Member for Garscadden acknowledged that fact.

The Government have shown their commitment to achieve a level playing field—a harmonisation of business rates—and have taken early steps to move in that direction. For example, one of our first measures in the past few years was the indexation of non-domestic rates. That has already been of substantial benefit to Scottish industry and commerce. It has been esimated that, if we had not indexed non-domestic rates to the rate of inflation, Scottish industry and commerce would have paid £50 million more in business rates during the past few years. That support would disappear immediately if the Labour party's proposal came into effect.

I have been examining the Labour party's proposals, and they are revealing and interesting. The document published last week on non-domestic rates is rather coy. It says only that Labour's provisional plans were laid out in its consultation document published in 1989. I thought that I had better refer to the original holy writ on the subject, so I turned to that document, which says that Labour

"would abolish the restrictions limiting increases to the retail price index. Businesses should shoulder a fair burden of the cost of local services."

I have no doubt that Opposition Members are proud of that proposal, but they should be under no illusion about what its consequences would be. If that had been Government policy in the past couple of years, businesses would already have paid £50 million more than they have paid, or are due to pay in the forthcoming year. That is the first consequence, and it would be damaging to the Scottish economy and to employment in Scotland.

But it is even more serious than that, because we know that local authorities—*[Interruption.]* No, let me continue. Local authorities have just been fixing the community charge, and we know that, if there had not been indexation, judging by the experience of previous years, the business rate would go up next year by the same amount as the community charge. For example, in Strathclyde, which covers half of Scotland, the increase in business rate would not have been limited to the rate of inflation, but would have been 12 per cent. In Stirling, the district business rate would be going up by 18 per cent., and in Edinburgh by 24 per cent.

I do not wish to debate who is responsible for that increase at the moment. *[Laughter.]* No, I am happy to do so on another occasion, and Opposition Members will not distract me from the point that I am making.

If this was a matter for local authority discretion, no matter whose fault it was, local authorities would be increasing the business rate for commerce and industry in Strathclyde by 12 per cent., and in Edinburgh by 24 per cent. Opposition Members should realise that that would be a consequence of the policies that they wish to pursue.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Rifkind: I shall give way in a few moments.

The position is far worse than I have so far described. Not only is the Labour party opposed to the indexation of business rates, but the inevitable consequence of what I understand to be Labour's policy is that there would be no prospect, either now or in the future, of the harmonisation of business rates north and south of the border. That is an even more serious point. As the House knows, harmonisation has been welcomed by virtually everyone in Scotland and there has been widespread recognition that the Scottish economy and Scottish industry have suffered for years because of the high business rates there compared to rates in England and Wales. For the purpose of today's discussion, let us not argue as to whose fault that was.

Business rates have been far higher in Scotland than in England and Wales, and everyone, apart from the Labour party, seems to agree that that should end as quickly as possible. But to achieve that, two things must happen; there must be a harmonisation of valuation law and a common rates poundage. If local authorities are left to decide those matters, quite properly they will use their discretion in different ways, and on the experience of the past 40 years, business rates in Scotland will remain significantly higher than those in the rest of the United Kingdom.

In the very first year we have reduced the gap by £80 million. That £80 million, together with the £50 million by which industry has benefited from indexation, means that already our policy has saved industry and commerce in Scotland—that means the Scottish economy and Scottish jobs—no less than £130 million. All that would be wiped away if it became a matter of local authority discretion.

It is literally impossible to have a common business rate and local council discretion. If the Labour party chooses the latter, it will consciously damage the Scottish economy and Scottish employment. The situation goes from bad to worse. The Labour party document seems to acknowledge that differential rates burdens could be damaging to some sectors of industry. The document states that it

"will need to ensure that any proposals do not put Scottish small businesses at a serious disadvantage in comparison to small businesses elsewhere in the country."

That sounds splendid, but why is it necessary to protect only small businesses from different and heavier rate burdens, but not big businesses or industry? Why protect small businesses, but give no protection to Ravenscraig, Yarrow, IBM or Ferranti?

I ask the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East why his party is guaranteeing or seeking to suggest that it would protect small businesses from differential rates burdens caused by giving local authorities discretion, but would offer no protection to the larger industries that employ most people. Has the hon. Member for Garscadden thought it out? Is it a conscious policy or is it simply a mess?

I suspect that it is a mess. I cannot conceive that the Labour party consciously wishes to put Ravenscraig, of all places, in a position where its rates burden would be consciously and deliberately higher than that of the steel industry elsewhere in the United Kingdom. As Opposition Members know, the steel industry in Scotland, along with every other industry there, has paid higher rates burdens than any industry in England and Wales. The Government's policy will eliminate that over a period. According to the document, the Opposition's policy would offer no such protection.

I have to ask the hon. Member for Garscadden—I shall happily give way to him—whether he and his party believe in and support the objectives of harmonising the rates burden of Scottish industry compared with industry south of the border. If he does, does he accept that that cannot be achieved without a common rates poundage? If he does not accept that, can he explain how giving local authorities discretion to determine the level of non-domestic rates is compatible with achieving a level playing field for Scottish industry compared with the rest of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Dewar: Obviously, I shall read with some care what the Secretary of State has said, but there are several ways in which we can help Scottish industry. Industrial derating was the simplest and best known way of doing that. I certainly do not accept that what he is doing, which is preserving the differences by conserving the present system, does what he has claimed.

The Secretary of State is indulging in sleight of hand. If he is assuming that the industrial rate will go up by the same extent as the poll tax, he forgets that that will produce a great deal more income that will bring both down towards a medium position. That is one example. I shall not say that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is cheating, as that would be an offensive thing to say and I would not wish to be offensive, but in a fabric of words, he is misrepresenting the position. We do not wish to place an unreasonable burden on Scottish industry, and we have no intention of doing so.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman has shown himself totally confused. I notice that he did not answer the question. The question was quite simple: does he believe in harmonisation—that means identical business rates for industry north and south of the border? If he does, how can he reconcile that with giving local authorities discretion as to the level of business rates? The hon. Gentleman knows that we have had industrial derating for years, and that has not produced a level playing field; that is not the answer. If the hon. Gentleman would like to clarify that, I shall happily give way to him again.

Mr. Dewar: I do not think that local authority discretion is necessarily the disaster that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is suggesting. In the past, local authority discretion has been a forced discretion, largely because cuts in central Government support meant that the system was bearing a burden for which it was never designed. If we consider who must bear the responsibility for that, I would not suggest the Secretary of State alone —I presume that his colleagues in the Treasury and his predecessors would take some responsibility. The right hon. and learned Gentleman talks about a mess and confusion and unreasonable burdens, but he should look at the record over the years of the Government whom he supports, in terms of the rate support grant, the revenue support grant and, of course, the poll tax.

Mr. Rifkind: The House and Scotland will note that the hon. Gentleman has not thought this one out. He is obviously embarrassed. He knows that in principle he is in favour of harmonisation. He knows that that is in Scotland's interests, but he obviously did not realise until today that that was incompatible with the policy that he is putting forward.

From the party that brought us the roof tax, we now have the jobs tax. The perpetuation of a heavier rates burden on Scottish industry and commerce would be damaging to heavy industry, to Ravenscraig, to Yarrow and to every business, big or small, wherever it may be in Scotland. If this debate is about the interests of the Scottish economy, I do not accuse the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends of deliberately wishing to do down the Scottish economy; I accuse them of a much more serious offence—of total and utter confusion and incompetence.

Hon. Members: Is that it?

5.17 pm

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): It is little wonder that my hon. Friends are asking the Secretary of State for Scotland, "Is that it?" Rarely have I seen a less competent performance by the right hon. and learned Gentleman. He showed complete and callous indifference to the state of the Scottish economy, and instead tried to turn the debate into an attack on Labour's policy on local government finance, purely to try to push the Tory party's chances in the forthcoming regional council elections in May.

The Secretary of State said that the House and Scotland would note what my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) said. The people of Scotland will judge my hon. Friend's contribution to debates over the past 10 years, and that of the Secretary of State, when they go to the polls in the next general election. I have every confidence that they will give resounding support to the Labour party, and that the policies that it has espoused for many years will be put into practice when Labour wins the next general election and forms a Government for the United Kingdom and sets up a Scottish Parliament.

The Secretary of State referred to the document that the Labour party produced on local government. He referred to the phrase that stated that the Labour party will look to business to shoulder a fair share of local government taxation. The Secretary of State seemed to imply that it is terrible to envisage that business should carry a fair share of the burden. That implies that the Government's policy is that poll tax payers should carry an unfair share of the burden. If business does not carry its fair share, the burden will be put on the poll tax payers. If that is the official Government policy on which the Tories will fight the next regional council elections, and the next general election, I look forward to that contest, as I am confident of its outcome.

At the end of last year, the Standing Commission on the Scottish Economy produced its final report. I feel it is necessary to remind the Secretary of State that throughout the three years in which the standing commission studied the Scottish economy, it was studiously ignored by Ministers, as was its final report. Ministers may argue that it is another cross-party political body, but it is nothing of the sort; if it was, the Scottish National party would have walked out by now.

The Secretary of State must recognise that the standing commission is composed of distinguished Scottish academics, industrialists and economists. Its final report was based on 30 different reports from Scottish analysts, and it took in a wealth of evidence from overseas. The conclusion of its report is that we require Scottish solutions to Scottish problems.

In the preface to the report, the chairman of the standing commission, Professor Sir Kenneth Alexander, said:

> "Some of the policy proposals are so specifically Scottish in their purpose that we consider it unlikely that they would be legislated by a Westminster Parliament. This leads us to conclude that the adoption of such policy initiatives requires a more decentralised political and administrative structure with a Parliament in Scotland having key economic and social powers."

That is not a party political conclusion but the conclusion of industrialists and business men. They have determined that Scotland's economic problems will be solved only by a Scottish Parliament with key economic powers.

It is imperative that the Secretary of State begins to take that message on board, because if he does not he will fail to understand the real problems that are facing the Scottish economy. He must accept that we have a pan-United Kingdom institution in charge of the Scottish economy—the Westminster Parliament. I shall not argue whether, by definition, that is good or bad. In control of that Westminster Parliament is a party whose power base is almost exclusively in the midlands and south of England. It will secure its control of Parliament as long as it retains its power base in the south. It does not require the voters of Wales, Scotland or the north to return it to office. As long as the voters of the midlands and south of England vote for it, it will retain control of this country.

The Conservative party is interested only in ensuring that everything is done to secure the economic interests of the south of England. It does not care whether that is bad for Wales, Scotland or the north, because it does not need voters in those areas to return it to office.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does the hon. Gentleman realise that the description that he is giving rather fits the Labour party's position in Scotland, where it represents only one seat north of the Tay?

Mr. Robert Hughes: What about Aberdeen?

Mr. McAllion: As my hon. Friend points out, Aberdeen is north of the Tay. Sometimes, Dundee is also considered to be north of the Tay.

Mr. Bill Walker *rose*——

Mr. McAllion: If that is to be the quality of the hon. Gentleman's interventions, I will not give way again. The hon. Gentleman has convinced me that it is unwise to give way to him.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Was the intervention made by the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) deliberate disinformation in the guise of his position as Scottish Defence Minister, or was it complete ignorance on his part?

Mr. McAllion: As my hon. Friend knows, it was complete ignorance.

The solution to the economy overheating in the south is to apply high interest rates not only in the south but in Scotland, Wales and the north, regardless of whether the economies of those areas need it. The mass unemployment, slow growth and under-utilisation of capacity in Scotland represent a complete negation and condemnation of the Government policy.

Mr. Hayward: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McAllion: I shall not give way because the hon. Gentleman is an English Member.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) said that he will not give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) because he is an English Member. Will you remind Scottish Members that all hon. Members are eligible to take part in debates on all parts of the United Kingdom? Many of us have much interest in the welfare of Scotland.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): The hon. Member who has the Floor decides to whom he will give way.

Mr. McAllion: I would have been more impressed by that point of order if the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) had been present throughout the debate.

Mr. Hayward *rose*——

Mr. McAllion: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman; this is a short debate.

May I draw the Secretary of State's attention to the research carried out for the standing commission by Alastair Lonie and David Power at Dundee university, and the evidence given by Professor David Vines and David Bell of Glasgow? They concluded that the policy of high interest rates had disproportionately disadvantaged Scotland and had taken £630 million from the local economy—more than the annual budget for the Scottish Development Agency and regional assistance in Scotland.

The Government have deliberately taken £630 million from an economy which is suffering from unemployment and under-utilisation of capacity and tried to pass that off as a serious economic policy that will benefit the people of Scotland.

It is not so much that the Government have the wrong diagnosis for Scotland as that they have no diagnosis and do not care whether they have such a diagnosis because they do not need the voters of Scotland in order to be re-elected.

Mr. Hayward *rose*——

Mr. McAllion: I have only a short time available, so I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

We know that the Secretary of State has abolished regional development grants in favour of selective assistance, which he says will more effectively target Government money where it is required. That was considered in some detail by the standing commission. It carried out a survey of regional financial assistance in Scotland between 1981 and 1988. It concluded that fewer firms are being helped now than in 1981.

The standing commission then considered the take-up of selective assistance, but what it found was very different from the picture that the Government paint. Taking into account the new and revised offers made by the Government, it found that in 1988-89 only £49·4 million had been provided in selective assistance to firms in Scotland—£9 million less than the previous year, and £17 million less than in 1984-85. The Scottish economy is desperately in need of state support and investment, yet it is being starved of both by the Government.

The standing commission concluded that, although that policy helped to reduce the Exchequer's outlay—and no doubt the public sector borrowing requirement—it was proving a real cost to the Scottish economy and was effectively negating the Government's policy of regional assistance.

There is evidence of that everywhere in Scotland. The headline in the *Glasgow Herald* of last November said, "Docklands aid dwarfs Scotland's". Alf Young, its economic correspondent, wrote of

"the most dramatic demonstration of regional policy in reverse yet mounted by the Thatcher Government"

and the massive spending by the Government on London docklands. Docklands boasts an enterprise zone on the Isle of Dogs. Quite why an enterprise zone was necessary to move the City of London a few miles down the river has always been beyond me. The article says that the Government are increasing assistance for the docklands development from £228 million to £332 million in 1990-91. Between 1989 and 1992, the Government will make a staggering investment of £813 million in the docklands development.

In addition, the extension of the Jubilee line to Canary wharf will cost £1,000 million, £600 million of which will be direct state subsidy. When I raised with Ministers and ScotRail the electrification of the line north of Edinburgh, I was told that it was too expensive at £100 million, yet £1,000 million is being spent on a short extension of the Underground to docklands. However, they cannot afford to electrify the north-east railway line north of Edinburgh, which is a disgrace.

If one compares the budgets for the Scottish Development Agency and for the new Scottish Enterprise, on present trends and over the same period to which I referred when I spoke about the docklands, one sees that no more than £330 million will be allocated to Scotland.

[Mr. McAllion]

How does that compare with the £1,000 million for the Underground development and with the £813 million for the London docklands development? Inevitably, the people who pay the price for those problems——

Mr. Devlin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McAllion: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman, who was not here at the beginning of the debate.

The people who pay the price for the Government's policies are those whom the Opposition represent and who live in Scotland, in the north of England and in Wales. The Secretary of State referred to the tremendous falls in unemployment. In my constituency, the figures of the Secretary of State suggested that 4,791 people were out of work last November. He would no doubt argue that that represents tremendous progress compared to the figures in 1982, but it represents progress only if one is taken in by the Government's own fiddled figures for unemployment.

Since 1982, there have been no fewer than 30 changes in the way in which the Government count the unemployed. Only one increased the number of unemployed; the other 29 reduced the number of those who were officially counted as unemployed. That was done in many ways. The Government based the figures, for example, on the claimant count rather than on those who were out of work and seeking work. They also discounted unemployed school leavers and denied income support to 16 and 17-year-olds. Those were all ways of bringing down the unemployment figure without bringing down unemployment.

Mr. Lang: The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development labour force survey assesses unemployment in the United Kingdom as being lower than the figures that we assess from our own unemployment benefit count. Is not the hon. Gentleman's case therefore nonsense?

Mr. McAllion: My case is not nonsense. The figures have been made available to me by the Unemployment Unit, which examines the Government's fiddled statistics carefully. It provided figures that show a different picture. Instead of there being 4,791 unemployed in Dundee, East, there are 7,011 unemployed in that constituency. In other words, 2,200 unemployed people have disappeared from the statistics not because they found work and so were no longer unemployed, but because they were removed by the Government's administrative diktat. They are still there and still unemployed, but they have become invisible to those in the Department of Employment who count the unemployed.

Dundee, East now has a real unemployment level of 17·5 per cent. more than 10 years after the Government took responsibility for the Scottish economy. Of 633 constituencies, only 48 have higher unemployment and almost all are in Scotland, in the north of England and in Wales.

Mr. Hayward *rose*——

Mr. McAllion: None of those constituencies is in the south-east, yet the hon. Members who represent constituencies there get up on their hind legs and boast about unemployment being defeated once and for all. They should tell that to the people in Scotland, in Wales and in the north of England.

Mr. Hayward *rose*——

Mr. McAllion: The hon. Gentleman will have the chance to make his own speech later.

What is worse is that, among the unemployed in Dundee, East, almost one in three have been out of work for at least a year. Does the Secretary of State wish to boast about such a record at the Dispatch Box? I hope not. I am conscious of the time and I may have spoken for too long already. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am pleased that the Minister says, "Hear, hear." I am obviously having some effect.

Other hon. Members have referred to moving away from the old smokestack industries into new sectors, such as electronics, which is a central theme of the Government's defence of its handling of the Scottish economy. They always boast about the work of Locate in Scotland in attracting inward investment to Scotland. That argument is beginning to wear thin with the Opposition.

The Government must understand that we live in a world where competition for inward investment is becoming ever fiercer. In four inward investment cases, Scotland has lost out. The Mitsubishi Electrics £180 million semiconductor plant did not go to Scotland, but to West Germany. The Fujitsu £400 million microchip plant went to the north-east of England and Texas Instruments, with 1,000 jobs, went to Italy. The Intel Corporation from California, with up to 2,400 jobs, went to the Republic of Ireland.

Increasingly, that will become the pattern. We shall be competing not only with the countries and areas that I have mentioned, but with eastern Europe. I heard on the radio this morning that workers in factories in East Berlin, for example, earn the equivalent of £25 a week. With such low-wage economies, where will international capital go to build its new semiconductor plants and its factories? It will go to eastern Europe, not to countries such as Scotland, England and Wales.

Mr. Lang: Will the hon. Gentleman remind the House why the Ford Motor Company did not come to Dundee?

Mr. McAllion: That is easy. Ford did not come to Dundee because Ford can play one country off against another. The hon. Gentleman should remind himself of the real issue. Ford claimed that it refused to come to Dundee because it could not obtain a single-union agreement there. What happened? Ford went to Spain. It did not obtain a single-union agreement there, but a multi-union agreement. It went to Spain because the Spanish Government provided more incentives.

Does the Minister remember Wang in Stirling and Caterpillar in Uddingston? Those were multinational companies which came here, picked the flesh off the bones of the Scottish economy and then took off when it suited them. Increasingly, that will be the pattern, as the Minister must realise. He cannot base his whole strategy on attracting inward investment. That is not realistic nowadays.

If we are to move forward, we must have a strategy that focuses on the local people and on the local area, with indigenous enterprise. That strategy was developed first in

Scotland by the Labour administration in Tayside region in 1986. We went to the people with the policy of establishing an enterprise board which would give assistance, soft loans and grants to small and medium-sized companies in Tayside to encourage them to grow.

That was a successful policy, but it was fought tooth and nail first by central Government, because to them it smacked too much of the Greater London council from which the idea was borrowed, and then by the local Tories, who thought that it involved interference in the free market. Now it has been heralded as a great success. The Minister of State, Scottish Office came up to Dundee to help launch the Tayside enterprise board and to try to claim some credit for it, although his party had fought it tooth and nail all along.

If we are to have the policies that will boost local industry and the local economy, they will come only from control being decentralised from Westminster. They will come only from a powerful Scottish parliament with key economic powers and key powers over the infrastructure. There is no future for Scotland otherwise. That is the conclusion of the standing commission report and, increasingly, of people across the country. It should be the conclusion of the debate, although unfortunately it will not be, because this debate has no effect on the Scottish economy or on Government policy. The Secretary of State is not Scotland's man in the Cabinet, but the Cabinet's man in Scotland and there is a wealth of difference in that distinction.

Several hon. Members: *rose——*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Unless speeches are much briefer, I am afraid that a number of hon. Members will be disappointed.

5.37 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): The hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) does not, of course, like to be reminded about Ford, so I shall remind him of something else. I shall remind him of the time when Dundee was competing for the headquarters of an international oil company. When the decision was about to be made, Dundee district council told its employees to go out on strike in support of what was obviously a politically motivated activity. That did nothing to persuade the oil company that Dundee was the place to establish its headquarters. With such leadership, companies will not come. I shall return to the problems of Dundee later, because my constituency is adjacent to Dundee.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Walker: I have only just started my speech, but very well.

Mr. Maxton: I hoped that the hon. Gentleman would correct the misinformation that he gave the House earlier. Will he point out to the House that the Labour party has five seats north of the Tay, whereas the Tories have two and a half?

Mr. Walker: I hope that the hon. Gentleman understands where north is in Scottish geography. If he said that the Labour party had four seats including those in Dundee and Aberdeen—and I imagine that he is also including the Western Isles—he would not be right about what was pure north. I should not expect him to understand that. I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the fact that in the Highlands, the Labour party is not considered to be the party that understands its problems —[HON. MEMBERS: "The Tories aren't."] The Labour party claims that it speaks for all the people of Scotland. I have never claimed to speak for all the people of Scotland. I speak for the people of north Tayside.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) said that the Conservatives were going to make this a debate about the roof tax. We are not. I find it interesting that the Labour party wishes to have a tax for Scotland which is different from that for England and Wales. I imagine that on this occasion Scotland is to be Labour's guinea pig. As I understand its proposals, councils will set their own levels of expenditure and the level of roof tax. Once again, under Labour, the elderly will pay a tax based on the size and present-day value of their home, regardless of the price that they paid for it.

The Labour party proposes to introduce computerised revaluations. What a lovely way to revalue. Labour would return Scotland to the evils of the old rating system and of revaluations. The uniform business rate will vanish and, once more, Scotland's shopkeepers and business men will find that department stores in Sauchiehall street pay more in local authority tax than similar stores in Regent street in London. There would be no harmonisation under Labour, and we know why. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State said, there would be a 24 per cent-plus increase in the business rate this year. Of course, the £130 million saving made under our policy last year and this year would not be made under Labour's policies.

I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's statement today on flood and storm damage in my constituency and other Scottish constituencies. That statement will be welcomed by all who have suffered in the flooding. That is true of my constituency where there has been extensive flooding.

The output of Scottish manufacturing industry in the second quarter of 1989 reached record levels. The Opposition do not like to be told that. Industry surpassed the previous peak recorded in the second quarter of 1974. Output was 3·8 per cent. up on the previous quarter. In 1988, manufacturing output in Scotland grew by about 8 per cent. At the same time, seasonally adjusted unemployment stood at 8·5 per cent. in December last year —the lowest since 1980.

Self-employment has increased by 50 per cent. since 1981. Between June 1981 and June 1988, self-employment rose by 66,000. When one compares that with the three decades to 1981—in which there was no change—one can see what a remarkable change has taken place in Scotland.

The October Confederation of British Industry survey confirmed the August Scottish chambers of commerce's business survey which showed that export markets, on which we depend so vitally, remain healthy. The 1989 annual survey of the top 200 Scottish firms carried out by *Scottish Business Insider* shows that turnover rose by 25 per cent. on the year before. That is a massive increase. Profits were up by 14 per cent. Both turnover and profits are up, yet all that we hear from Opposition Members is doom and gloom.

Some 132 of the top 200 companies are Scottish-owned. So much for the nonsense about Scotland's industry being

[Mr. Walker]

owned and run by other people. All those facts show that the growth in the Scottish economy in 1988 was the strongest since 1973.

The growth in Scottish manufacturing productivity since 1979 has been faster than any of the major industrial economies. Between 1 January 1980 and 1 January 1989, the number of companies registered in Scotland rose by just under 20,000 or more than one half. The most recent survey by the Fraser of Allander Institute forecast that the growth of the Scottish economy is set to outstrip that of the United Kingdom over the next five years.

It is interesting to note the dramatic change in the places to which Scottish firms export. For example, 23 per cent. of our exports in 1973 were to north America. Today only 17 per cent. of our exports are to north America, so there has been a reduction. Let us see what has happened within the EEC. In 1973, 23 per cent. of our exports were to the EEC. That has now jumped to a massive 53 per cent. We are exporting much more to Europe. The benefits of the European market are beginning to be felt, and not before time, particularly when one considers some of the non-tariff barriers that kept our exports out for so long. Strangely enough, the biggest single export earner is the manufacture of office and data processing machinery.

I make no apology for mentioning the whisky industry. As a teetotaller, I am proud of what the Scotch whisky industry does for Scotland. It provides £1 billion-worth of exports, or 20 per cent. of our manufacturing exports. That is important for Scotland and we must continue to remind those who do not realise its value to Scotland that the Government's sensible tax regime over recent years has done much to help the Scotch whisky industry.

We also must not forget British Aerospace, Rolls-Royce and Ferranti. Aviation and avionics are the industries of tomorrow, among which we must include electronics. IBM, Motorola, Digital Equipment, NEC, National Semiconductor, Hewlett-Packard, Honeywell, NCR and Unisys are all the industries of today and tomorrow. They produce 16 per cent. of Scotland's gross domestic product and employ 12 per cent. of the work force. The output of the industry last year was three and a half times higher than in mid-1979. That shows what the Government's policies have done to make Scottish industry more competitive.

In 1989, the oil industry recorded the second highest level of drilling activity ever, with 328 offshore wells started. So much for the doom and gloom that we heard about the oil industry running down and out.

The service sector provides 68 per cent. of Scotland's employment, with over 1·3 million jobs. There was an overall increase of 112,000 in service sector employment from 1979 to December 1988. The service sector also helps Scotland's economic growth. The financial services and business services sector, with 179,000 jobs—50,000 more than in 1979—also contributes massively to Scotland's well-being.

Some £100 billion of funds is managed from Scotland. That is over 10 per cent. of the United Kingdom unit trust market and 20 per cent. of the life assurance market. The industry depends on doing business outside Scotland, as does the Scotch whisky industry and all the other companies that I listed. So much for the narrow nationalist attitudes of those who say that we should do things only in Scotland.

Tourism is another important industry in Scotland. It must be discouraging for visitors to Scotland to see messages written on stone telling them to go home. Yet that is what one gets from the Socialist nationalists. Tourism had a turnover of £1,594 million in 1988. The number of overseas tourists was up by 27 per cent. on 1984. Scotland's penetration of the north American market is higher than that of the United Kingdom as a whole. Again, Scotland is performing well. I make no apology for speaking about tourism. It is the largest employer in north Tayside.

I welcome the introduction of Scottish Enterprise. Recently in Brechin we had the launch of the north Angus initiative. The Labour administration of Tayside regional council was noticeable by its absence at that launch. It seems that the hon. Member for Dundee, East thinks that such great initiatives are fine in Dundee but not much good in Brechin, Kirriemuir or Forfar. The district councillor, the convener of industry—a gentleman known by the name of Forsyth of that ilk, who is an SNP councillor—made an attack on the regional council when he launched the initiative. He did so because of the council's absence. It is interesting that, since then, Councillor Sheana Welsh has publicly criticised me for agreeing with Forsyth. That Forsyth is the SNP district councillor, not my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth).

But what else can we expect when as Councillor Flora Isles said when she resigned from the SNP:

> "We have different policies in different parts of the country and different policies or no policies to meet changing circumstances"?

Indeed, that is why she resigned from the Scottish National party. Councillor Sheana Welsh, running true to SNP form, has a different policy and makes different public utterances from her industry convener—the famous Forsyth. Perhaps she was embarrassed by the "Absent Andrew", her husband, the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh), who, like the Labour party, failed to attend the north Angus launch. Perhaps his failure to attend brought about yet another division in the SNP.

In connection with regional grants, I commend Don Brothers, who recently opened a large factory in my constituency despite the fact that no grants are available and he was given no assistance under any funny schemes run by the Labour administration in Tayside. I understand that Don Brothers gave up grants amounting to about £500,000, which he could have had if he had gone to Dundee, which he was asked to do. He declined to do that and stayed in Forfar because its work force and environment are so much better and more conducive to productivity and to exports than those in Dundee.

That is an example of why regional aid had, properly, to be changed. That is why I welcome the changes that the Government are making. I advise Ministers that the economic successes of our policies in Scotland are there for anyone who wants to see them. They can be seen in our supermarkets, stores and shops and in the bustle in the high streets—*[Interruption]*—even in Dundee. Opposition Members should go to Taybridge station and watch the people going on holiday and doing things that were not available to them 10 or 20 years ago. They are able to do

those things now because of our economic success. Because they have more money in their pockets, people can enjoy more things today.

The quality of life in Scotland is superior to that in any other part of the United Kingdom and that, linked to our economic success, makes it the best part of the United Kingdom in which to live and the best place in the world to be part of.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the House of my earlier appeal for brief speeches.

5.52 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I shall do my utmost to follow your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to be brief.

The debate has gone up or down according to one's expectations. One need only read the Order Paper, the substantive motion and amendment in the name of the Prime Minister to note the diametrically opposed views on the Scottish economy. Indeed, I wonder whether they referred to the same thing. We have, of course, had selective statistics to support either case, especially from the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker). However, I agree with the hon. Gentleman in two particulars. He was the first hon. Member to refer to tourism, which is an important and growing industry in the rural areas of Scotland, and he referred to the whisky industry which, as in his constituency, is important in mine.

The hon. Member for Tayside, North referred to the Scottish chambers' "Business Survey". It is important to note that its most recent survey is its most pessimistic since its surveys began in 1984. That pessimism has been echoed in the "Industrial Trends Survey" of the Confederation of British Industry, which shows that manufacturing optimism is at its lowest for seven years.

Hon. Members of all parties have accepted that in recent years the Scottish economy has been going through a period of fundamental change as the old smoke stack industries have declined and we have looked to the development of new industries. As electronics has been around for some time, I am not sure whether we can still classify it as a new industry, but it has a potential for growth. Reference has also been made to the oil and gas industry and to the financial services sector. As the older industries decline, it is important that we do not forget the economic consequences. If the Scottish steel industry were to decline even further, it would have severe implications for the rail network in Scotland and knock-on effects on the electricity industry. Such factors cannot be overlooked.

There are other warning signs because much of the growth in jobs in recent years has been in the service sector, and, as last week's report "Economic Outlook" from the Royal Bank of Scotland suggested, the current downturn will squeeze the service sector, especially the retail sector, more than the last recession in the early part of the 1980s. Therefore, the outlook in that sector is not encouraging.

The hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) referred to Locate in Scotland. None of my hon. Friends would criticise or object to jobs coming to Scotland as a result of foreign companies investing here. However, we should be concerned to ensure that we do not become dependent solely on jobs which, in many respects, are production jobs and that we try to create as many jobs as possible that are high-quality, high-tech jobs. We should ensure that we are designers as well as putters-together, if I may put it that way.

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) referred to a report that the Secretary of State attributed to an official of the Scottish Development Agency. It contained the sombre warning that the contribution of indigenously based industries is particularly disappointing. The loss of Scottish ownership of Scottish enterprises has already been mentioned. It has been estimated that fewer than 100 clearly definable Scottish companies are now listed on the stock exchange. Between 1983 and 1986, 321 Scottish companies were taken over by outside companies. Some of the names are well known, including Anderson of Strathclyde, Collins, Clydesdale bank, Bells and Distillers.

While that has been happening and Scotland has been losing some of its big companies, as Alf Young pointed out in a recent article in the *Glasgow Herald,* things on not too happy a note have been stirring at a lower level in the economy. He wrote:

"If many of the biggest trees in the Scottish corporate forest fell to the chainsaws wielded by Guinness, Vantona Viyella, BP, Charter Consolidated and many others over the past 10 years, the paucity of seedling companies springing up from the forest floor to take their place simply compounds the problem."

That is a cause for concern.

If one takes the number of new small businesses that are being set up, by reference to net VAT registrations, one sees that the growth in Scotland has been significantly below that in the United Kingdom as a whole. The article then states that a number of our smaller and medium-sized companies have been selling out, although they may not have made the headlines as much as the bigger companies, and that fewer of those smaller and medium-sized companies then grow into big companies. Consequently, there will be fewer opportunities in Scotland for our graduates to take jobs in promotable posts and fewer opportunities for our managers to reach the top in commercial enterprise.

As has been said, there has been emigration over many years, but the quality as well as the quantity of that emigration causes concern. Many of our best people and our graduates are going south. The introduction of the student loans scheme may affect the number of graduates in Scotland because of our four-year courses. If Scottish graduates have that debt around their necks as they leave university, how many of them will be attractive propositions to banks if they then wish to set up a small business on their own? I believe that for many years to come we shall reap an adverse whirlwind from the student loans plan.

Enterprise in Scotland needs encouraging. In the White Paper that foreshadowed the Employment Bill, the Government identified the importance of training. They have admitted that the private sector has never been a good trainer in Scotland, yet they are passing responsibility for training to the private sector. If that is to happen, it is important that it works, and that it works well.

I took some encouragement from the reply that the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Lang) gave me at Scottish Question Time last week, when he seemed to suggest that there would be scope for the

[Mr. James Wallace]

local enterprise companies to develop training over and above the national training schemes of employment training and the youth training scheme. Perhaps he will say more about that when he replies to the debate and state whether more money will be available for training or whether the only money that is being made available for training with the LECs will be the money that is available for funding ET and YTS.

In addition, there is a need for venture capital. There has been a lack of venture capital going into Scottish companies, particularly for start-up. One often finds a willingness to lend £1 million or £100,000, but in some cases what is needed is £10,000. In fact, 80 per cent. of applications to the Highlands and Islands Development Board are for grants up to £15,000. Such grants have been very important to people, particularly in the highlands and islands, starting small businesses. As the board's last annual report shows, the cost per job, in grant-equivalent terms, has been just over £6,000.

That seems to me to be money very well spent. Government Members and their kin in the City often criticise Scotland for having, in some ways, developed a dependency culture, but without the HIDB and the SDA our economic position would be far worse. The £22 million that the HIDB spent on grant assistance in 1988 produced £69 million from private sources. That seems to me a very good form of pump priming, and I hope that that valuable work will continue as we move over to the new system.

In addition to venture capital and training, we need a Scottish Parliament. No doubt Government members will tell us happily about the statistics, about the polls carried out among Scottish business men, showing that a Scottish Parliament is not tops among the things that those people would like to see. Within the last two or three weeks, *Scotland on Sunday* carried an article, written anonymously by a Scottish business man, putting the case for a Scottish Parliament. It says something about the climate of Scottish business that somebody putting his head above the parapet to support a Scottish Parliament feels that he has to do so anonymously. This is the bunker mentality.

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): I agree that people should be prepared to put their names to things in which they believe. Why did the Social and Liberal Democrats fail to table an amendment to this motion?

Mr. Wallace: The hon. Gentleman will be delighted to know that the matter was discussed last night at a parliamentary party meeting, and it was decided that the motion in the name of the hon. Gentleman's right hon. and hon. Friends was one that we could support.

I believe that a Scottish Parliament would be much more in touch with the continuing development needs of Scottish industry. I have already mentioned how it could target its tax-cutting powers; how it could look into the possibility of lower interest rates and the setting up of an industrial credit bank. Consider the situation in West Germany, where power is diffuse, where there is a federal structure. One often finds businesses being set up in centres of power. In many ways, centres of power attract new business. I believe that a Scottish Parliament could be a catalyst and could add some dynamism to the Scottish economy.

As one looks forward to 1992, one is conscious of the need for an improved transport infrastructure. The hon. Member for Tayside, North, who has left the Chamber, referred to the importance of Scotland's export industries. He mentioned whisky and office equipment. Clearly, in the case of an economy that is so dependent on exports, access to markets is important. I remember going to the constituency of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) when the Portobello Freightliner terminal was being closed. At the time, that seemed to be a very short-sighted move, and experience has shown just how short-sighted. Our European competitors are improving their infrastructure, particularly in the case of railways, while the Government here seem to baulk at extending electrification north of Edinburgh.

Take the question of air transport. Currently, and quite properly, there is a debate on the future of Prestwick. In this regard, I think that the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) will find that my views do not differ much from his. This is the focus of Scottish debate at a time when, for example, the Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris is being integrated with the whole transport network—linking it to the city and to the rest of the country. While these imaginative things are being done by our European competitors, little imagination is being used here. I certainly do not count a toll bridge to Skye as one of the imaginative projects that we need if we are to compete on equal terms.

Finally, I want to refer briefly to the fishing industry, which is so important to many communities round our coast. When the Government failed to embark on a decommissioning scheme, they missed an opportunity. It was a big mistake. Of course it would not have been the whole answer, but I cannot see a better way of ensuring that the capacity of the fleet is more in line with the catching opportunities. If the fishing opportunities of the industry are to be reduced, it must be given some financial compensation. One wonders what kind of fleet the Government expect to see at the end of this year if they allow pure market forces to take their course.

6.5 pm

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) has made a number of points to which I want to refer later. He referred to the absence of my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) from the Chamber. I should point out that my hon. Friend is attending a Committee meeting upstairs.

I apologise to right hon. and hon. Gentlemen on both Front Benches for my absence during the opening few minutes of the speech of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). I was having a personal meeting with the Prime Minister. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] It was about the Armitage Shanks Tubal works in Barrhead. I want to thank the Minister of State and a large number of Opposition Members for their support in that regard. It is an issue of great importance to my constituency.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) *rose*——

Mr. Stewart: As the hon. Gentleman has signed my early-day motion, I will certainly give way to him.

Mr. McKelvey: I wish the hon. Gentleman every success when he meets the Prime Minister. I hope that she will be able to do something about Armitage Shanks. When I

went to see her about the Armitage Shanks closure in Kilmarnock, she said that she would do her best. Unfortunately, however, the closure took place. I accepted the hon. Gentleman's support at that time, and respected him for giving it. Indeed, I received support from other hon. Members. I cautioned the hon. Gentleman not to put too much faith in the Prime Minister's ability to do anything against a multinational that is determined to move elsewhere.

Mr. Stewart: The purpose of my meeting was to look to the future in Barrhead. Armitage Shanks has, indeed, confirmed its decision to close the Tubal works. When I went with a letter from the Prime Minister to discuss the situation I was prevented from passing the factory gate. That is an indication of the company's management.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland referred, rightly, to the importance of transport policy. As he said, we await the decision on Scottish lowlands airports policy. My hon. Friend the Minister of State cannot possibly be expected, in this debate, to announce a decision; that is a matter for the Secretary of State for Transport. However, anything that he can tell the House about the timing of the announcement would be helpful to hon. Members in respect of the positions that they may take.

While I am on that point, I wish to congratulate the noble Lord King on his excellent announcement about the Scottish headquarters for British Airways and the intention to provide a service from Glasgow to New York, starting on 3 August, if the Secretary of State for Transport takes the correct decision on airports policy.

I want to draw the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister of State to the importance of the imaginative set of proposals for the development of the corridor. These will turn on Glasgow's getting transatlantic status. There is immense potential for new growth in that area of west central Scotland—and that is not just my opinion; it is an opinion shared by others, such as the Labour group in Renfrew district council.

More generally, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North have put forward very clearly and comprehensively the basic figures on the Scottish economy. Manufacturing output is now the highest in Scotland's economic history. One has only to look at the CBI's figures on output and employment.

The hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion), who is also attending a Standing Committee meeting, and the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland both referred to the need for indigenous growth in the Scottish economy. That is a very important point. The self-employment figures have increased by about 50 per cent. since 1981, compared with no change at all in the previous three decades. Many of these people will in future need small, medium-sized and large firms in Scotland. The other most encouraging indicator for the future is that manufacturing productivity in Scotland in recent years has been as high as in any other industrialised country and higher than most.

When I saw the motion on the Order Paper, I wondered why the Opposition had chosen to debate the Scottish economy today. I hoped that we would hear concrete proposals from the Labour party about how it would tackle the problems, as it sees them, of the Scottish economy. We have had some proposals. The hon. Member for Dundee, East talked in ringing terms about the importance of a Scottish Parliament, which was also referred to by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland.

We know of the enthusiasm of the Opposition Benches for that important body. No doubt if I took a show of hands, most Opposition Members would put up their hands. I see the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvy) putting up his hand. If such a body were set up, no doubt Opposition Members would give up their seats in this place to serve in it. May we have a show of hands to see which hon. Members agree with that? I see that Opposition Members are about 50:50. If there is ever a Scottish assembly, we look forward to by-elections in Scotland.

The Labour party proposes that the new body would have economic and industrial responsibilities. We are also told that the new powerhouse of Scottish Socialism would have responsibility for inward investment. No doubt hoardings would go up from Massachusetts to Mississippi and from Los Angeles to Long Island saying, "Come to sunny Scotland. We can offer you what no other European country can—Socialism." But there would need to be a footnote—"except Albania." Only in Albania and on the Benches occupied by Scottish Labour Members is there any following left for Socialism in Europe.

Mr. Wallace: Does not the hon. Gentleman presuppose that that would be a Scottish Parliament elected without proportional representation? Would he change his mind if there was proportional representation?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Would the hon. Gentleman please keep to the motion on the Order Paper?

Mr. Stewart: If the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland thinks that the Labour party will go for proportional representation, he will have a sad awakening.

The second proposal from the Opposition was on business rates. The important progress towards a unified business rate, which the entire business community, large and small, has underlined as of crucial importance to the future of Scottish business and industry, would be thrown away by the Labour party. There would be huge increases in the burden of rates.

Of course, local authorities have a tendency to increase the burden on non-domestic ratepayers, because businesses do not have votes. The burden of the increase on businesses is often passed on to consumers who live outside the area. When the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) replies to the debate, he may confirm his belief, which I have heard in the past, that rates have no effect on jobs. That is not the view of any business man to whom I have talked on the subject.

We also heard a proposal from some Opposition Members for a roof tax. That was well analysed by my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North. It is interesting to note the rumours that the Labour party in England would not go ahead with that proposal. No doubt, in the next 24 hours or so, we will hear another authorised version from the Opposition.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State may have been slightly unfair to the roof tax in his general criticisms. The roof tax would be good news for some parts of the Scottish economy. It would be good news for that admirable body of people, double glazing salesmen, and for central heating engineers, because their products are to be exempt from the general increase in taxation which

[Mr. Stewart]

would follow other house improvements. But it would be bad news for precisely the people upon whom the future of the Scottish economy most depends—those who are trying to improve themselves as workers, managers and entrepreneurs, who are upwardly mobile and who wish to move, naturally and properly into better housing for themselves and their families. They are classically the people, as well as the elderly, who would be hit by the absurd proposal.

We have heard from the Opposition the usual parroting of doom and gloom. We have heard complaints not solutions, and problems not answers. Yet again, the Labour party has confirmed that it has nothing new to offer. It has forgotten nothing and learnt nothing from its period of power.

I compliment my right hon. and hon. Friends on their common-sense policies, which are steadily turning the Scottish economy round. I wish them every success in continuing with those policies.

6.15 pm

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): As my old granny would have said, February is always a dull month. That speech fairly shortened the winter, but that is about all it did. The hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) started off not too badly, but he drifted into his usual rambling. If the speech of the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) was that of a teetotaller, he should try taking a dram now and again.

I want to put on record my thanks to BP, with which I have not always enjoyed the best relationship, for its massive investment in the petrochemical industry at Grangemouth in my constituency. The investment will provide some new jobs, but it will certainly secure existing jobs. I understand the annoyance of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) with BP because of its involvement with Britoil. In my defence, I warned the House, on the day of the announcement that BP was being given Britoil, what would happen. The takeover of Britoil has had precisely the outcome I expected. However, on a constituency basis, I record my thanks for that massive investment.

I also want to thank the Secretary of State for Energy. As the House knows, I have been campaigning, sometimes alone, against the application by Shell Exxon to construct a pipeline from Grangemouth to Manchester to pipe all the ethylene manufactured at the most northern plant down to England. I am grateful to the Secretary of State for refusing the application; he has informed me that he has ordered a public inquiry.

I hope that all the parties will examine carefully the proposal to construct a pipeline. As I have said often, the future of downstream industries in west central Scotland depends on the retention of ethylene. A pipeline from Grangemouth to Manchester would leave only one gap in the ethylene grid. If companies could move ethylene about as if jobs did not matter, they would do so to the detriment of almost every area where petrochemicals are based. Therefore, I am grateful to the Secretary of State for Energy for ordering a public inquiry.

The hon. Member for Eastwood sounded hollow when he talked about the industry's rates and business rates and general rates on people. I live with the abiding memory of when he was a Minister in the Scottish Office. The then Government introduced legislation to derate the plant and machinery outside buildings, which cost Central regional council £8 million of rateable value.

I took a deputation from Central regional council to see the Minister in his ivory tower at Dover house to ask the Government to make good the shortfall that his legislation had caused in rate income for Central regional and Falkirk district councils. The Minister said, "Your rates in Central region are below the national average per head of the population, so I shall not give you any money. The increase in rates for Falkirk district council of 6p in the pound and for Central region of 4p in the pound will only bring you up to the national average." Now the hon. Gentleman has the gall to criticise local authorities for increasing rates.

I wanted to make that point before the Tories in Scotland started an attack on local authorities about rates in the run-up to the regional elections. The hon. Gentleman's expressions of concern about rate levels sounded hollow when set against the background of the Labour party's proposals on what has been described as the roof tax.

Last night I made an offer to the hon. Member for Tayside, North that I extend to any Scottish Conservative Member. It will not take me long to go round the Scottish Conservative constituencies. I am not contesting the next election and as we run up to it I shall have time on my hands, so I offer to come to any Conservative seat, providing the sitting Member of Parliament makes the arrangements and debate the merits of the poll tax against the Labour party's proposals. That offer is on the table.

I shall take up two points made by the hon. Member for Tayside, North, possibly the only two serious points in his speech. The first concerns the export of whisky. One decision that has been taken in relation to the construction of the Channel tunnel is that whisky in bulk form—this should be a warning to all of us who enjoy a glass now and then—is so volatile that it will not be allowed to go through the Channel Tunnel. Three commodities will not be allowed through the tunnel: liquid petroleum gas, liquid chemicals, and whisky. Therefore, it is fairly obvious that all the exports of Scottish whisky will have to go by sea. What is the Scottish Office doing to ensure that the exports go through Scottish ports? What is now happening is absolute madness.

The second serious point made by the hon. Member for Tayside, North involved general exports from Scotland. During the past 10 years—and, I admit, just a wee bit longer than that—the volume of exports of manufactured goods originating in Scotland, going out through Scottish ports, has dropped from 75 per cent. to about 18 per cent. That is an absolute disgrace.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) talked about the closure of the terminal at Leith. It was closed because the shipowners introduced the grid system. Whisky that is manufactured in Perth is taken by road—at no cost to the exporter and manufacturer because it is paid for by the ship owner—to the non-scheme port of Felixstowe, from where it is exported. Of course, they are all non-scheme ports now. That is done on the basis that it is cheaper to take the goods by road than to steam the vessel up to Grangemouth or Glasgow.

That policy is all right until all the Scottish ports are closed down, and we are heading that way. We shall then

see what happens to the grid system. It will be abolished overnight. The whisky industry is important and the Government should consider those two aspects of it.

The Scottish economy is fragile, and the Minister would mislead the House if he sought to pretend otherwise. All the surveys to which my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) referred prove the validity of that point. Anyone who is complacent about the future of the Scottish economy will have to answer to the people who will lose their jobs as a result of an upturn in unemployment.

Like other hon. Members, I speak to industrialists. None of them says that he is confident about the next 18 months or two to three years. They are all looking ahead to difficult times. I was horrified when, over Christmas and the new year, I saw a Minister on Scottish television arguing that high interest rates were good for the Scottish economy because they made us work harder and become more efficient. The Secretary of State hinted at that, too. I have never heard such rubbish in my life.

The Minister should acknowledge that, far from being good, high interest rates are damaging. We need to keep a careful watch on the development of our economy. I look forward to the day, not too far distant, when the responsibility for running the economy is in the hands of my hon. Friend the Member for Garscadden and his colleagues.

6.26 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I was going to open my speech by saying that I thought that Labour and Tory Members had a psychological problem when debating the Scottish economy. After listening to the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker), perhaps I should say that they have a geographical problem as well.

Labour and Tory Members suffer from the delusion that Scotland is a poor dependent economy that will always rely on the good will of the Westminster Government. I want to make the opposite case in terms of the amendment in the name of my hon. Friends and myself. Scotland is an exceptionally rich country, but its economy is being mismanaged and its assets are being pillaged.

No one, including the present Chancellor, the past Chancellor, and even the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), who was in charge of the Scottish economy, would prescribe the present level of interest rates, given the level of demand in the Scottish economy. I have an impeccable source for this view—no other than the vice-chairman of the Scottish Conservative party, Mr. Bill Hughes, who, with engaging candour, said on 29 June last year on Radio 4:

"we have to periodically endure the higher interest rates because that is for the better end of the total United Kingdom economy. I think that this is a very fair trade off."

I suspect that Scottish manufacturing industry, which, because of the at least 5 per cent. surcharge in interest rates in the Scottish economy, is facing additional borrowings —that is, taxation—of £200 million, might think differently. Scottish farmers who face additional borrowings of £50 million and the hard-pressed Scottish fishing industry that faces additional borrowings of up to £10 million might also think differently.

Earlier the Secretary of State for Scotland said that the Scottish economy was not overheating. He did not go on to explain why we should have a level of interest rates that was appropriate only, if at all, for an economy that was overheating. Will Tory Ministers accept that, whatever the present level of activity in the Scottish economy, it would be higher if we had a level of interest rates appropriate to Scottish economic conditions.

When we debate the Scottish economy, the Secretary of State for Scotland always clutches at straws. Last year in the Scottish Grand Committee he clutched at the straw of a Fraser of Allander Institute report that he found sympathetic to his case. However, when we read the report in detail we found that it warned of the damage that would be done to an investment/export economy such as Scotland by higher interest rates.

During Scottish questions in December, the Secretary of State quoted, in glowing terms, a Royal Bank of Scotland report that argued that Scottish growth this year might be marginally higher than that of the United Kingdom as a whole. I took the trouble to examine that economic analysis in detail. The relevant passage reads:

"Demand is, consequently, marginally stronger in relative terms and may well result in a better Scottish growth performance in 1990 (perhaps 2 per cent.—2·5 per cent.) than in the UK as a whole—little comfort given that the demand-dampening policies in force just now were aimed at cooling the overheated south-east and will still leave Scottish employment and output levels lagging well behind the national average."

The Secretary of State cited that report favourably. If he cites the forecast favourably, does he accept the analysis that accompanied that report?

There are two reasons why the Secretary of State would be unwise to rely on favourable short-term forecasts for the Scottish economy. The first is obvious. Earlier tonight, the right hon. and learned Gentleman quoted the industrial production figures and said that they showed that the Scottish economy was doing particularly well. However, the index of industrial production, minus class 13—investment in oil and gas—shows a different picture. Minus class 13, the latest figures for industrial production for Scotland show a 10 per cent. increase since 1985. The comparable figures for the United Kingdom show a 19 per cent. increase.

The evidence is clear. There is not a general economic recovery in Scotland, relative even to the modest improvement in the United Kingdom economy. There is an investment surge in the North sea now because of strengthening oil prices, but I doubt whether even the Secretary of State wants to take credit for that.

There is a more serious reason why the right hon. and learned Gentleman would be unwise to rely on short-term forecasts. No economic forecast can cope with the impact of a major industrial collapse, but the Scottish economy now faces at least two clear dangers of collapse in core industries.

The first is the steel industry. From the position of jobs related immediately to steel—that is, people working directly in the steel industry and for the suppliers of steel —it is clear that at least 25,000 jobs are at stake. Taking a broader picture, and including industries which are dependent on the supply of steel—and are therefore dependent on the pricing and source pricing of steel—that figure could be expanded to well over 100,000.

The second is the fishing industry, on which 30,000 jobs in Scotland depend. The Secretary of State said yesterday that the fishermen were rich and did not need any Government help. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman have no compassion for family businesses

[Mr. Alex Salmond]

which are caught in a cost-revenue squeeze? A constituent of mine has had his boat sold by the Sea Fish Industry Authority. He got for it one third of the price at which it was valued a few months ago. As a result, he is in danger of losing not only his job, his boat and his livelihood but his home and everything else.

Has the Secretary of State no compassion for fish processing workers earning less than £100 a week who are being offered by their employers a zero per cent. wage round—no increase whatever in their pay? Will the Government not dip into their pocket and provide for the Scottish fishing industry even the same level of support that is available to every other European fishing industry?

I took part in a BBC television programme shortly after the turn of the new year, in which people were asked to comment on Scotland's economic prospects in the 1990s. I was struck by the remarks of David Murray, who the Government will undoubtedly say is a model Scottish business man, and he deserves that title. He did not in that programme speak of some major industrial renaissance for Scotland. He spoke of his real concerns about the level of external ownership in the Scottish economy and about the damage being done to his and other business by high interest rates.

Even more disturbing than the present situation is the total lack of vision in Government economic policy to meet the challenges of this decade and those of the next century. The only strategy that this Government have ever had for the Scottish economy has been the attraction of mobile international investment. Yet it is clear that international investment will become tougher to attract because of competition not simply from Ireland and southern Europe but also from eastern Europe. That strategy has only limited potential in the present decade.

We should be moving to a natural resource-based economic policy instead of either demand-managed economy or policies based on attracting international investment. We have not done well so far. In the last decade, £87 billion of oil revenues went straight to the London Exchequer. That represented £17,000 a head for every man, woman and child in Scotland. We should remember that when the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth)—the Under-Secretary—and his fan club of Sudeten Scots who disrupt Scottish Question Time tell us how lucky Scots are to experience the munificence of the Westminster Exchequer. It would not be so bad if we did not have the knowledge that it is Scottish assets which have bankrolled the Thatcher economic experiment for the past 10 years.

Announcements in recent days show that the great gas robbery planned for the 1990s will be even worse than the great oil robbery of the 1980s. At least the oil was landed in Scotland and we received some direct jobs impact. The gas from the central North sea that Amoco is taking to Teesside will not even touch Scotland.

The implications of that are severe. First and obviously, the petrochemical and downstream jobs will go to the north-east of England. They are severe, secondly, because of the plan to construct a 1,750 MW power station at Welton, near Redcar. Perhaps when he replies to the debate the Minister will say how he intends to sell Scottish electricity, generated by coal or nuclear power, twice or, in the case of nuclear, perhaps five times as expensively as gas power over the border when faced with competition from a power station of that magnitude.

There are even more serious implications. What energy intensive industry will locate in central Scotland when it can get more favourable electricity prices by locating in the north-east of England? Labour Members should be able to think of at least one major energy-intensive industry in central Scotland which is currently making the choice between a Scottish and a north-east of England location.

I have no doubt that Labour Front-Bench spokesmen, remembering that the Labour party initiated this debate, will wish to say whether they intend to oppose the plan to send North sea gas from the central North sea to Teesside rather than to a Scottish landfall point.

We in Scotland face a basic choice: either we use our immense resources quite literally to power an efficient competitive Scottish economy in Europe, or we continue with a situation, under any Westminster Government, by which our economy is mismanaged, our resources pillaged, our industry decimated and our nation humiliated. If we are prepared to put up with that, we will be what Carlyle once called the English—"a nation of fools."

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am anxious to raise a point with you now so that the Minister is able to respond when he replies to the debate.

In his opening speech, the Secretary of State for Scotland seriously misled the House by claiming that a document to which the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), referred extensively had been reported in the *Glasgow Herald* on 12 December. Clearly, that was intended to mislead the House and the Press Gallery. I have with me——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that a Minister deliberately misled the House. He knows that that would be out of order.

Mr. Wilson: In that case, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he must have done so inadvertently, although the consequence is the same. In advance of the Minister of State replying to the debate, I shall be happy to give him a copy of the newspaper in question so that he may quote the source, because it would be an intolerable abuse of the House if that tactic were used to mislead.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is a matter for debate. It is not a point of order for the Chair.

6.38 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): We must remember when we talk about the Scottish economy that it is made up of a conglomeration of local economies. The Minister of State will agree that the retention of profitable firms is as important an object as the creation of jobs.

That being so, I ask the hon. Gentleman to use his good offices to intervene in the dispute between Suter Estates of London and the Drummond Packaging Company of Greenock. Many jobs are at stake. The London company is seeking to remove Drummond Packaging from its premises in Greenock. It would be disastrous if that

happened. The Minister is aware of the severity of the unemployment problems of Inverclyde. Will his officials intervene in the matter?

The French parent company of Drummond Packaging offered Suter Estates, which owns the land, £1·4 million. That was rejected, and Drummonds entered into discussions with the Inverclyde district council to purchase land on which to build customised premises. The buildings should be completed at the end of November this year, but Suter Estates, the London-based property company, is telling Drummonds to quit by mid-summer. If that happens, several score of my constituents will be put out of work. I hope that the Minister will intervene in that important matter.

I said that I would be brief and I shall be. However, I should like to speak for two minutes on that once magnificent industry, which is now but a remnant of its former glory—the shipbuildng and marine engineering industry.

What recent discussions have the Minister or his officials had with their colleagues at the Department of Trade and Industry about the European Community directive on the shipbuilding intervention fund? That is an important form of aid to shipyards. Will the Minister say how many Scottish shipyards have access to that form of European Community subsidy? I make a plea on behalf of Scott Lithgow—a company which, until now, has been denied access to that form of subsidy—that it be given sympathetic consideration because what we are seeing Europewide, and it is a welcome development, is a full capacity of berths in shipyards.

Some experts estimate that, within the next two or three years, European yards will be short of between 35 and 50 berths to build vessels. I know of European shipping lines that are now seeking tenders from British shipyards, but in some cases those shipyards—and Scott Lithgow is one of them—have had to turn away those notifications of interest because they do not have access to that type of subsidy. That is a disgrace if there is a European Communitywide subsidy for the shipbuilding industry. Firms such as Scott Lithgow and Fergussons are denied the opportunity of recruiting, selecting and employing highly skilled adult males. There are too many such men on the dole in my constituency.

I understand that Caledonian MacBrayne will have to replace up to four major and four minor passenger ferry vessels over the next five years. That figure was given to me in an answer by the Under-Secretary some days ago. I make a plea for those orders to go to Scottish yards. It does not embarras me to say that some of those orders should come to Fergussons in Port Glasgow. It is a first-class, small ship, specialist yard. Some of the Scottish orders that the Secretary of State now signs because, in essence, he is Mr. Caledonian MacBrayne should be built in Aberdeen and in Port Glasgow.

Kvaerner of Govan, Yarrow, Hall Russell, Fergussons and Kincaids are the remnants of this once great industry. The shipbuilding industry uses modern electronics and employs highly skilled labour. Over the next two years, the Government should seek to defend the interests of those employed in that industry or who could find employment in it.

6.44 pm

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Anyone listening to the speech of the Secretary of State could be forgiven for thinking that the production of candy floss was a major growth industry in the Scottish office—it was bright and cheerful but when you bite into it you find it lacks substance and nourishment. Anyone sitting at home watching this debate on television, who used to work a Caterpillar, at Linwood, at one of the shipyards, or anywhere else that has lost jobs, and who is eking out his unemployment benefit, must be sick to the back teeth by what we have heard from Scottish Office Ministers today.

It is not good enough to respond to this serious matter by bandying statistics about the 1960s and 1970s and who was responsible for what and when. The truth is that there has been a long-term decline in Scottish industry for more than a century, as other industrial nations have equalled and surpassed our output and brought in orders in sectors where we have formerly had an unrivalled lead. There is no point in ignoring that fact—it is the future that matters, so let us concentrate on that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) referred to the unpublished reports written by the university of Louvain, which forecast a sharp decline in Britain's industrial areas and a massive increase in job losses as a result of the introduction of the European single market. The report specifically mentions Strathclyde as one of the areas for which it forecasts dire results. It pointed out that coal and steel-producing areas would suffer from competition.

The Government have asked what answers the Opposition have. The Louvain report came up with some of the answers, but we have heard nothing about that from the Government today. The report says that the problems are related to insufficient investment in railways, to widespread dereliction, to the dearth of investment and to a shortage of professional expertise—the report calls it an "exodus of grey matter" to the south-east, where clearly jobs and promotions exist.

Business men and local authorities are pessimistic about the single market because they fear that American and Japanese companies will move to the continent, with a consequent loss of orders for suppliers and a loss of customers for small businesses in the surrounding areas.

The absence of regional government in Britain is an extremely important aspect of the debate, and Louvain also mentioned it as something which has hindered progress in Scotland. In North Rhine Westphalia the Government provide up to 10 times as much money for research and development in industry as the Department of Trade and Industry does in England. Whatever the figures may be for Scotland, it is certainly not as good as 10 times that of England.

Firms in my constituency have expressed anxiety about the future. Some of the construction firms are steady at present, but they are faced with Europewide competition for orders of quite modest value. How can that contribute to forward planning and job security for the work forces?

A clothing manufacturer in Maryhill sees the dangers of competition from Germany; West German manufacturers have already obtained supplies from East German sources at a lower cost than can be obtained here. The textile industry has already had a series of redundancies in the Borders and elsewhere as a result of decreased orders and falling sales.

[Mrs. Maria Fyfe]

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) for standing back and allowing me to speak. His attitude is a contrast to that of the Secretary of State, who has the habit of constantly referring to "hon. Gentlemen opposite". He does not seem to notice that Scotland has three women Members of Parliament. We are sitting here, but we seem to be invisible. I have often seen reports that refer to women as an under-used resource. Women are also described as an invisible resource. I thought that that was an exaggerated description until I entered the House a couple of years ago and observed the conduct of Conservative Members such as the Secretary of State, who do not even recognise our existence.

Although female unemployment is approximately one third of male unemployment, far too many women are in low-paid or part-time jobs with no prospects or training opportunities. Women need not only training schemes but time off to take part in them, and we need far more child care provision. If Britain could provide child care on the scale that it did during the second world war, when we were fighting an enemy for our very existence, surely we can provide child care when we are fighting for our economic existence.

6.49 pm

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Mr. Ian Lang): My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) in his excellent speech asked why the Labour party had chosen to have this debate on the Scottish economy. Having listened to it, I share his curiosity, because nothing that has emerged has in any way advanced its cause one bit.

With policy documents falling thick and fast from the Labour party, rather like leaves in autumn and with roughly the same life expectancy, it occurred to me that, when the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) referred to a genuine and authoritative document, he was referring to the industry policy document that the Labour party published this week entitled "Fulfilling our future: Industry 2000". But when I looked through it and found almost nothing of policy but rather a lot of wind and verbiage, I realised that he could not have that in mind.

I am not surprised that such a vacuous document has been presented this week. The Labour party may want to conceal the fact that its industrial policy in "Meet the Challenge, Make the Change", which was published last year and ratified by the 1989 Labour party conference, contains such policies as a payroll tax on all Scottish business based on turnover, or a commitment to renationalise British Telecom, British Gas and the water and electricity industries, or the plan to legalise secondary picketing and to allow unions to call strikes before a ballot has been called. No wonder it is not keen to draw attention to that. Perhaps the next policy document will be called "Back to the Drawing Board".

After the Labour party's drubbing over its proposals for a roof tax from every commentator throughout Scotland, after the revelation of its jobs tax, to which my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State drew attention in his opening speech, whereby already an extra £130 million would have been taken out of Scottish businesses, after its earlier commitment to a payroll tax, after the revelation in its local government finance document of its intention to put the Scottish Enterprise initiative into the hands of the local authorities, and after its already well-known plans to introduce a tax-raising assembly in Scotland, it is not surprising that the hon. Member for Garscadden should fall back on selective quotations from a discussion paper of no status whatever, the substance of which was reported in an article by Alastair Balfour in the *Glasgow Herald* in December. [HON. MEMBERS: "What date?"] I think that it was 30 December—at the end of last year.

I would prefer to rely on some of the surveys that have been coming out from responsible and recognised bodies such as the Fraser of Allander survey which referred to growth continuing over the next five years, a survey which prompted *The Scotsman* to headline an article

"Outlook brightens for Scots economy in 1990s".

Who am I to argue with *The Scotsman*?

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lang: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, since he has not spoken.

Mr. Kirkwood: As the Minister is busy talking about surveys, has he undertaken any surveys of the state of the Scottish fishing industry? Is he aware that earlier this week 130 jobs were lost in Holmac Seafoods in my constituency? If he undertook such a survey, he would get some fairly dire results.

Mr. Lang: No doubt the hon. Gentleman will find an opportunity to develop his point in due course, but I want to reply to the points that were raised in the debate.

The survey by Cambridge Econometrics suggested that the Scottish economy grew more rapidly than that of the United Kingdom last year and will do so this year. The CBI survey suggested that output would rise faster in the United Kingdom, and there was more optimism about exports and employment increasing in Scotland in the year ahead while it is falling in the United Kingdom. There was similar optimism in the business strategy survey and the Building Employers Confederation survey.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) recounted the successful growth of most of Scotland's major industrial companies. No wonder the Labour party is forced to talk about relative decline when there has been so much growth and increased prosperity, with the average income of Scots rising by a third over the past decade, compared with absolute decline under the previous Labour Government.

It is interesting to reflect that, between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s, manufacturing industry declined more steeply in the United Kingdom than in Scotland. Today, Scottish manufacturing output and GDP are at their highest ever levels. The latest figures show GDP per head in Scotland to be some 3 per cent. above the United Kingdom average, excluding the south-east. That is hardly symptomatic of an economy in relative decline.

The hon. Member for Garscadden referred to the Louvain report, as did the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe). It was originally prepared in French and it may have lost something in translation, but the hon. Gentleman seems to have accorded the opposite view of the state of Strathclyde, as summarised in the report, to the

reality. For greater accuracy, I have obtained a translation. Referring to Strathclyde and its technological position, the report said:

"Strathclyde is, in fact distinguished from all other regions studied by a distinctly weaker presence of traditional sectors . . . and in comparison with other regions of Europe which are characterised with traditional industries has a better representation of advanced technology activities in its territories."

That is the opposite of the point that the hon. Gentleman was seeking to make.

The hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion), referred to expenditure in docklands and sought to compare that adversely with——

Mr. Wilson: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The House was misled earlier and I have drawn attention to that. The Secretary of State, having looked for a reference to cancel out my point, came back with another reference to the article. In doing so, he sought, for the benefit of the press, to devalue the report to which my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) referred. I have now found the article which the Secretary of State claimed establishes his case, but it made no reference to the report. Let me quote the last paragraph.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am having difficulty in finding a point of order for me. The hon. Gentleman is raising a point for debate, not a point of order. What is the point of order for me?

Mr. Wilson: I shall come to the point of order and to do so I shall quote the last paragraph of the article by Alastair Balfour in the *Glasgow Herald*. It says:

"The State of our Nation in this last decade of the century is poor, and getting worse. The pity is that so few recognise it and fewer still are ready to address it."

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is a point for debate, not a point of order.

Mr. Wilson: The House has been misled twice in order to disinform the press.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lang: The article in question was wrong and so the paragraph in it is wrong.

Mr. Dewar: I have not had time to study the article, but I want to be clear what the Minister of State is saying. Is he telling me that the article of 30 December by Alastair Balfour specifically referred to the document from which I was quoting and deals with its contents?

Mr. Lang: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State said that the substance of the article —*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman may check that in *Hansard*. But as the substance of the report is incorrect, and as it was not accepted by the Scottish Development Agency—*[Interruption.]*

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Are you not going to reprimand the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) for throwing a newspaper across the Dispatch Box?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am sure that the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) regrets the action that he has just taken and I hope that he will feel it appropriate to apologise to the House.

Mr. Wilson: I overestimated my strength, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The second copy of the newspaper was meant to land alongside the first. I apologise.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North has apologised and that is the end of the matter.

Mr. Ewing *rose*——

Mr. Lang: The relative comparison is not with the United Kingdom's economy——

Mr. Ewing: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Misleading the House used to be a very serious matter. It is now taken as a matter of course.

Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie (Glasgow, Pollok) *rose in his place and claimed to move*, That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 204, Noes 275.

Division No. 70] **[7 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*

Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLe'ish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Ken Eastham

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Grist, Ian
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
Killedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Wavaney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim

Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 33 (Questions on amendments) and agreed to.*

Mr. Deputy Speaker *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House congratulates the Government on the success of their economic policies in Scotland which have resulted in higher living standards, greatly reduced unemployment, a substantial increase in the workforce in employment, and record levels of manufacturing productivity and output; have promoted the competitiveness of Scottish industry and its readiness to meet the challenge of the Single European Market; have encouraged the growth of investment of enterprise and small businesses, and have provided a basis for sustained growth and development across the economy as a whole; and notes that unemployment is now falling faster in Scotland than in the United Kingdom as a whole.

King's Cross Railways Bill

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order 121 (Quorum of committee on opposed bill), leave be given for the Committee on the King's Cross Railways Bill to proceed with a quorum of two.—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

7.12 pm

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): I am most grateful to the Chairman of Ways and Means for facilitating this debate. I thought that I might have to begin by introducing myself to right hon. and hon. Members, because I have been so long detained outside the Chamber that hon. Members may have forgotten who I am. [HON. MEMBERS: "Never".] Indeed, since 27 June last year——

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): May I say that my hon. Friend will always be remembered as a shining wit?

Mr. Hamilton: My hon. Friend has merely stolen one of my spoonerisms.

Since 27 June last year I have had the honour and privilege of chairing the Committee considering the King's Cross Railways Bill, which, while not exactly the greatest show on earth, has added to the gaiety of nations and augmented the public stock of harmless pleasure from the Grand Committee Room off Westminster Hall. We have sat in public on 33 days since, and we have had one private session and also one site visit.

I have emerged this evening blinking into the sudden glare and sunlight of the Chamber and hope that hon. Members will vote for the motion, which is brought before the House at the request of all the members of the Committee: my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), and the hon. Members for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) and for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay). I hope that hon. Members will appreciate that the honour of sitting on the Committee was not one that we actively sought, but we are doing our duty as it was imposed upon us by the House and intend, even if the motion is passed this evening, to continue to do so.

The Committee has now been sitting for a long time and my colleagues and I feel that we have now exhausted time and are beginning to encroach upon eternity. It is producing some significant problems for those on the Committee in carrying out their other parliamentary duties from time to time.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I wonder whether, having gone this far through the experience, the hon. Gentleman now feels that private Bills should be encouraged or discouraged as a process. Does he not now have much sympathy with the special Select Committee that looked at this, seeking a way to reform the whole process?

Mr. Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman implies that I did not have any sympathy with that proposition before I became Chairman of the Committee. I should disabuse him of that idea, because I feel that there is much to be said for many of the recommendations in the Joint Committee report and I hope that the Leader of the House will take on board that Committee's recommendations. I am sure that they are in line with the views of many hon. Members who have come here this evening to debate not merely

[Mr. Hamilton]

whether the quorum on the Committee should in this circumstance be reduced, but the wider points that have been adverted to by the hon. Gentleman.

It is a serious request that we are making to the House and it is not made lightly. It is not one to which, in other circumstances, I should be very sympathetic. I believe it to be of some importance, therefore, to establish the justification for what is being proposed.

I have said already that we have sat in public for 33 days. It is only this week that we have begun to hear evidence on behalf of the petitioners against the Bill. Therefore, the Bill is likely to continue in Committee for a very long time to come

I have also said that, notwithstanding the request that we are making this evening, it will be incumbent upon hon. Members to attend diligently to their duties as often as is possible and necessary. I give an assurance to the House that they will do so.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I sympathise with the situation of the members of the hon. Gentleman's Committee. I have sat on and chaired, I think, five private Bill Committees and I understand his position, even though I shall be opposing what he proposes. He has just mentioned that the petitioners are about to start making their case. Does he think that they will be disadvantaged by this move, because the promoter, British Rail, has had the opportunity of a quorum of three, whereas now the petitioners will have a quorum of only two?

Mr. Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman may like to know that it is not necessarily an advantage to those making speeches that they be heard; in some cases it may be the opposite. However, I take the point that he has raised and assure him that, in our opinion, the petitioners will not be disadvantaged by the proposal. If we believed that they would be, I should not be standing here now advocating that the motion be passed.

A full record of the proceedings is taken every day and the transcript is available the following morning. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we have been assiduous throughout the proceedings on the Bill in testing with some vigour the assertions of British Rail. I do not think that the representatives of British Rail would say that every day has been an agreeable experience, as they have been subjected to the penetrating glares and cross-examination of the members of the Committee.

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): If it is not a disadvantage to any party for the quorum to be reduced from three to two, and my hon. Friend advanced the case that a good transcript was available to other hon. Members, why not reduce the quorum to one?

Mr. Hamilton: I appreciate that my hon. Friend thinks that autocracy is the best system of government, and I am sure that many hon. Members have sympathy with that. However, it is a question of degree. From time to time, it is necessary to adjourn the Committee, merely for a few moments, for an hon. Member to make a telephone call, or to perform some other function that it would be too indecorous to mention. For that reason we tabled the motion, and we also recognise that hon. Members have other duties in the House and outside, and it is our opinion that, on balance, this one exception to the general rule ought to be allowed, on the ground of the length of time that the Committee has been sitting.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I can sympathise with the dilemma of the Committee, because I have been a Chairman of a Select Committee, although it did not have to sit as long as the hon. Gentleman's Committee. Does he agree that the problem that the Committee faces and that the House is considering tonight—I believe the problem has applied to other Bills in the past—is that Bills of this description come to the House without being preceded by other procedures? This type of private Bill deals indirectly with matters of public concern that it was not initially meant to deal with. There is a deep-seated difficulty over the nature of the promoter's objectives rather than any shortcoming in the procedures of the House.

Mr. Hamilton: I believe that procedural alterations could be made to shorten the time for which Committees sit. I believe that, if there were a procedure such as a summons for directions in cases before the High Court, to examine which witnesses and the nature of the evidence to be called and other such relevant questions, that might shorten the length of time for which the Committee sits without disadvantage to the promoters or the petitioners on the Bill. There are other options that one could mention.

I have a great deal of sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's remarks. I know that he is a distinguished Chairman of a Committee, as is the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks).

This request is not without precedent, although precedents are not apposite to cover the case of the Committee on which I sit.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North) *rose*——

Mr. Hamilton: Would my hon. Friend permit me to make a little more progress with my speech? I hope that the debate will not last as long as the Committee has been sitting, and I want to allow other hon. Members to speak. I hope that my hon. Friend will be patient and perhaps intervene later.

Motions to reduce a quorum on Committees on private Bills have been put before. For example, in 1965 in the Committee examining the Covent Garden Market Bill, one of the hon. Members was taken seriously ill early in the proceedings and the quorum was reduced. In 1986, during the Committee on the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill, the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) refused to serve and no other Opposition Member could be found to take her place, so the quorum was also reduced then.

There are not many precedents for what we are asking the House to do. I am fully sensible of the enormity of what is being proposed, and I do not think that it should become a general precedent. The rules and procedures on private Bills are not to be substantially changed, but I believe that when a Committee lasts for an exceptionally long time, such as the length of time that we have endured, it is right that hon. Members should be permitted to be absent for short periods, from time to time, without causing the Committee to adjourn.

The previous record for length of sitting of a private Bill Committee is held by the Associated British Ports (No. 2)

Bill and the North Killingholme Cargo Terminal Bill, which sat for 26 days. The Leicester (Crematorium) Bill also lasted for 26 days in the 1982-83 Session.

The Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill Committee, which sat for 25 days, met for 86 hours in Committee over five months. The King's Cross Railways Bill has already sat for more than 115 hours on 33 days, over eight months, and as I have said, it is possible that it will last for another 15 or 20 days. We shall be well into the lead by the time that we conclude our proceedings.

Looking to the future, that time is probably as nothing compared to what will be endured when, and if, British Rail comes forward in November, as it has said that it intends to do, with its high-speed link Bill to put the rail line through Kent to King's Cross. Therefore, I hope that I carry with me tonight supporters from Kent who sit on the Benches behind me.

I hope that I am making a case based on the length of time that the Committee has served. The average number of sitting days per Committee during the past 20 years is 4·8, so the vast majority of private Bills sit for only a few days, and the total number of hours when the Bill is considered is very small.

Mr Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): What is the average now?

Mr. Hamilton: I accept the hon. Gentleman's sedentary comment—we are certainly pushing up the average, but I do not think that that is the greatest of my achievements in my short period in the House.

A number of Select Committees on hybrid Bills have sat for lengthy periods, but hybrid Bill Committees are not strictly comparable with private Bill Committees, because they contain a greater number of hon. Members and a smaller quorum in relation to the overall size of the Committee. That is the point that the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure had in mind when it turned its attention to quorums and made its recommendations.

The two most notable hybrid Bill Committees were the Channel Tunnel Bill—on which I also had the privilege of sitting—which sat for 39 days in 1985-86 and 1986-87 and the Dartford-Thurrock Crossing Bill, which sat for 22 days in 1987-88, when there were seven members and the quorum was three.

I have some experience of these matters, and it is on the basis of that that I make this request this evening. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) should have some sympathy with my request, as he sat on the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure. In paragraph 118 of its proceedings, that Committee says:

"it is now unrealistic to expect members of an opposed bill committee in the Commons to abandon all their other duties in order to attend the whole of the committee's proceedings, it seems desirable slightly to relax the requirement for a quorum."

I am delighted to adopt the view of my hon. Friend the Member of Faversham, whom I am pleased to see here to support me.

I hasten to assure hon. Members that the purpose of moving the motion is not to enable hon. Members to take days off regular. I have had one morning and one afternoon off to perform other duties in the House and in my constituency during the 33 days that the Committee has sat; otherwise, I have sat in the Committee Room almost without exception, with just a few minutes outside. Other hon. Members have had other reasons to be away from the Committee for short periods.

The motion is to facilitate two hon. Members being away from Committee, without having to disrupt proceedings and to adjourn and so cause counsel and witnesses to have a break in proceedings. That causes inconvenience to petitioners, who are disadvantaged when the timetable of the Bill is unexpectedly altered, rather than to promoters.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The hon. Gentleman has been chosen for special treatment by the Tory Whips to serve on the Committee. Before he proposed the motion, I wonder whether he had a good look around to see whether someone else was available to fill the bill and whether he could make a change and substitute someone else. That would require a new procedure. One or two Tories seem to have a lot of time on their hands. Off the top of my head, I am thinking about the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is prepared to do a couple of days for Barclays for £100,000 a year. Does the hon. Gentleman have that sort of money?

Mr. Hamilton: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the four hon. Members on the Committee are painfully aware that we are dedicated public servants, unpaid for the extra responsibility on our shoulders, while in front of us sit a suave collection of silks, juniors, agents and others, who are deriving no doubt well-deserved fees for the work that they perform. I should hate the hon. Gentleman to think that there was the slightest tinge of envy in our minds when we look at them.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): My hon. Friend is a saint.

Mr. Hamilton: I was not aware that canonisation was in the gift of the Chief Whip, but it may be my reward for all my hard work in Committee.

I speak for all hon. Members on the Committee when I say that it is not our intention to use the latitude that the motion would give us to be away from the Committee in contravention of our duties to the House. We take very seriously paragraph 119 of the Joint Committee report, which states:

"The Committee wish to emphasise that despite the relaxation of these formal requirements, Members of Parliament should still regard themselves as obliged to attend committees on opposed bills assiduously and attentively."

It will be my intention to continue to sit on the Committee every day, in so far as it is possible for me to do so, and we shall attend assiduously to our duties.

Therefore, I commend the motion to the House. I hope that it will not be taken as a generalised exception, but will be treated as the exceptional case that it is. I hope for the support of my hon. Friends and of Opposition Members.

7.32 pm

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): I, too, had the privilege of sitting selflessly on the Committee considering the King's Cross Railways Bill. Somebody up there in the Whips' Office likes me, too. I sat on the Committee considering the Dartford-Thurrock Crossing Bill, to which the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) referred. That Bill dealt with a bridge from one place to another place where I had never been and which I had never heard of. I never crossed the bridge, and probably

[Mr. George Galloway]

never shall, but it was a bridge too far for me. I sat on the Committee for all those 22 days under the distinguished chairmanship of the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman).

Mr. Skinner: He was not all that distinguished then.

Mr. Galloway: He was a very distinguished Chairman. He did not leave his place very often, either. I see that he has his reward in heaven, his canonisation by the Chief Whip and now sits on the Treasury Bench, so perhaps the hon. Member for Tatton has something to look forward to after all.

Mr. Corbyn: Perhaps my hon. Friend can enlighten the House about a rumour that is going around that the Dartford-Thurrock Crossing Bill may have to return to the House because of the height of the bridge. In those circumstances, presumably my hon. Friend would be more than happy to serve once again on that Committee.

Mr. Galloway: If it is proper to say so, I had always thought the measure a dubious one. After those 22 days, the Committee made a fairly strong recommendation which I understand the House later overturned. It may be that our wisdom has been vindicated and the measure will return.

Having served my 22 days on the Dartford-Thurrock Crossing Bill, clearly I transgressed again, because I was given the chalice of a place under the equally distinguished chairmanship of the hon. Member for Tatton—the *Spectator's* parliamentary wit of the year. Before the Committee started, I thought that epithet only half right. As each day progressed—and, as the hon. Gentleman mentioned, there have been many days—my admiration for him has grown and his wit and wisdom is being amply demonstrated in the Chair of that Committee.

I hope that no one will imply that one of the reasons for the tremendously slow progress of the measure is somehow any shortcomings in the chairmanship of the Committee, for the hon. Member for Tatton has acted assiduously, wisely and with a good deal of humor, often finding pearls of humour where none could have imagined it possible in the tedium.

No fault can be laid at the door of the Chair of the Committee, or the Members of the Committee or the highly remunerated silks and others, some of whom are in the Gallery—I realise that I was not supposed to mention them. I have been so long in that Committee that I am losing touch with parliamentary procedure. Some of them are doing well and they have all had their moments. Like Wagner's operas, they have all had their moments and their terrible half hours. Some of them have been Rocky Marciano, others have been Don Cockell; sometimes the roles have been reversed. It has been a long time.

I wanted to give one example to my hon. Friends, most of whom I suspect are ranged against the motion, although I am sure for other reasons than wanting to see me locked up in the Grand Committee Room for any longer than necessary. Last Tuesday, as the House will know, was the day of action called by the Trades Union Congress in connection with the ambulance dispute. I was privileged to be invited by the ambulance workers' trade unions and the Scottish Trades Union Congress to address the rally at George square in Glasgow. It was a very significant occasion.

I could not turn down the invitation, and the Chairman of the Committee, although no doubt his views are different from mine, was willing to release me for that purpose. However, that reduced the available membership of the Committee to three.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) the other Labour Member on the Committee wanted to attend a meeting in the House on the ambulance dispute, and again the Chairman was willing to release him. That meant the collapse of the Committee. The proceedings stopped, causing inconvenience particularly to the petitioners. The promoters have broad backs and their counsel and other legal representatives were not terribly distraught about the break, but those petitioners who were appearing for themselves or had fine legal representation which I understand was working virtually for nothing, were particularly disadvantaged.

It is clearly ridiculous, when a Bill has been considered for 150 hours—and, despite what the Chairman of the Committee said, I suspect that it will be 150 hours more yet —to expect a quorum of three out of four Members of Parliament to devote so much time to the Committee or to feel terribly guilty about answering a telephone call, a call of nature or anything else. When I was at the rally in Glasgow, I was aware of the responsibility with which I had left my three colleagues trapped in the Committee.

Mr. Moate: The hon. Gentleman explained that there is always a clash of priorities when one is serving on a private Bill Committee, because circumstances such as the ambulance dispute arise. Does he agree that such circumstances would arise whether it was a short or long Bill? If it were a short Bill and the same pressure had arisen, he would have felt similarly obliged to go elsewhere and similarly guilty about leaving his colleagues behind.

Mr. Galloway: By definition, the longer a Bill goes on, the more such clashes of responsibility are likely to occur and to prove problematic. I have much sympathy with my hon. Friends who criticise the private Bill procedure, but that issue is different from the motion that we are discussing.

As a Scottish Member of Parliament, I must be in my constituency on Friday and often have constituency business on Monday. That effectively means that almost all my time in the House is spent in Committee. I cannot attend Prime Minister's Question Time—I have forgotten what the Prime Minister looks like—or questions on foreign and commonwealth affairs, and this week I could not attend Scottish questions. That is becoming intolerable.

I accepted the mantle thrust on me by the Whips of serving on the Dartford-Thurrock Crossing Bill and now on the King's Cross Railways Bill. I trust that they are polishing another Bill for me to serve on when this one is finished. The Opposition's deputy Chief Whip is present, and I am sure that he can hear what I am saying.

I hope that the House will pass the motion because it will make life much easier for the four members of the Committee. It will not disadvantage the petitioners—I understand people being anxious about the dangers of disadvantaging them—and no one who has read the transcripts of the Committee's proceedings, which I

commend to hon. Members, could claim that the Committee has been a pushover for British Rail. On the contrary, BR has been mauled repeatedly during our proceedings.

I hope that, in all the circumstances, the House will pass the motion.

7.43 pm

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Michael Portillo): The motion is strictly procedural, but sometimes it is helpful for the House to hear the Government's attitude to such matters.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton), the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) and the other two hon. Members serving on the Committee on their excellent service. They have displayed selfless public service and commitment to duty.

On Second Reading last year, I said that the Government gave consent for British Rail to seek the powers in the Bill. In principle, the Government believe that the Bill's proposals are sensible and that they are a further step in British Rail's plans to create a modern railway to carry traffic to and through London.

Consistent with that approach, the Government support the motion, which is supported by all the members of the Committee and would enable it to complete consideration of the Bill in a sensible way. I am therefore happy to record the Government's attitude to the motion.

7.44 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): As I said earlier in an intervention, I sympathise with the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton), my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) and the other two hon. Members serving on the Committee.

I chaired four or five private Bill Committees. Sometimes a streak of malevolence goes through the heart of even the kindest Whip when he is deciding which hon. Member should be given a task that is onerous, unrewarded and unobserved. One of the worst things that can happen to any hon. Member is to be totally unobserved for such a long period. Hon. Members who sit not only on private Bill Committees but on public Bill Committees and Select Committees are the workhorses of this place, and they deserve recognition for that.

The Committee stage of a public Bill used to be rather like dropping into a legislative black hole. There was plenty of action, but they sat only on Tuesdays and Thursdays. We now have the advantage of Committees being televised. I am a member of the Committee considering the Broadcasting Bill. It is important for all politicians to know that they have a platform. Therefore, the Committee stage of public Bills has become much more relevant and interesting than it was in the past.

The Committee stage of a private Bill is different; it is like being fossilised in amber. It may appear very grand —the members serving on the King's Cross Railway Bill look very grand and decorous, I am sure—but, rather as with insects fossilised in amber, there is little movement.

I must underline the fact that I am exceedingly sympathetic to the motion, but for several reasons I shall vote against it.

The hon. Member for Tatton and my hon. Friend the Member for Hillhead mentioned Queen's counsel, who seem to be paid by the word. They seem to assume that members of the Committee are incapable of reading. After one has sat in such a Committee for a few hours, one is almost incapable of doing anything, but one can usually summon up the ability to read a sentence. However, they continue to read interminably. I hope that the hon. Member for Tatton has reminded learned counsel that members of the Committee are capable of reading the papers that are put before them and that there is no need to go through them word by word, at great expense to the promoters and petitioners.

Knowing the circumstances that prevail on private Bill Committees, I believe that it is little wonder that hon. Members are so reluctant to serve on them. I volunteered to do so because I thought that I would learn something. I think that I learned a few things. I certainly learned about the defects of the private Bill procedure, with which I shall deal later. A number of hon. Members, confronted with the possibility of serving on a private Bill Committee, have fleetingly considered taking the Chiltern Hundreds. One or two would have preferred to disembowel themselves rather than serve on a private Bill Committee.

When we were considering how to get hon. Members to serve on private Bill Committees, the Select Committee on Procedure suggested—this was a serious suggestion—the possibility of knighthoods being given. That would not have enticed Labour Members, but Conservative Members might have been enticed by gongs being handed round.

The difference between the Committee stage of a private Bill and that of a public Bill is that, as the hon. Member for Tatton said, the private Bill Committee meets perhaps not for more hours but for more days and at times which are crucial in the House, such as Question Time. The Committee meets on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

The other distinction is that on a public Bill Committee, it is possible for hon. Members to disappear, to come down here and to make speeches. I do not know whether the Broadcasting Bill Committee is still sitting. I should be there, but no one will drag me down here and complain on the Floor of the House that I was not serving on the Committee. Yet that is what can happen to an hon. Member who does not turn up at a private Bill Committee. It is not permissive but mandatory for an hon. Member to serve on that Committee. If an hon. Member refuses to serve on such a Committee or does not turn up, it is incumbent on the Chairman of the private Bill Committee to report the absence to the House. That is the difference, which we must examine.

I suggest to the Minister and to hon. Members who have gone through this rather daunting experience for so many hours that hon. Members of all parties should insist that the report from the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure, which was presented to the House in July 1988, should be debated properly on the Floor of the House. We should have the opportunity to vote on its various recommendations.

It is a substantial report, and I do not intend to take hon. Members all the way through it. However, it is worth reminding the House of a few of the recommendations so that hon. Members know what the report contains.

Mr. Spearing: Before my hon. Friend discusses these important factors, will he permit me to attempt a reconciliation between himself and the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton)? Does he agree that one of the

[Mr. Spearing]

recommendations which was not in the report, although it was good, was the installation of a filter—perhaps a joint Committee of both Houses—to determine whether a private Bill was suitable for consideration by either House? Would that proposal deal with many of these matters?

Mr. Banks: I must point out to my hon. Friend that that is the first recommendation of the Committee. The report says:

"Promoters of a private bill should be required to prove before the committee on the bill that private legislation is necessary to secure the primary purpose of the bill."

The report continues:

"Where the primary purpose may be authorised through other means, the committee on the bill should insist that those means be pursued first, and that the approval of Parliament be limited only to the specific components which require its authority."

That would undoubtedly foreshorten many of the proceedings that are now being endured by members of the Committee.

The other principal recommendation that I want to draw to the attention of the House is recommendation 5, which says:

"In cases where planning considerations are dominant"—

which is clearly the case in the King's Cross Railways Bill—

"all works proposals for which private bill approval is presently required should instead be authorised through non-parliamentary procedures involving the holding, where necessary, of a public local inquiry into objections."

There are many objections to the King's Cross Railways Bill on local planning and national strategic planning grounds.

As I have said to the Minister and many other hon. Members, the proposal should never have had to go through the private Bill procedure. It should have been considered in other ways, and there should have been a full public inquiry.

Mr. Moate: I agree on that point, although that is not why I intervened. To correct what the hon. Gentleman said, does he recall that we had an extensive and full debate on the recommendations? We are waiting now not for a debate but for Government moves to implement the recommendations.

Mr. Banks: Yes, but the debate that I seek would be an executive debate so that we could take a decision at the end. We had a take-note debate. I remember the present Secretary of State for Energy when he was Leader of the House putting off the debate for ages, although many hon. Members were asking for one. The then Leader of the House kept saying that the Government were digesting the report. When we came to the debate, it was merely a take-note debate.

I do not know whether the hon. Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) shared this belief, but many Opposition Members thought that the then Leader of the House would make recommendations. However, when they were explained to the Prime Minister, he backed off quickly because the Prime Minister had said previously in Question Time that she thought that the private Bill procedures were perfectly adequate for such matters. I realise that the Prime Minister's word is law all the way through, but it is about time that hon. Members began to insist that cases such as the one that we are hearing tonight should never be repeated. That issue could unite hon. Members of all parties in demanding that action be taken.

I wish to draw the attention of the House to a couple of other major recommendations. There is a danger of the report being forgotten. It took a long time for the Table Office to find a copy, and we shall be told next that the report has gone out of print so we cannot discuss it. We shall then be told that all the drafts have been lost as well. I am suspicious about that, and I must insist that we have a proper debate in which we can take decisions. Recommendation 13 says:

"Each House should incorporate environmental impact assessment into private bill procedures by making new Standing Orders."

My God, we need an environmental impact assessment on the proposals for King's Cross. I am sure that, if hon. Members were to seek that, British Rail's proposals would be cursorily and summarily thrown out.

The report also recommends:

"Opposed bill committees should comprise five Members and the quorum should be three."

If even the four or five recommendations that I have read out had been incorporated, the hon. Member for Tatton and my hon. Friend the Member for Hillhead would not have been in their present position.

There is a difference between this proposal and the two precedents that were mentioned by the hon. Member for Tatton: the Covent Garden Bill of 1965 and the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill of 1986. In the case of the Covent Garden Bill, one hon. Member had a lengthy illness and another suddenly felt a bit dicky, which was not surprising given the problems associated with the private Bill procedure.

In the case of the Felixstowe Docks and Railway Bill, my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) refused to serve. There were effective reasons for her not serving. It is not easy merely to appoint another Member because proceedings are already under way. An hon. Member cannot be brought in at a later stage, because that would be grossly unfair to the promoters and to the petitioners. There were specific reasons in 1965 and 1986 why a proposal to reduce the quorum should have been received favourably—as it was. The position here is different.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: It is true that the reasons for the quorum were different for those two Bills, but the hon. Gentleman's argument seems odd. The quorum was reduced in the 1986 Committee because the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd), with whom I have the greatest sympathy, refused to undertake the duty imposed on her by the House. In this case, hon. Members are performing those duties, yet they are not to have the advantage of such a move.

Mr. Banks: There is another difference. The matter was brought to a head because my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley refused to serve. We are obliged to her for refusing because, as a result, the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure was set up. If, after my hon. Friend rendered us that service, we had had a chance to decide on the matter, the hon. Member for Tatton would not have been in his present position.

All hon. Members are taking an honourable approach. People outside and our constituents must understand. Now that the House is televised, I should not be surprised

if each of the hon. Members who is serving on the Committee was accosted by their constituents saying, "I've been watching the television and I have never seen you at Prime Minister's Question Time or in Scottish Question Time. Where were you? What have you been doing?" Since the private Bill Committees are not televised, hon. Members should have the opportunity to ensure that everyone inside and, more importantly, outside the House knows what goes on. That is why, if for no other reason, this debate is useful.

I object to the reduction of the quorum. The promoter, British Rail, is the real problem maker and has got us into this mess. British Rail's arrogance and high-handed attitude have not been at all helpful. It is about time that we visited on the heads of those who make the decisions at British Rail a just penalty for the way in which they are prepared to use this procedure.

Mr. Skinner: Put them on the Committee.

Mr. Banks: Unfortunately, they would make all the wrong decisions. British Rail and other promoters seem able to use this place in a way which I consider to be wholly unacceptable.

British Rail had the advantage of a quorum of three, with four hon. Members usually in attendance. The petitioners are beginning to present their case. Camden and Islington borough councils are presenting their case, part of which will be to show why the second London terminal for the Channel tunnel should be located in my constituency and the London borough of Newham, rather than at King's Cross. Petitioners will make that case, but the same quorum of hon. Members will not be present to hear them.

I want to know from the hon. Member for Tatton whether the reduction in the quorum will mean that, on average, there will still be four hon. Members on the Committee. I am worried about why he wishes to reduce the quorum now. It may be because of pressures in the past or intimations that there will be pressures in the future. In other words, an hon. Member may wish to make the odd visit abroad or there may be a reselection crisis in the air. If there will not be the same regular attendance to hear petitioners as there was to hear the promoters, the petitioners will be at a disadvantage.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: There is no sinister motive underlying the request of the Members of the Committee. It would be an unjustifiable slur on his hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) and for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) if the hon. Gentleman were to suggest that we intend to do something which would disadvantage the petitioners. It has been our duty all along to bend over backwards to assist the petitioners, particularly those who are not represented by counsel or specialist parliamentary agents. We have done our best to accommodate them in all their difficulties, given the disparity of resources between private individuals and enormous corporations such as British Rail.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that the only reason why we come now with this request is that we have sat for 33 days, which is seven days more than the previous record. I did not feel that it was open to us to make this request until the exceptional nature of the Committee became evident for all to see.

Mr. Galloway: Two of the members of the Committee have been reselected.

Mr. Banks: I am relieved to hear that at least two of them have been reselected. I did not mean to imply that there was any intentional disservice to the petitioners. I merely wish to know that the petitioners' case is heard to the maximum effect and by the full membership of the Committee. Ultimately, all four members will vote, whether or not they all heard the cases put by the various petitioners.

We are in this mess because Private Bill procedures have been tested to destruction. Clearly they are completely inappropriate for a measure as important as the King's Cross Railways Bill and the location of the second London terminal for the Channel tunnel and associated infrastructure, which is the largest capital investment in transportation this century in this country——

Mr. Cormack: The largest ever.

Mr. Banks: That is even longer than this century. I am obliged to the hon. Gentleman, who is so precise on these matters.

The private Bill procedure is not the way to deal with a Bill such as this. The Government have walked away from a major strategic decision. I have been to see the Minister and he has been courtesy itself, but he has never accepted that the decision is so important that it should be taken by the Government and not left to four members of a Committee who have had the decision inflicted upon them. They will have to listen to hours and hours of petitions. This is a strategic decision, and the responsibility should be taken by the Government.

The Government are to blame as well as British Rail, but they are doubly to blame because they have allowed private Bill procedures to be used by British Rail on such a significant development and because they have refused to bring the report on private Bill procedure to the House so that we can vote on it.

I could make the case that we should have the terminal at Stratford where there is no opposition to it, unlike at King's Cross. We are waiting to greet the construction.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order.

Mr. Banks: I know that that goes somewhat beyond the terms of the motion, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am coming to my peroration, my last sentence.

The hon. Member for Tatton knows our motives for opposing the motion. This debate and the pressures that have been put on the Committee have reminded us yet again that the private Bill procedure is inappropriate and overstretched. If we obtain a debate on it, the Committee members will have served us well, as they have done in the Committee. I repeat that I shall oppose the recommendation tonight.

8.6 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): I begin by applauding the Committee for both its assiduity and its integrity. Those of us who are anxious about British Rail's proposals, both in this Bill and in the others that it proposes to bring forward, are extremely grateful to the Committee for the way in which it has forced British Rail to address some of the questions that, in its usual slovenly

[Mr. Andrew Rowe]

way, it would have preferred to slide past the Committee in the miasma that is characteristic of its normal proceedings. I pay a grateful tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) and his colleagues on the Committee.

I served on a Committee on a private Bill under the scrupulous and assiduous chairmanship of the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). He has said that he understands what is involved, and from my personal experience I know that that is true. He said that hon. Members, or at least most of them, can read, so it could be argued that all that is needed is a transcript. Why should we bother to have a Committee of Members of Parliament when it would be cheaper for professionals to argue out the matter and to make a decision based on the transcript of those discussions?

That argument under-estimates the importance of cross-examination by members of the Committee. As my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) said, one could ask: if the quorum is to be reduced by one, why not reduce it again? If it was reduced again by a third, one would obtain a recurring decimal—except, in this case, it would not be a recurring decimal, but a spasmodic decimal. The effect of reducing the quorum would be that people would not come so often.

I am surprised that the members of the Committee want relief. The proceedings have almost all the ingredients that one could possibly wish for in the life of a Member of Parliament. First, they are complex. We have heard how many days the board of British Rail took to present its evidence. The numbers of days was greatly increased by the need for British Rail to re-present and in some cases re-re-present evidence. The matter is immensely complex and we probably need to have a balance of hon. Members to scrutinise it thoroughly.

The Bill deals with matters of major importance. Often in this place we find ourselves working hard on matters which, sub specie aeternitatis, are of no importance whatever. British Rail is seeking to override carefully constituted protection for the heritage and the environment. Scheduled buildings are not only of major importance in the context of King's Cross but of fundamental importance to the protection of the British environment from John o' Groats to Land's End. If a private undertaking can use the private Bill procedure to demolish the protection of scheduled buildings, there is no safety for any of our landmarks. We may find that the Dean and his bus affiliation in Salisbury would use the private Bill procedure to demolish the cathedral to allow more parking.

The Bill has also provided all sorts of surprises, and it is always rather nice in an otherwise drab routine to have surprises. I am sure that every member of the Committee must have had a frisson of surprise when British Rail told the Committee that, in its brand new 21st-century station, the platforms would not be long enough to accommodate its brand new 21st-century trains and, so that the passengers are not prevented from getting off the trains, the driver will have to get off in the tunnel and walk back down the track.

It has all been immensely entertaining. What could be more fun than to discern, for example, that British Rail wants a new station when it cannot give the Committee any firm assurance that it will have a line to get to the station? These are matters of burlesque amusement from which, when hon. Members reflect upon them, I am sure that they will not wish to be released.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) has made it abundantly clear that this is an outdated way of handling such major matters. Indeed, the debate is really about the clear and unmistakable evidence that major private Bills such as this can no longer be run in this way and that the promoters can no longer expect Members of Parliament to participate.

Before we get the essential changes that the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure has previsaged, perhaps we should suggest one or two improvements. I wonder whether this motion would be before us if the timing of the Committee's sittings were to be changed. Why is the timing of the Committee primarily for the convenience of the legal profession? Why does the Committee not sit at times that would suit Members of Parliament, so that hon. Members could come to Question Time and take part in some of the more lively parts of the parliamentary day?

Mr. Neil Hamilton: Perhaps I can give my hon. Friend some suggestions. It is, of course, open to the Committee to set its own normal sitting hours. One of the problems that we have faced during our proceedings when we have wished to sit later in the afternoon is a shortage of shorthand writers. If there is nobody to transcribe what is said, the Committee is unable to sit. That is something else to which the House should turn its attention.

Mr. Rowe: I am both grateful for and appalled by that intervention. That seems a further example of the extraordinarily incompetent way in which we run our own affairs if we cannot so structure our organisation that we can arrange the timetable to make it possible to run the proceedings of our House as they should be run.

It would considerably benefit petitioners if they could meet the Committee at a time that is not during their normal working hours. I suspect that many petitioners have to take time off work and often even have to accept loss of earnings simply to come here to give evidence. What is more, because it is almost impossible for the Committee to predict exactly how long any sitting will last, no doubt the petitioners come and—like out-patients at some of our hospitals—go away disappointed, not having seen the doctor. If we were to suggest altering the procedures of the House so that such a Committee could sit at times that suit Members of Parliament, perhaps we might have less difficulty with the Committee.

The procedure that we are discussing was designed in the 19th century to assist relatively weak private railway companies to override the spoiling tactics and the enormous power of the large landowners. It is no longer an appropriate vehicle for a huge state monopoly that is seeking to override the weakness of individual housholders or, in the case of this British Rail Bill, to override the law of the land. It is wholly inappropriate.

I am not concerned only about the Bill; I am concerned about the future. There is alleged to be coming—I do not really believe it because we have heard it all before—or there is the faint possibility that at some stage British Rail will bring before the House a Bill to connect the Channel tunnel to either London, Swanley, Ashford or somewhere. There is a faint chance that British Rail might devise some

way of getting its trains from the Channel tunnel portal to —I can see that I am in trouble, Madam Deputy Speaker——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Rowe: If that were to happen, we would be faced with a Bill of such length and such complexity, affecting so many thousands of people and covering tens of miles from Dover to King's Cross or—more realistically—to Stratford, that I believe that it would prove impossible to find hon. Members prepared to serve on such a Committee. As a high proportion of that Bill's content would relate to planning matters, the time is long overdue for the House to turn the report of the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure into regulations before we get—if we ever get—the Channel tunnel link Bill.

8.16 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I speak because of the procedural matters involved, and also as an Islington Member of Parliament. My hon. Friends the Members for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) and for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) cannot be here tonight, but they are interested in the fate of King's Cross and, therefore, in the fate of this proposal.

Although I understand that the motion deals with the quorum of the private Bill Committee, other issues emanate from that, which are of great importance to the House. Other hon. Members have touched on the procedure of the private Bill Committee and on the public's right to know what is going on. I have been following this from a distance. Now that the Whips have left the Chamber, I can reveal to the House that I have never served on a private Bill Committee—*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) is informing me that he is an agency— *[Interruption.]* No, I beg his pardon, he is now a full Whip. Nevertheless, although I have never served on such a Committee, I have observed them from afar.

I have been concerned that, so far, the Committee has sat for 33 days, and I have every sympathy for the hon. Members concerned. If I had to serve on a private Bill Committee that was dealing with a part of the country that was far away from London and of no direct concern to my constituents, and had to spend that amount of time on matters of no direct relevance to my area, I can understand that people in my constituency would say, "What on earth are you doing obsessing yourself with the Inverness Harbour Bill?"—or whatever.

I can understand both that and the frustrations of the hon. Members concerned. Although I have a great deal of sympathy with them and the House should have some sympathy with their problems, that is not to say that I shall vote for the motion, so they will have to suffer for a bit longer. Nevertheless, I hope that the House has listened carefully to what has been said and will consider the procedures involved.

In the past, I served as a local councillor. Indeed, I was the chair of a planning committee on a borough council. No borough councillor would get involved in such detail on a planning application or a planning procedure, because that is not the way in which local government works, so why should we expect Members of Parliament to go into the most enormous detail on planning matters?

This abuse of the private Bill procedure is growing. The procedure was introduced as a form of planning control for major harbour and railway developments. It was the only form of planning control that existed at that time. There was no local government framework capable of dealing with planning, and Parliament deemed this an appropriate form of control.

There would be no point in going into how the railways were built and into the procedures that had to be followed. However, one has to ask whether, in this age, it is appropriate that an enormously important decision in respect of King's Cross, with ramifications far beyond King's Cross—indeed far beyond the railway network of this country: international ramifications—should be thrust upon four Members of this House, who are forced to give up virtually all other parliamentary and political activity to pursue the matter. The House must address itself to that problem, and I hope that it will. I hope that it will recognise that there is something fundamentally wrong with the existing procedures.

I have been involved in road inquiries in the past, and I expect that, if the Department of Transport's plans for my borough go forward, I shall be involved in such inquiries again. There is nothing particularly democratic about the public inquiry system, either. However, the advantage is that the applicant has to put all his cards on the table in advance.

One contrasts that with the case of the King's Cross Railways Bill, in which British Rail seems to make up the evidence as it goes along. Every day, it seems to come up with a new set of papers and a new set of plans, even if it cannot measure the length of a train and compare that with the length of a tunnel.

In the case of a public inquiry on a road or a major building, for example, the inspector reports to the Secretary of State, who makes the decision. The Secretary of State is not accountable for the decision, except to the extent that, theoretically, as Secretary of State he could be the subject of a motion of censure. There is something fundamentally wrong with decision-making as a whole.

There are also, of course, the feelings in the community. I represent—Islington, North, which is slightly beyond King's Cross. Actually, the main line from King's Cross runs through it. The Department of Transport, through its consultants, has just put forward a proposal for the creation of a major road through Islington, down to King's Cross, and a road beyond that.

I realise that that matter goes slightly beyond the scope of our debate, but I make the point to underline the concern of the community about the passage of the King's Cross Railways Bill. Many people in Islington are genuinely very worried. They are worried about the size of the proposed development north of King's Cross, and they are worried about the procedures being adopted in respect of the Bill itself.

The Bill has been under consideration for, I think, 33 days—my hon. Friends may correct me if I am wrong—most of which time has been taken up by British Rail. As I said, British Rail has altered its course many times throughout the procedure, and it has not yet come up with a firm proposal for a line leading into King's Cross. It is discussing the provision of a station served by some very outdated tracks.

Indeed, at the moment trains could not get into the new King's Cross international terminal. There is no tunnel that could take them. So a station is being discussed

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

virtually in isolation from a rail system that coud cope with the trains. That was pointed out earlier by the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe). For 33 days, British Rail has had very expensive representation—silks and all the rest—and goodness knows what the cost is. At the end of the day, we shall all have to pay the bill.

The procedure involves Members of Parliament being taken away from the political activities for daytime sittings of the Committee. The local community, most of whom have other things to worry about, are unable to be represented, other than through local authorities or by community associations. Some people are making enormous sacrifices to represent them.

The Camden and Islington local authorities are now starting to present their views and their evidence. That evidence is very much out in the open, unlike the case presented by British Rail. Now we are told that it is an appropriate time to reduce the Committee quorum. I understand why the motion has been moved, but what message is to be given to the people of the borough that I represent? How are they to be told that the quorum is being changed, now that the applicants have completed their submission?

I know that it is not the intention of the hon. Members concerned, but one cannot escape the fact that the impression being given to the people in the community is that the views of the two local authorities, both of which are elected—the board of British Rail is not elected—of the local community association, of the King's Cross Railway Lands Group, and of all the other groups concerned are such that they can be dealt with by a smaller Committee. The message is inescapable: that they are less important than the British Rail evidence. I hope that the House will recognise that, if the quorum motion is passed, it will be very difficult to persuade people in the boroughs of Camden and Islington that their views and the views of others—many people are affected—are being taken seriously.

It is not appropriate to go halfway through a Bill procedure and then change the quorum. If, when the Committee started, the quorum was three out of four, it should stay at that figure. In the light of all this, the Select Committee on Procedure may well bring forward a procedural proposal. That would be the appropriate time to make such a change. It would be appropriate to consider also the representation of the public at Committee meetings, the sitting times and other procedures. It is not appropriate to chop and change in the middle, because that is seen as unfair to the less well-financed people who are trying to put forward their views.

In future, we shall have to look much more seriously at the major questions arising from these matters. It seems to me that it is fundamentally wrong that a major planning decision such as this should be taken by a Committee of four hon. Members. The local authorities have a sort of walk-on part. They can collect evidence and put it forward. Local communities can collect evidence and put it forward. But a Committee of the House will decide one way or the other. As the hon. Member for Mid-Kent said, this procedure rides roughshod over many other things. The implications of the decision are enormous.

As a separate matter, there is the enormous office development proposal north of King's Cross. In reality, of course, it is linked to the fate of the King's Cross station development itself; one cannot separate the two. Nor can one escape the effects on south London constituencies and on Kent as a whole. If this major station complex is not approved, the railway line route south of London will have to be different; if it is approved, the general direction of the railway line will be more or less set. One way or the other, the effect will be considerable.

I realise that the terms of the motion are quite narrow. However, as in the case of most things that are narrow, the deeper one goes, the wider one wishes they were.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not in my case. The more I go into this, the more I realise that the hon. Member is straying. It has been a very good-humoured debate, but I wish that he would come back to the motion that was moved by the Chairman of Ways and Means.

Mr. Corbyn: I can only beg your pardon, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was not attempting to deviate one iota; I was merely trying to explain the depth of feeling in Islington. People in every pub on the Caledonian road talk of little else than the King's Cross Railways Bill Committee. Indeed, the verbatim reports are passed from house to house. They are read as widely as the *Islington Gazette*.

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): And in Dulwich.

Mr. Corbyn: Yes, in Dulwich as well. One report that I have here is very boring, but some are very interesting and are widely read.

I hope that, when the House makes its decision tonight, it will vote the motion down for the reason that I have given: that it is unsustainable, midway through a Committee, despite all the frustrations, which I understand, to change the rules. One cannot move the goal posts halfway through the game. The message that the House will give the people of Camden, Islington, the south London boroughs and Kent, which will all be affected, is that somehow there is one rule for British Rail and a different rule for everybody else. That is not good enough. It is not acceptable, and it will not be understood by people outside the House.

Another message from the debate is that there must be a serious examination of the private Bill procedure. It was never intended that planning decisions of international importance, in this case the biggest construction project that the country has ever seen, should be decided by four hon. Members, all of whom have other pressures on their time. I do not say that they have better things to do, but they have other things to do as Members of Parliament. Their experience on the Committee must have given them food for thought. I am always reminded that people who have served on juries for a long time during a major trial are given absolution by the judge at the end; he says that they will never have to do jury service again. I hope that the four hon. Members on the Committee will be given absolution from serving on other private Bill committees. I hope that the Whips will read that in *Hansard*.

The issues are complex. A point of principle is involved. I hope that the House will reject the proposal before it and show that it intends to keep faith with the original procedure. That would give confidence to the people, community groups and local authorities now preparing to

appear before the Committee that they will be subject to exactly the same rules as British Rail, rather than inferior terms of representation

8.30 pm

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton) and his colleagues for their service on the Committee. The whole House owes them a debt for their assiduous attendance and the conscientious way in which they have pursued their duties. In sympathising with their predicament, I fear that I cannot support the motion. It gives me no pleasure to say that, but the motion raises a constitutional point, a broad general point of policy and a particular point in this case before us.

On the general policy point, it would be wrong, as the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) said, to change the rules of the game during play, or to move the goal posts while the players are on the field. It would suggest that the party that had had the opportunity of presenting its case before a full Committee of four, or a quorum of three, was in a stronger, better and more prestigious position than those who present their case later to a lesser quorum. That would be wrong in law and in equity.

It is an important principle that justice should not only be done but be seen to be done. Although I have no doubt that the two hon. Members who would constitute the new quorum would discharge their duties with absolute integrity and objectivity, nevertheless it would appear that the petitioners were being short-changed. It is wrong to try to tamper with, or to make minor repairs to, the mechanism while the vehicle is still in motion. For that reason, if for no other, the motion should be rejected.

The motion illustrates the problems of piecemeal change. The House has had before it for some years a recommendation of the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure. We have had an opportunity to take note, to digest and to debate it. I regret that that opportunity was missed by the powers that be in suggesting the changes that could be made to accommodate the real shortcomings in the procedure. The shortcomings are before us this evening, but the motion also highlights the misuse and abuse of private Bill procedure by sponsors such as British Rail, which is promoting the Bill under discussion.

It is absurd that a Bill can be brought forward to develop a terminal in central London without any mention being made of the route or path to that destination. The Bill is so constricted and constrained that, should someone dare mention the route to the destination, he might well be called to order and would certainly not have the opportunity to appear before the Committee. To be able to make such a great development by the salami process of slicing off first King's Cross and then pieces through south-east London and Kent to the Channel tunnel terminal is wrong. If nothing more, the procedure and progress on the Bill show the inadequacy and shortcomings, and demonstrate that change is necessary.

Mr. Corbyn: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, before other Bills on rail development are promoted by British Rail, it should be forced to produce a detailed plan of the entire route programme and destinations for trains from the Channel tunnel, so that we may have an idea of the effect on Kent constituencies, the hon. Gentleman's constituency, my constituency and many others between London and the north of England?

Mr. Bowden: I welcome that intervention. It is a rare and happy occasion when the hon. Gentleman and I can agree so wholeheartedly.

It is tragic that 33 days have been spent by the Committee listening to argument—who knows, the Committee may spend another 33 days listening to further argument—and at the end of it the proposal of British Rail for the route may be turned down by the House, or an alternative proposal may run parallel to it. At the end, all the work of the Committee might be rendered redundant and obsolete because the proposal for the development of King's Cross did not fit in with the chosen route.

That shows the utter waste of public and private money in following a procedure which does nothing to help the country at large but does everything to facilitate British Rail in trying to develop, in an inefficient and secretive way, a Channel tunnel rail link to connect the whole of the United Kingdom with continental Europe.

Mr. Corbyn: I promise that this will be the last intervention. Of course, there is a fear that the Bill will be entirely abortive. That is possible. I understand that we are debating only the quorum of the Committee. In that respect, the quorum would then be dealing with a Bill that was about to be aborted. In the meantime, many people would have lost much money on property deals in the area.

Mr. Bowden: I am concerned about the waste of public money. I do not have quite the same concern about the speculation of private money. At the same time, I am concerned about the blight on so many properties, families and communities. The stress and anxiety that the uncertainty has caused are to be deprecated. That demonstrates more than anything else the need to change the private Bill procedure which is being so misused and abused.

I recognise the difficulties that my hon. Friends and other hon. Members on the Committee are experiencing in neglecting by necessity the needs of their constituents and their own parliamentary duties in the House, and I have no wish personally to prolong their agony. However, it is essential that, if we are pursuing the proposal to develop King's Cross, it should be done on an equal footing for all parties. On that basis, I cannot support the motion.

8.39 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): I am opposed to the private Bill procedure, for many of the reasons mentioned by hon. Members from both sides of the House in relation to its general operation. Traditionally, Parliament dealt with private Bills, and public Bills only later came in on a more general and wider basis. We should now have moved on from private Bills, because society has changed so much.

A provision that was right for small traders, the establishment of charters and other provisions seems entirely inappropriate in the modern age. Something that was used by the forces of the petty bourgeois and is now used by the big bourgeois and large corporations, will inevitably be abused. The procedures that were outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) in terms of the report of the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure should be seriously considered

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

and responded to. Measures for the provision of transport such as the one before us should be matters for the public Bill procedure.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Is the hon. Gentleman saying that he believes that matters that fall within private Bill procedure should be dealt with by statutory instrument? If so, will he acknowledge that that would deprive legitimate objecters of the opportunity to put forward issues in Parliament, before a parliamentary Committee, that are of relevance to them in their ordinary daily lives?

Mr. Barnes: An interesting discussion has been taking place. Earlier, hon. Members outlined some of the items contained in the Joint Committee's report that try to handle some of these problems. Although I generally find a great deal in the private Bill procedure obnoxious, I do not deny that there might be specific and limited provisions for which the procedure might be appropriate, if some of the checks and balances suggested in the Committee's report were brought forward.

Mr. Cash: In other words, the hon. Gentleman agrees that the private Bill procedure, with modifications, has his support.

Mr. Barnes: Basically, the major items that have been brought forward as private Bills are an abuse of the House, although they might be in line with the tradition of private Bills that came before 1800. They might have some scope for use if they are carefully checked and controlled. However, our major concern is the abuse of such procedures by strong outside organisations when alternative avenues are available such as the public Bill and planning agreements.

Mr. Gerald Bowden: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, if a railway network is planned which is to cover the whole of the United Kingdom and open up every region of that kingdom to continental Europe, it goes above the normal scope and confines of private Bill procedure and should be dealt with in something wider?

Mr. Barnes: I agree with that. Essentially, the private Bill procedure is increasingly used for matters that it was not developed to handle. The case in which the planning agreements should have been used was briefly mentioned; it involved the two Humber port Bills. The investigation, questioning and public inquiries that they involved should have taken place in the Humber area, not the House.

I take the point made by the hon. Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) that we are not in the business of attempting a minor, piecemeal adjustment to an unfair system. We should be worried about the suggestion to reduce the quorum, because that would allow us to bumble on with the measure, rather than face up to the transformation that is required.

Other proposals could be put in front of us to deal with a crisis that might occur in the Committee, and they would not produce the same piecemeal adjustment that leads to this sort of system going on and on, as it has. For example, if Committee Members come under too much pressure and experience mental fatigue because of the time involved—I agree that they bear a terrible burden—the House could swop the membership of the Committee. I know that that is not entirely desirable and problems will arise from it. However, it happens elsewhere.

I have been on a Select Committee that has been preparing a report that is shortly to be published. I came to the Committee relatively near the end of procedures, when a great deal of work had already been done. I was not involved in any voting because we reached unanimous decisions. I was able, at least towards the end of the Committee, to make a contribution and assist in reaching those unanimous decisions. It is possible, at the halfway stage, for someone else to be drafted in if there is a specific problem. It has been said that hon. Members can read and do not always need counsel to give them detailed information. They can also read the past reports and details of the Committee so that they can make a significant contribution, together with the three other members, to the Committee's final decision.

It would be possible to have a reform in line with the provisions contained in the Committee report that could be seen as an advancement. If there is a massive problem for the Committee to sustain its quorum of three, it could be extended to a Committee of five Members.

I have served on only one such Committee. It lasted for about eight days and dealt with the Birmingham City Council (No. 2) Bill concerning the road race in that district. If a problem arose over the provision we are discussing, some hon. Members here tonight who have revealed that they have never been involved in such procedure could offer to take up the fifth position if we decide that that is a viable alternative.

8.48 pm

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): On the face of it, the proposition to reduce a quorum from three to two is the narrowest of procedural points, and I am sure that I would be brought to order if I sought too stray to far from it. However, tonight's debate has shown beyond doubt that that small procedural matter arises only because of some major principles—a confusion of principles—stemming largely from Ministers.

We would not be in this position if we had thought out clearly the strategy we were adopting on railway policy, particularly with regard to the Channel tunnel rail link. If we had clearly thought out our approach to major planning matters, particularly in the light of the report of the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure, we should not be in this position.

Inevitably, when our principles become confused and our hypotheses muddled, we get into trouble, as we are now. If my right hon. and hon. Friends do not heed the problem we are facing, they should think of the problems that we are likely to face when we come to the further legislation referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton). He spoke of the next major Bill directly relevant to this proposition—that dealing with the high-speed rail link.

If hon. Members on the private Bill Committee are finding themselves in difficulty, imagine the problems that the House will face when we come to a Bill of such immensity and complexity that it will make the King's Cross Railways Bill seem the most modest of propositions. If we do not get this right, how shall we face further proposals of this kind? It is a muddle and the House

should not try to resolve it by passing a motion in an attempt to put a plaster on what I would call a gaping wound.

I come to the fundamental problem about planning. It is preposterous—the absurdity of it has been made clear tonight—that a planning matter of this magnitude should be determined by a Committee of four Members. It is even more absurd to suggest that that number should be reduced on occasions to two. Because it is an absurd proposition, the House should not accept it.

The Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure tackled the proposition head on and concluded that major planning matters of this kind were inappropriate to be dealt with by this method. The House has had that report for some time, and its conclusions commanded general support from the Front Benches. Its proposals were probably torpedoed in Whitehall by the large number of parliamentary draftsmen who have great skills in handling this procedure. I do not think that politically there were any arguments against what was proposed. If we are to deal sensibly with major planning matters of great concern to the British people, we must get the procedures right, and they are not right at present.

Even if we accepted the Select Committee's report on private Bill procedure, it would not necessarily help us with Bills of this kind. It would still be a matter to be determined by the Government whether the King's Cross proposals—or, indeed, a high-speed rail link proposal—should be dealt with by the planning procedures outside the House, by the hybrid Bill procedure in the House or by a special development order. Those are still political decisions, but it is clear that the present procedure is totally inappropriate for a matter of this magnitude.

Hence, our first mistake has been not to face up to the planning matters. We also have it wrong in terms of the railways, because it is fundamentally ridiculous that a small Committee of four Members—reduced to two on certain occasions—should have almost the power of life and death over something that the Government regard as critical—the hub of the ultimate high-speed rail link linking the Channel tunnel and the rest of the United Kingdom.

That is a wrong proposition. It is a matter of public policy, and the Government should have determined at a much earlier stage that it was a matter of public policy, that the Government were involved and that it should have been a hybrid Bill. A hybrid Bill would have allowed us to avoid the sort of problems that we are now facing, for we would have had a larger Committee, the problems of a quorum would have been avoided and there would have been no difficulty over attendance. The Channel Tunnel Bill is evidence of that.

There are disadvantages and advantages in all procedures, but we would not be in the position in which we find ourselves today if the Government had faced up to that responsibility. They will have to face up to it when we come to further legislation, in relation particularly to the high-speed link. So again we have a muddle, and it has produced the problem that, we face.

I had the privilege—if that is the word—of serving on a similar Committee, through it was not quite so long. I was Chairman of the Committee that dealt with the Ginns and Gutteridge Crematorium Bill, and deliberated for 26 days. I learned a lot about the burning of bodies, about smells and many other things, and, while it probably did not contribute much to my political knowledge, it has resulted in my being sympathetic to those who serve on the Committee with which we are now concerned. One appreciates the difficulties that they face.

I also had the privilege of serving on the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure, and, because of that, I reached a different conclusion from that reached by my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton), who selected a quotation from the report emphasising why it was difficult for four Members to stay permanently on a Committee. The conclusion that that Select Committee reached was contrary to the proposition that we are facing today.

Our proposal—I gather that most people are in favour of the conclusions of the report—was not that we should allow the quorum ever to be reduced to two: it was that the Committee should be increased to five and that the quorum should stay at three, which is the quorum that we have now. If we are minded to implement the Select Committee's report, we must not reduce the quorum to two. The proposition was clearly that it should remain at three, but that the size of the Committee be increased to five.

A further important recommendation was that the members of such private Bill Committees should be drawn from a large panel of Members who would, in effect, be volunteers at the beginning of a Session to serve on such Committees. They would volunteer because they felt that they could spare the time or give priority to such Committees or because they enjoyed them. Many hon. Members enjoy private Bill Committee work, and I do not think that there would be a problem in having such a panel. It must be better to have volunteers rather than pressed men.

I am proud to have served on that Select Committee, and its report, in my view, is one of the best documents the House has produced. It added up to a valuable package. It would have allowed the House to avoid many of the problems that we face today. It would have resulted in better decisions and given greater justice to petitioners and others. Therefore, it would be wrong tonight to deal with the small problem that has arisen in this case and ignore the recommendations of the Select Committee. We should implement the report as a whole.

I agree with those who say that it is wrong in the middle of proceedings suddenly to change the rules. It is all very well for my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton—he was out of the Chamber when I expressed my admiration for the service that he has given—to say that the petitioners will not lose. He has not explained why they would not lose by the Committee being reduced from four to two. Is he saying that at no time is the quality of decision-making by four superior to that of two? If so, we should always have had a quorum of two. I cannot understand his argument.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: I am not making the case that a decision made by two is as good as a decision made by four, and in this case the decision will be made by four after an exhaustive examination of all the evidence put before us, including that which has been put before other members of the Committee when one has been out of the room in the proceedings on the Bill hitherto. So unless my hon. Friend is saying that the quorum of a Committee of four should always be four, I do not understand the logic of his argument.

Mr. Moate: I remind my hon. Friend that, although the quorum is three, there is a strict injunction on all Members that they should be in attendance at all times and that the reduction to three should be exercised very sparingly indeed. The Chairman has the power to report to the House—I do not think that the power is exercised any longer—any Member who is absent for quite a short time, so the quorum is very much a fallback.

If the general rule is that four hon. Members should be present, and three on occasions, that rule should apply throughout the proceedings. Otherwise, petitioners who lose their case might feel aggrieved that for much of the proceedings, when they were putting their case, only half the Committee members were present.

The House should not pass the motion. We should follow the recommendations of the Select Committee and not reduce the quorum to two. That was specifically rejected in the report. A Committee of two is an absurdity.

8.59 pm

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): Like the Government, the Opposition do not have any official view on this motion, as it is a House of Commons matter and it is for all hon. Members to make up their minds accordingly. Having served on one or two of the private Bill Committees to which the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton)—who spoke to this proposal in his usual able and amusing way—referred, I have great sympathy for him and his Committee members.

I served on the two Channel tunnel Committees, in 1975 and in 1985, the latter of which spilled over into 1986. They were hybrid Bills. I am talking about longevity rather than procedure. They were long-drawn-out affairs. I do not claim the same affinity with my Whips' office that the hon. Gentleman obviously has with his, but I was rewarded on the last occasion by being put on to the Standing Committee that followed the Second Reading of that Bill. I have some experience of long-running Committees and the disruption that they cause to the daily lives of hon. Members. For that reason, I shall be voting for the motion.

The Committee is unanimous in its view; that fact should make some impression on hon. Members. The fact that, if we pass this motion, we will be accepting a quorum of two should not concern us too much. If the Committee consists of only four hon. Members, and three hon. Members form a quorum, as the hon. Member for Tatton rightly said in his intervention in the speech of the hon. Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate), it is not that two people are taking the decision—the whole Committee is taking the decision—but that some of the evidence will be heard by a smaller number than makes up the Committee. That is not unusual. I point out to the hon. Member for Faversham and some of my hon. Friends that, if the quorum for debates on the Floor of the House was 75 per cent. of hon. Members, the House would be a much quieter place.

Every hon. Member who has participated in the debate agrees on the inappropriate nature of our proceedings for schemes of that magnitude. The hybrid Bill on the Channel tunnel was not an effective way of agreeing, debating or discussing what could be said to be the major civil engineering project of this century. For a Committee of that size to be responsible for a decision of that magnitude is not a sensible way for the House to proceed.

As all hon. Members know, one of the problems with the railways is that, traditionally, any alteration to a railwaay building or to the existing railway system must be done in this laborious way. That is something that we should examine. For the Channel tunnel, the King's Cross terminal and the link from the Channel tunnel that will join it with King's Cross—indeed, the railway links with the rest of the country—to be decided in that way is nonsense to say the least and brings the proceedings of the House into disrepute.

Mr. Corbyn: I accept and understand my hon. Friend's point about major railway developments, but does he accept that the private Bill procedure protects some smaller railway developments or railways that might have been closed?

Mr. Snape: I cannot say that my memory goes back that far. I am sure that, in the last century, there were good reasons for the procedures that we still have today, but they have been somewhat outworn by the passage of time.

Another point that most hon. Members who have spoken have mentioned, and one with which I agree, is that normal planning procedures are circumvented by our procedures in the House. Again, that is an understandable matter of concern for those who live in and around the King's Cross area, such as the constituents of the hon. Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) and others who participate regularly in debates such as this. People cannot generally understand how schemes of this magnitude can be debated and decided in this place by a handful of hon. Members using archaic procedures left over from the last century.

I hope that those in the Government responsible for these matters have listened to the debate, that those who have not listened will read the report of the proceedings, and that the House of Commons will do something to reform those procedures which bring all of us into disrepute. However, I repeat that I was impressed by the case made by the hon. Member for Tatton and the other distinguished members of the Committee, and for that reason, if it becomes necessary, I shall be joining them in the Division Lobby tonight.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 107, Noes 24.

Division No. 71] **[9.08 pm**

AYES

Allason, Rupert	Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Arbuthnot, James	Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Ashby, David	Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Atkinson, David	Cormack, Patrick
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*	Davies, Q. *(Staml'd & Spald'g)*
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*	Dewar, Donald
Bevan, David Gilroy	Dickens, Geoffrey
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter	Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Boscawen, Hon Robert	Durant, Tony
Boswell, Tim	Fearn, Ronald
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia	Fookes, Dame Janet
Brandon-Bravo, Martin	Forman, Nigel
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl'Y's)*	Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*	Foster, Derek
Buck, Sir Antony	Freeman, Roger
Burns, Simon	George, Bruce
Canavan, Dennis	Goodhart, Sir Philip
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*	Graham, Thomas
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*	Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Carrington, Matthew	Gregory, Conal
Cash, William	Grist, Ian
Chapman, Sydney	Grylls, Michael
Chope, Christopher	Hanley, Jeremy

Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hinchliffe, David
Home Robertson, John
Hordern, Sir Peter
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Janman, Tim
Kennedy, Charles
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Lang, Ian
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Mans, Keith
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mitchell, Sir David
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Portillo, Michael
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Sackville, Hon Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Sims, Roger
Snape, Peter
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Stevens, Lewis
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thurnham, Peter
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Wood, Timothy
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. George Galloway and
Mr. Neil Hamilton.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Cartwright, John
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Flannery, Martin
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hayes, Jerry
Haynes, Frank
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moate, Roger
Nellist, Dave
Pike, Peter L.
Rowe, Andrew
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Vaz, Keith

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Harry Barnes and
Mr. Jeremy Corbyn.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Ordered,

That, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order 121 (Quorum of committee on opposed bill), leave be given for the Committee on the King's Cross Railways Bill to proceed with a quorum of two.

European Community (Right of Residence)

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Before I call the Minister, I must tell the House that Mr. Speaker has not selected the amendment, but Members may raise points on the amendment during the debate.

9.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 7706/89 and the Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Home Office on 8th January 1990 relating to rights of residence; and supports the objective of facilitating the free movement of European Community nationals.

This debate is an opportunity for the House to note the progress of the right of residence directives and their likely impact on the United Kingdom should they be adopted.

For some 10 years, the proposal that Community nationals should enjoy a general right of residence in other member states has been under discussion in Europe. Finally, recognising that deadlock had long been reached, the European Commission, in May last year, withdrew its earlier proposal and later submitted three new draft directives in its place. It is these new draft directives that are under discussion tonight.

Hon. Members may have with them tonight Commission document 4234/90, which was deposited in the House on 30 January. It may be helpful if I give a brief explanation of what it contains. It incorporates some of the amendments proposed by the European Parliament on 13 December. It does not include the latest text of the proposals upon which political agreement was reached at the last Internal Market Council and I will mention this again a little later. It is a purely formal document issued by the Commission in response to the first opinion of the European Parliament on the original text of the proposals. However, the supplementary explanatory memorandum, which we submitted to the House on 8 January, is an accurate reflection of the latest text of the proposals.

These new measures are designed to provide a right of residence throughout the Community for categories of Community national who do not already have such a right under the free-movement provisions of the EC treaty. Their purpose is to promote the free movement of EC nationals within the Community—a principle to which the Government have long been committed. We have therefore sought to respond throughout the discussions in Europe in the most positive manner possible.

Since July, rapid progress—in the light of the earlier discussions unexpectedly rapid progress—has been made towards agreement among member states. There have been intensive discussions and at the last Internal Market Council, on 21 December, the presidency noted that politicall agreement on the substance of the directives had been achieved.

The iimportant matter of treaty base, however, remains unsettled. and adoption of the directives cannot take place until the European Assembly's further opinion has been made available and considered by the Council. It may therefore be that formal adoption of these proposals will not be possible at the next meeting of the IMC, on 22 February. If this is the case, the next opportunity for their adoption will arise at the IMC scheduled for 3 April.

[Mr. Peter Lloyd]

I would like to stress at this point that the Government are extremely conscious of the importance of the arrangements which enable Parliament to play a full and effective part in the scrutiny of Community legislation. However, we believed that the situation which arose suddenly in December, when there seemed a strong possibility of agreement to the directives at the IMC meeting, met the exceptional criteria laid down for adoption before a debate. In the event, however, the contingency which we foresaw did not materialise, and I am very glad indeed that the House has this opportunity to consider the draft directives before the question of adoption arises.

There are, as I have said, three draft directives to be considered. They are aimed at students, pensioners, and other non-economically active persons respectively. It may be helpful to the House if I outline in brief the basic provisions of each.

First, the directive on students will apply to any EC national enrolled on a vocational or professional training course at a recognised educational establishment. The spouse and dependent children of the EC national will also benefit, but right of residence will be conditional on possession of sufficient resources to prevent the beneficiaries becoming a financial burden on the host member state. Sickness insurance will also be required where relevant—for example, in countries which operate a medical insurance system rather than a health service as in the United Kingdom.

Secondly, EC nationals who have been employed or self-employed will benefit from the directive on pensioners. They must be in receipt of an invalidity or early retirement pension, or old age benefits, or a pension in respect of an industrial accident or disease. Along with their spouse and dependent relatives, such EC nationals will be accorded a right of residence provided there are sufficient resources to prevent them from becoming a financial burden on the host member state. Sickness insurance will also be required where relevant.

Thirdly, any other EC national will benefit from the Directive on other non-economically active people provided there are sufficient resources to ensure they, and members of their family admitted with them, will not become a financial burden on the host member state. Again, there is a requirement for sickness insurance, if necessary.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Has any attempt been made to quantify the sort of resources that would be needed, concerning the definition of "dependent relatives", and the length and breadth of that expression?

Mr. Lloyd: The length and breadth of the expression is detailed in the draft directives, and is there to be seen. The mimimum amount of resources will be social security payments, whichever form they take, in the relevant country. Resources must be at least at that level.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Am I right in inferring that those people from Hong Kong to whom the Government are to give the right of abode—I totally support the Government in that—will also benefit from these directives?

Mr. Lloyd: Yes—like any other British national, they will be able to take advantage of the directives, under the migratory workers provisions of the treaty, to live in any part of the Community as long as they have the resources to do so.

Although there are three separate directives, there are common threads running through them all, not least the requirement that beneficiaries of each directive should not become a financial burden on the host member state. Member states have agreed that, if the right of residence is to be available on such a wide scale, there must be some protection for their social assistance systems.

Consequently, the directives have been drafted in such a way as to prevent the possibility of EC nationals going from one state to another from becoming a charge on social security funds in each, or even moving solely to maximise their entitlement to social security assistance payments.

In calculating the adequacy of the resources available to applicants, account will be taken of the personal circumstances of those involved. That will avoid the situation of a pensioner in receipt of a small pension, but with substantial personal resources, failing to qualify. Adequate resources are deemed to be resources higher than the level at which social assistance is paid within the relevant member state, as I just told my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash). It is the Government's view that the provisions of the directives contain adequate safeguards to ensure that their implementation would not result in any drain on our social security system.

Each directive also makes provision for family members. In the case of students it will be limited to the spouse and dependant. Pensioners and "others" will be able to have with them their spouse and any dependent relative in the ascending and descending line. Specific provision is also made in each directive to enable the spouse and dependent children of the main beneficiary to work in the host member state. Similar provisions have been in place for a number of years in the case of migrant workers, so for most people the provisions do not add to what is already available.

The provisions about resources being sufficient to prevent claims for social security benefits apply to those dependants in the same way as to the applicant.

Each directive contains an important provision ensuring that the right of residence will exist only so long as the persons concerned continue to meet the criteria that I have just outlined.

In common with other measures relating to free movement, derogation from the provisions of the directives will be possible only on grounds of public policy, public security or public health. These are the basic provisions of the directives as they now stand. Member states have reached agreement thus far, but such an achievement is the result of considerable effort.

Amendments to the original proposals have had to be made. For example, a scheme to reimburse the host member state for social security claims made by students has been replaced with the requirement to show adequate resources. Similarly, on pensioners it was agreed that simply having a pension was insufficient.

In order properly to assess the resources of pensioners and "others" it has been agreed that the personal circumstances of the applicant, and where appropriate those admitted with him, will be taken into account; and it has been agreed that the necessary amendment will be

made. Another amendment has been agreed in recognition of the concerns of member states about the definition of family members. Initially, those family members who were to benefit from the pensioners and "others" directives were defined by refereace to article 10 of regulation 1612/68 EEC.

Several member states noted the outstanding proposals to amend that particular provision in such a way as to widen considerably the definition of family members. Such a degree of relaxation was regarded as an unwelcome development by member states, at least in respect of the right of residence directives, and as a result the directives will now specify precisely to which family members they apply.

We understand that a statement for the Council minutes will be included to the effect that the given definition of family members may be reviewed in the light of any changes to article 10 of the regulation.

It is the Government's view that, if the treaty base for all three directives is changed to article 235—I will mention this again a little later—they represent proposals which should be acceptable to the United Kingdom. Improvements have been made to the original texts, and we believe that it is in the United Kingdom's interests to signal agreement to the proposals.

Acceptance of the proposals will facilitate the free movement of EC nationals within the Community. Naturally, that will work to the benefit of British citizens who will, provided they can meet the requirements of the directives, be free to live elsewhere in the Community should they choose to do so.

We are satisfied that the directives are framed, as far as possible, in such a way as to prevent abuse, and we believe that the overall effect on the United Kingdom and its citizens will be beneficial. The Government do not consider that the number of people who might take advantage of the directive, if made, will significantly increase the numbers of persons entering the United Kingdom.

More people will be able to come here to spend their retirement years, to study or simply to live in the United Kingdom. Equally, British citizens will have the freedom to choose another country of residence if they so wish. British students will be able to move easily to study in another member state. Residence cards will be issued to those exercising rights under the provisions of the directives in much the same way as they are already issued to EC nationals exercising rights of free movement under the aspects of the treaty covering migrant workers.

No new bureaucracy need be created, and in administrative terms the directives will require a minimum of change to our current measures for dealing with EC nationals. Consequently, it is the Government's view that implementation of the proposals would create no significant costs to this country.

One important feature of our consideration of the directives has been the need for the Government to examine the question of Community competence, in particular as it relates to EC nationals who are not workers or otherwise economically active.

We have looked carefully at the development of Community law and we have concluded that the free movement of all Community nationals, whether they are economically active or not, is an objective of the treaty. The right of residence directives therefore fall within the competence of the Community.

Earlier, I mentioned that the important issue of the legal base of the directives, which governs the majority which must be obtained for adoption, remains unsettled. The original Commission proposals were to base the directives on article 7 for students—qualified majority voting; articles 48 and 54 for pensioners—qualified majority voting; and article 100 for "others"—unanimous voting.

Those treaty bases are unacceptable. The United Kingdom has made it clear throughout that we consider that article 235, which requires unanimous voting, is the only appropriate legal base for all three directives, and that view is shared by several other member states. At the last Internal Market Council in December, the Commission undertook to give further consideration to the issue of legal base.

We fully expect, in the light of the discussions to date, that any revised proposal which the Commission may make will reflect the concerns expressed by us and the other member states.

The Government consider that acceptance of the right of residence directives, provided that the legal bases are changed, is the proper course of action. Measures of this kind, which reduce unnecessary obstacles to the freedom of EC nationals to choose where they will live in the Community, is a good example of what the Single European Act means when it speaks of the establishment of an area without internal frontiers in accordance with the treaty. They have no effect on our right and determination to combat the evils of terrorism, drug trafficking and international crime, or to control immigration from third countries.

I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will agree that we in the United Kingdom have nothing to fear from these proposals but much to gain. We have been presented with an opportunity to further the principle of free movement in terms which the Government consider acceptable to the United Kingdom. I therefore commend the proposals to the House.

9.32 pm

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): The directives once again point up the flaws and unfairness of the United Kingdom's immigration rules. Unless the European Community's proposals, welcome though they are, are accompanied by corresponding changes in our rules, they will place some British citizens at a disadvantage compared with EC nationals. British citizens will have less right to family unity, which is at the heart of these rules, than other EC citizens coming to this country.

Europe could give us the opportunity to treat our citizens equally and fairly, which simply is not happening at present. A paragraph of the declaration signed last December by Immigration Ministers says:

> "There is a growing aspiration, particularly on our continent, that people should be able to move about freely beyond State frontiers: we believe that EC Member States should be all the more diligent in reinforcing their co-operation in that it provides an incentive for others, in other parts of Europe and the world at large, to develop this freedom too."

Those brave words were uttered when western and eastern Europe were beginning to change. As I shall show, some British citizens—potentially, all of us—are not as free as that grand declaration envisages. With freedom of movement, and with the move to harmonisation of the rules of the EC, we should take the opportunity to remove

[Mr. Alistair Darling]

some of the restrictive rules that cause hardship and, in some cases, are quite blatantly discriminatory against British citizens. If we are to create a people's Europe, we need to go far further than the proposals allow.

We have heard a great deal recently about Hong Kong; the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) has already intervened on the subject. This evening, we have the chance to remind ourselves about the rights and limitations of rights that are placed on people living in this country.

There are three proposals before us. The first relates to students. At present, a male student can be joined by his wife, but a female student cannot be joined by her husband as of right. When I raised that question with the Minister's predecessor, who is now the Patronage Secretary, he replied in a written answer that he did not propose to change that rule and that there were sound reasons for not doing so. It is good that only six months later, the Government have become more accommodating. Now, not only can students be joined by their spouses, but, according to the directive, they can also be joined by their families, should they so wish.

The second proposal is more far-reaching. Retired people from the European Community can come to this country and be joined by their families, as can people of independent means who have come to this country to stay for either a short or a long time. No matter how welcome that new proposal may be and no matter what its justification, it brings into sharp focus the difficulties that are faced by people in this country who want to enjoy the same rights. The proposal of family unity points up the disadvantages that British European Community nationals face and will continue to face.

The concept of family unity should be the cornerstone of our policies in this aspect of immigration law. The Minister has been at pains to point out that, even with the new rights, the spouses of people coming to this country and their families will not be a burden on people living in this country. I can see why he made that point, but as I listened, it occurred to me that he was at pains to stress that they would never become a burden on people in this country. What machinery is he proposing is to ensure a continuous assessment of people so that they do not reach a point where they might want to rely on resources from this country?

If family unity is the principle on which the rules are based, that unity must be just as important for rich people as for poor. There may come a time when someone living in this country will, for one reason or another, want to take advantage of some benefit. That seems to argue for examining the rationalising of benefits and public support provisions throughout Europe. I appreciate that that is not the Minister's responsibility, but we should consider that point.

I come to the heart of my criticism of the proposals. I do not oppose them on their merits, but I believe that they point up the difficulties for many in this country. At present, a Frenchman can marry a woman from Pakistan, for example, and can enter the United Kingdom if he is a worker within the meaning of European legislation. He could also be joined by his children under 21 and by his parents because they all come within the European Community's definition of "family".

A British citizen living in England, for example, does not have that automatic right. To marry a non-European Community national, he has first to satisfy the primary purpose rule—rule 50—in the immigration rules. He has to prove that the primary purpose of the marriage is not for his spouse to gain admission to this country. There are other tests that have to be passed. If he wishes his family to join him, there are even greater and more formidable hurdles. They have to satisfy the immigration authorities that they will have adequate accommodation and that they will not be a burden or otherwise come to rely on public funds.

Furthermore, some British citizens have to satisfy the authorities that they are related to their children. Last summer, there was a great deal of controversy about the Government's proposals to impose DNA testing on people who wanted to prove that they were related to their children. Under these rules, the Frenchman to whom I referred does not have to bother with any of that. It is sufficient for him to arrive at Dover or at Heathrow and to say, "This is my wife, these are my children and these are my mother and father. I'm coming in here."

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicestershire, East): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not just a question of the immigration rules, which, as he has rightly pointed out, are discriminatory, but of the use of delays in the operations of the Home Office? Such delays have now become an accepted part of the way in which immigration is conducted in this country. Administrative delays are used as a means of immigration control. It is not just a question of satisfying the tests that my hon. Friend has outlined, but of having to wait in Bombay, New Delhi or Islamabad for many months before an interview is granted and of then having to wait while the information is passed from the Foreign Office to the Home Office. There are then delays at Lunar house, which are still quite prevalent. Does my hon. Friend agree that those delays, which are not part of the rules, exist and cause much hardship and anxiety?

Mr. Darling: I am glad that my hon. Friend raises that point. I know that he has a great deal of experience in these matters. Both the Foreign Office and the Home Office use the weapon of delay as an instrument of control. I am dealing with the case of a constituent who hopes to be joined by his wife. A great deal of delay arose because we had to discover whether the Home Office or the Foreign Office should answer our correspondence, and indeed, whether a Minister or something called the correspondence unit should answer my letters. The delays are inordinate. No one will tell me what they are trying to find out.

The declaration to which I referred at the beginning of my speech talks about free movement and a free people's Europe. Some British citizens living in this country do not enjoy the freedom that will be conferred on European nationals under the regulations. It is wrong that the Frenchman to whom I referred is placed at a great advantage compared with an English, Scots or Welshman who wants to do exactly the same thing as the Frenchman. It is ironic that an EEC national of another country should have more rights than a Briton. The Government will have to address that problem.

The same problem arises with children. Under the EEC regulations, young people under the age of 21 are counted as children. Under the United Kingdom immigration

rules, a child is counted as a child only if it is under the age of 18. I suspect that all hon. Members consider that if they have children they will always be the parents of those children. Nothing magical happens at 18 or 21 to stop them being their children. Under the EEC regulations, the definition of family does not have a cut-off point.

The regulations are welcome, but they point up the difficulties faced by immigrants. The Government are not prepared to tackle those problems. The Minister should tell us whether, in the people's Europe that we are now entering, he is prepared to consider the plight of many people resident in this country who find it increasingly difficult to be joined by their families—to whom they are closely attached—or to marry the person of their choice. I suspect that the Minister will reply in the negative.

It is ironic that the European convention on human rights provides that everyone of marriageable age should be free to marry. In theory, we are all free to marry, but not if we choose to marry someone, for example, from the Indian sub-continent. Although in theory the primary purpose rule applies to everyone, in practice it is applied only to spouses from certain parts of the world.

If everyone in the House is in favour of family unity, we should give it some substance and not simply use the words as a slogan to collect votes at election time. I fear that many hon. Members, particularly Conservative Members, say one thing to their constituents and vote the other way when given the opportunity.

Europe gives us an opportunity to harmonise rules. We are not talking about primary immigration. We are discussing the need to treat our citizens equally. If the regulations are put into effect, the extraordinary result will be that people living in continental Europe will have greater rights to live with their wife, mother, father or children than people who live in Britain. People in Britain will wonder how that can be the case.

It will be open to a British citizen to go to Paris or Germany and become a worker in the sense of the EEC regulations and then come back to Britain to get round the British regulations. We should avoid that ridiculous position.

I wish to deal with three further points. I understand that the regulations are at a preliminary stage and that the Government will come back with definite proposals. As I understood it, the Minister welcomed this opportunity of a preliminary debate on the substance of the directives. No matter: I shall make the points anyway, because they have some substance——

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I commended the draft directives to the House and said that, although the Government were determined to see that the legal base was changed, we believe that the political agreement that has already been reached is sensible and satisfactory and we hope that the House will agree with us on that.

Mr. Darling: I obviously misunderstood the Minister. However, the point that I am about to make still stands because the issues will arise time and again.

First, I refer to harmonisation——

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way on this point, about which we should be absolutely clear. It is my understanding that there will not be an opportunity to discuss the regulations again, providing that the understanding to which the Minister referred materialises and that the regulations obtain a two-thirds majority at the Council of Ministers, possibly at the end of next month. If my hon. Friend thinks that there may be an opportunity to exercise other matters at large, that is one thing, but I believe that there will be an opportunity in respect of these regulations also.

Mr. Darling: I fear that my hon. Friend is absolutely right. I shall now preface my three points with the obvious remark that these issues arise now and will arise again and again and again, because they do not directly fall within the scope of the directives. My hon. Friend has made a good point about the directives, because the discussions are between Ministers, and the House will not get an opportunity to discuss them further, despite the fact that the constituents of many hon. Members will be concerned, not only with the directives and the subject matter that they cover, but with the matters that they could have covered but do not.

At long last, I reach the three other points that I have wanted to mention and on which I shall be grateful for the Minister's comments. First, what is happening about the Schengen agreement? No debate on immigration rules would be complete without a reference to it. We are not a party to the treaty, which is between the Benelux countries, France and West Germany, but we send observers. Completely against the odds, the Schengen agreement was not signed last December because of objections mainly from European non-governmental organisations that were concerned about the ramshackle bureaucracy that it would create, together with the potential for discriminatory practices in the control of movement.

I should be grateful if the Minister could let us know the Government's view on the current state of the Schengen agreement, because it has some bearing on this country. There is no doubt that it is the blueprint for the regime that will prevail after 1992 and it is referred to when the Trevi group of Ministers meet from time to time.

My second point is entirely connnected with the directives. Undoubtedly, as we move towards more harmonisation and common rules throughout the EEC, we shall need safeguards and an appeals system. The Minister has talked about the test of whether someone will become a burden on the public purse. There are always two or three interpretations of individual circumstances. The need for an appeals system in this matter, just as with every other immigration rule, is growing greater by the day. As the decisions of immigration officers often cannot be questioned and hon. Members' rights to intervene have been severely curtailed, the quality of the decision-making is deteriorating. That is not in the interests of any view of justice or of the good workings of Europe. The time for an independent watchdog to supervise such matters is long overdue, but I dare say that we shall return to that matter on many occasions.

Thirdly, our system for dealing with emergency applications to enter this country leaves much to be desired. The directives are about the right of families to come to this country. I need hardly remind the Minister that, only two weeks ago, we had the appalling spectacle of a family trying to come to their father's or their uncle's funeral in this country and being cross-examined by an immigration officer about the number of water buffalo that one of their relatives had owned when he lived in Pakistan.

That sort of thing is thoroughly distasteful, and we really ought to avoid it. What we need is an efficient and speedy system of resolving these problems.

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): The hon. Gentleman talks about an efficient and speedy system. Surely the system will be far more efficient and speedy if it is simply a matter of rules laid down by the House being interpreted honestly and with integrity—as they are—by the professionals concerned, rather than those professionals having to put up with the interference of Members of Parliament, who are concerned not so much with whether the rules are being properly applied as, for obvious reasons, with getting votes in their constituencies.

Mr. Darling: That is a fatuous point. I am aware of the hon. Member's views on these matters, but it would not be particularly useful to go into them. Most hon. Members will know that, with the best will in the world, officials interpreting any rules, whether about immigration or any other matter, make mistakes. It seems to me that there is a great deal of merit in having an appeal system. My experience is that, if one knows that one's decision may be questioned or queried, it tends to be of a higher quality than it is if one knows that it will never be looked at again.

Lastly, I should like the Minister to talk about what is happening generally about the imposition of a common visa regime in respect of third countries. Quite clearly, that has a major bearing on the way in which these directives will work. It seems to me that, as Europe grows larger, in the political sense—perhaps by the day—there will be more movement. It will be a Europe in which people move across the old borders. There will be increasing demands from those who wish to marry or to form relationships with people outside Europe, and those demands will have to be considered and accommodated.

I hope that we shall be able to avoid having a web of rules. I hope that we shall be able to avoid an extension of bureacracy—an extension which I fear we could get. If, at some future time, the Government come forward with proposals to remove the obvious difficulties that we have created by conferring rights on EEC nationals while ignoring the plight of a large number of our own citizens, many people in this country will be profoundly grateful. At long last they will begin to think that all British citizens are treated equally, rather than that some getting treatment at the expense of others.

9.52 pm

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) has done the House a service by drawing attention, in the main part of his speech, to the fact that the document highlights a new dimension of inconsistency between immigration rules under British law and immigration rules under EC law. As the hon. Gentleman said, there is no doubt whatever that much greater rights are now being given to EC nationals than are available to our own citizens. That matter should be the subject of a proper, and perhaps detailed, debate in the House.

Before turning to the kernel of that argument, let me begin, as so often on these nocturnal occasions, with a ritual protest about the inadequate way in which the House continues to scrutinise EC legislation. Rarely have we seen a more shameful example of our weak powers and unsatisfactory procedures in that regard. It is a matter of record, in *Hansard* recently, that during the past 12 months the European Commission sent to the House 765 directives or documents, consisting of well over 10,000 pages. A great many of them have become, or are in the process of becoming, law applicable to our subjects. Those documents, if they are scrutinised at all before being rubber-stamped, are scrutinised in late-night debates lasting only one and a half hours. They come to us in indigestible lumps. The situation is totally unsatisfactory, and this directive is a classic example of the need for better scrutiny.

Mr. Cormack: Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be a very good idea if, once every two weeks, we were to devote a day to these matters? Does he agree that that would have the added advantage of helping the Government in their legislative desires and ambitions?

Mr. Aitken: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. I would be in favour of the extra day and of curbing some of the legislative excesses. I have a suspicion, perhaps an unworthy one, that tonight in particular my hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench have indulged in skilful stage management by putting on the debate as late as possible, when the House is as empty as possible, with the Minister making as technical a speech as possible, thereby luring us all into such a comatose state that we do not notice what is happening.

A radical change is being instituted in our immigration laws. We are right to draw attention to it. Let us begin by reminding ourselves of the status quo on immigration law. This is a highly populated island. Successive Governments for over a quarter of a century have exercised a policy of strict and, on the whole, fair immigration control. The basis of that control is a mixture of laws and immigration rules, which are carefully worded, which have been lengthily debated and which on the whole are precise.

The EC directive drives not merely a coach and horses through our immigration laws but, in effect, a whole succession of European juggernauts, which will completely change much of the basis of our immigration laws. For example, the directive extends the right of residence in Britain not merely to all 280 million EC nationals but to their families and relatives, many of whom will not even have to be EC nationals themselves. It may not add up to the River Tiber——

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I am sorry to interrupt the flow of my hon. Friend's argument, but he seems to be developing the line that the directive is making a huge change. It is not. The big change came with the signing of the treaty, which enabled those who are economically active to move freely about the Community. The directive will add a few much smaller groups. It defines them and makes it possible for them to move under the treaty. It is not the vast change that my hon. Friend suggests.

Mr. Aitken: I was not born yesterday. I have read the document. Of course it is true that hitherto workers have had the right to move freely around the Community, but this is a big extension and not a trivial add-on, as the Minister suggests. I shall come to the precise definitions, woolly and vague as they are. They include not merely pensioners but a category of non-economically active persons and, most interestingly, a massive extension of the dependant category. We shall consider that closely.

I do not wish to over-dramatise the position. Before the Minister interrupted me, I was about to say that I do not think that the changes in the immigration rules will amount to the Tiber foaming with much blood, but it will be a case of the immigration headquarters at Croydon

bulging at the seams with new applications. We should recognise that there will be a significant and substantial extension.

One asks the question: have the British people been consulted about the changes? Can even the Minister understand the implications of the changes that he is pushing through? The reason I ask that follows the Minister's intervention. I am not sure that he can have satisfactorily read the directive; certainly I shall be fascinated if he can satisfactorily explain the definitions of families who will be able to come in.

I shall read to the House two or three lines from the Government's explanatory memorandum. The paragraph headed "Policy implications" deals with the rights of dependants of EC nationals to exercise their right of residence in this country. It says:

"The new wording specifies that the family members who may benefit from the provisions of the Right of Residence Directives are those currently covered by Regulation 1612/68."

That is the change to which the Minister referred as not very great. The paragraph continues:

"It is, however, proposed to include in the Council minutes a statement as to the possibility of a review of the given definition of members of family in the light of the outcome of proceedings on the proposal for a Regulation amending Article 10 of Regulation 1612/68."

What does all that Euro-jargon mean? It means that no one has a clue what the definition of dependant, families or relatives of EC nationals who will have the right of residence in this country will be. If ever there was a foggy, inadequate, vague definition of dependant, this is it. The Government's explanatory memorandum, which is a polite title for the verbiage that I have just read, shows how extraordinarily vague the category of dependant will be.

As the category of dependant cannot be satisfactorily defined, will the Minister give a definition of the phrase "non-economically active persons"? We are giving right of residence in this country to pensioners and other non-economically active persons. I am anxious about that phrase, because I suspect that it will mean the unemployed, the unemployable, the underclass and the "don't want to work" class.

I say this with some feeling, because I represent a constituency that was much troubled by what was known as the "dole-on-sea" phenomenon a year or two ago. As a result of boarding house keepers placing advertisements in the poorer districts because they could not fill their rooms, they were able to recruit large numbers of people who could not find work or, as we more often thought, people who did not want to work, to the south coast by a sort of magnet approach. All sorts of social problems flowed from that migration. I do not like the notion that we shall have a dole-on-sea syndrome with people from, not just the north of England, but the whole of Europe being attracted into a district. That is wrong and we need a much more precise definition than anything given in the explanatory memorandum.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): Will my hon. Friend consider the fact that, in the light of the greenhouse effect that some people are forecasting, the legislation could have the opposite intention?

Mr. Aitken: I presume that my hon. Friend means that my constituency is likely to become the riveria of Europe. That would no doubt be agreeable but, once again, the immigration consequence of the document needs to be considered.

Hong Kong has been referred to tonight. In this House, certainly on the Government Benches, we are contemplating a battle royal on the subject of Hong Kong. The heavy artillery of the Foreign Secretary and the big guns of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) will shortly be locked in combat. We shall hear a great deal about the flow of Hong Kong immigration and whether we should give 50,000 passports.

If we look closely at the document and consider its implications because of the new rights given to EC nationals, residents and their families, we see that there is a huge, not just loophole, but bolthole, in the EC rules for Hong Kong residents and many others. The House may not be aware, but the easiest place in the European Community to get a passport today is Portugal. All one has to do is buy a modest residence, keep it for three years —one does not have to live there—and having done so, one can get a Portuguese passport and thus become an EC citizen and resident.

Therefore, any Hong Kong nationals who are denied passports and entry into Britain simply have to club together, so that somebody buys a small villa in Portugal at a low cost. Within three years, under these extremely vague rules, they can bring in their entire family, dependants, and presumably many other relatives, without any of the checks and balances that exist under our immigration rules. If the British public want this, and it is intended by Parliament, so be it. However, such immigration by stealth, round the back door, through those EC methods, is not what this Parliament has yet accepted as right.

Sir Philip Goodhart (Beckenham): Will my hon. Friend consider that a Hong Kong resident would not have to go to Portugal to buy a villa, but would be able to go to Macau, just across the water from Hong Kong? All Macau residents will be able to move to Portugal at any time they wish.

Mr. Cormack: When my hon. Friend answers the point raised by our hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart), will he consider that residents from Hong Kong, from wherever they come, are perhaps more likely to enjoy living in the climate of the south of France, than Bolton or Bootle? Therefore, the argument can be turned to good effect by those of us who feel that the Hong Kong people may come here, but many of them may choose to live not in Great Britain but in other parts of the Community.

Mr. Aitken: The point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) is a case of special pleading and seems to be a question of hope over experience, because all evidence suggests that this country is still a mecca for people from all over the world. they come for language and many other reasons, and the flow of Hong Kong nationals within the Community, from wherever they come, is more likely to be to here than from here to other outlying parts.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) raises a significant point. It is correct—I omitted it—that the loophole is even wider than that which I illustrated when I spoke of people buying Portuguese villas. Hong Kong nationals can easily go to Macau, get

[Mr. Aitken]

European residence by that route, and then, as EC nationals, they can, with the extensive rights and privileges granted to them, have full right of residence in this country.

I am simply arguing that, instead of turning up at a late hour and nodding these big changes through, we should be aware that they have profound implications, which deserve the full parliamentary attention that was originally requested by the Select Committee.

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): I am listening with care to the hon. Gentleman's xenophobic ramblings. Given the weather in this country, the relatively low social security benefits and the general decline in the quality of life that has accompanied 10 years of Tory misrule, is he really saying that people from the four corners of the world are panting to come to Ramsgate?

Mr. Aitken: The hon. Lady's eloquence on behalf of Ramsgate means that, if she were to lose her seat, there might be a job for her as the tourist promotion officer there. At the end of the day, these significant changes in the rules are valuable to European nationals. They are not available yet to British citizens. I suspect that the hon. Lady handles as many immigration cases as any hon. Member. She must recognise, as the whole House should —as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central recognises —that whether one is for looser or tighter immigration, there is something intrinsically wrong with being offered, on the one hand, a set of British immigration rules that say one thing, and now suddenly, in a midnight debate in the House—*[Interruption.]* It is not quite midnight, although it feels like it; it has been a long day. On the other hand, we now have a different set of immigration rules offered to us by Europe.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the House should debate such matters in a better way. Would the people who are economically inactive, of whom he spoke, who might come to Ramsgate or wherever, automatically qualify for British social security benefits, pensions and so on by coming here?

Mr. Aitken: No. I gather that the Government assure us that, by a mechanism not yet devised—when it is devised it will almost certainly not be large enough to operate, or be quick enough to be operated, in a satisfactory way—somehow there will be no financial loss to Britain because those social security benefits will be transferable across frontiers.

I am not arguing on an economic basis, but pointing out that we are now getting, as a result of the directive, two different sets of immigration rules and two standards. With such double standards, whether one favours one or the other, it is unacceptable that it should happen in this way, in a late-night debate, via a European directive.

The Government, whose relations with the Select Committee on European Legislation are normally good, have not behaved courteously or correctly in this episode, because the Select Committee demanded a debate on the subject, recognising that it was of considerable political importance, but has been denied one. We are now debating it, in effect, after the horse has bolted. The Government seem to have made every decision and made every concession except one—that is, whether unanimity is required or whether it can be done by majority voting. Other hon. Members who serve on the Select Committee on European Legislation may develop that theme, because the Government have not behaved in a constitutionally correct way towards the Committee. The House should recognise that the changes in the immigration rules are being carried out in a wrong parliamentary way.

10.11 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The hon. Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) finished on a note that I wish to take up. There are two themes to tonight's debate—the substance of the matter and the merits that have already exercised the minds of my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) and the hon. Member for Thanet, South. However, the underlying theme is that of the constitution and parliamentary procedure, and it is to the latter that I wish to direct the attention of the House. While I agree with the hon. Member for Thanet, South in his reference to the relationship between the Government and the Select Committee—which is not good on that matter, although I hasten to add that there is a good understanding on most matters—the damage is not to the Committee but to the House and to parliamentary procedure.

The issues before us are of considerable constitutional significance because they show that we do not deal properly with advising the House on what is afoot in the European Community in respect of institutions and developments. The Committee that I have the honour to chair cannot do that, because the House has not provided it with adequate terms of reference, a matter that we hope will soon be addressed by the Government. The current arrangements could work better. They have broken down in spirit, if not in letter, on this occasion. Therefore, if I appear to be tedious in reading some of the verbatim reports of the Committee and the correspondence that has passed between the Minister and myself on behalf of that Committee, I apologise. However, it is important to have these matters on record because, irrespective of whatever of the substance of the matter may come back to haunt us in the future, the procedural matters relating to this debate may do so, although I hope not.

The treaty base was referred to by the hon. Member for Thanet, South. The Single European Act changed the whole outlook in respect of decision-making in the Community. No longer was it possible for a single member to delay or to hold up decision-making; indeed, the purpose of parts of the Single European Act, as the Leader of the House told us when he was Foreign Secretary, was to streamline and speed up decision-making. Vast areas of decision-making were transferred from, in effect, unanimity to qualified majority voting.

There are 76 votes on the Council of Ministers, 54 of which are required to pass a matter requiring a qualified majority, and 23 to block. The United Kingdom has 10 votes. I shall not go through the other member states as it would take too long. The important question is whether the Commission promulgates a regulation under an article of the treaty that requires qualified majority voting, simple majority voting or unanimity. It is those three choices. If it promulgates it under unanimity, the powers of the

Government and the influence of the House—because that is what these debates are supposed to be about—is much the greater.

The articles that have been quoted in respect of these regulations are 7, 8A, 49, and 54. As the Minister said in his opening speech, they require qualified majority voting. Articles 100 and 235 require unanimity.

The difference of opinion that the Government have with the Commission, probably rightly, is on whether freedom of movement and residence of economically non-active persons can properly come under the first four articles that I read out. There has been some discussion and, as we heard from the Minister and as we shall hear later, there is probably an expectation—I put it no higher than that—that ultimately these regulations will be retabled or withdrawn or the Council could agree unanimously to translate them into articles 100 and 235, but on condition that we agree to the matters in hand. That was part of the deal.

Let me deal now with our scrutiny procedure. For the record, because it is relatively unknown I want to read out the resolution of the House of 30 October 1980. It says:

"*Resolved,*

That, in the opinion of this House, no Minister of the Crown should give agreement in the Council of Ministers to any proposal for European Legislation which has been recommended by the Select Committee on European Legislation, &c., for consideration by the House before the House has given it that consideration unless—

(a) that Committee has indicated that agreement need not be withheld, or

(b) the Minister concerned decides that for special reasons agreement should not be withheld; and in the latter case the Minister should, at the first opportunity thereafter, explain the reasons for his decision to the House."—[*Official Report*, 30 October 1980; Vol. 991, c. 843-4.]

That matter was recommended by the Williams committee, which sat between 1976 and 1978, and was put through the House under the leadership of the noble Lord St. John of Fawsley, now a well-known Member of the other place.

The proposals before us have a long history. They were first promulgated in 1974 in a different form and subsequently withdrawn. They were retabled by the Commission as recently as 29 June 1989. On 20 October, the Government then published, as is their wont, the memorandum, from which the hon. Member for Thanet, South quoted, and on 25 October the Select Committee, in its 35th report, HC15, XXXV, said:

"The explanatory memorandum recalls that the United Kingdom has reserved its position on these proposals but, if they were agreed, this wider definition of family members would also apply in the case of persons covered by the draft Directive on pensioners and other non-economically active people. This would have the effect of further increasing the number of third-country nationals with the right of entry to the United Kingdom under Community law."

All that is well known to the House—it has been rehearsed in debates already—but I want to put on record the exchanges between ourselves, the Minister and the House in that respect.

The next thing that happened was that the Select Committee received a letter from the Minister on 19 December '89. It is fairly long, but it is right that I should quote it in full. It says:

"At its meeting on 25 October the Scrutiny Committee understandably concluded that in view of their legal and political importance these documents should be debated. We have recently been seeking to arrange a debate, but it has not proved possible to re-arrange business in the short time available before the House rises and I thought you ought to know that there is a possibility of agreement being reached in the Community before a debate can be held.

This is because progress in the discussions (after, as you know, a very long period of deadlock) has recently quickened markedly. At a meeting of the Internal Market Council on 23 November, a settlement was reached which adequately deals with the concerns which we and a number of other Member States had to ensure that non-economically active EC nationals who take up residence in another country would not become a burden on that country's public funds. In the light of this settlement the French Presidency has been pressing hard for the adoption of the Directives, and the European Council on 8-9 December referred to them as 'an important measure which is scheduled for adoption by the end of the year'. At the same time, the Government has looked again at the question of Community competence and has concluded that our longstanding reserve can now be lifted, provided our earlier concerns about the legal base can be resolved.

The matter will come up again at the meeting of the Internal Market Council on 21-22 December, at which the Presidency will be pressing for a final decision on all three Directives. As the drafts currently stand, we will have a difference with the Commission and with some other Member States over the proposed legal bases. Given the Presidency's eagerness for a decision there is, however, now a chance that we can secure the legal bases we want provided that we and other Member States can agree to accept the Directives at this meeting."

That was the meeting of 21-22 December.

"In these circumstances, in order to secure negotiating advantage, we would like to hold open the possibility of agreeing to the Directives, without putting on a scrutiny reserve, notwithstanding that it has not yet proved possible to arrange a debate on the legal bases which we consider more satisfactory.

It is of course conceivable that matters will not go quite this way and that it will after all be possible to have a debate before final conclusions are reached. Needless to say, that would normally be our strong preference. We shall in any event be submitting a further Explanatory Memorandum and seeking to arrange debate as soon as possible in the New Year. After anxious consideration, however, we are satisfied that, given the extra momentum which the proposals have gathered since the end of November, it would be wrong to pass up the chance of a satisfactory outcome on the grounds that it has not so far been possible to arrange a debate."

Happily, there was no final agreement on the date. I ought to say here and now that the members of the Committee and I are obliged to the Minister for that letter: it was full and frank, and it told us the exact position. To be fair, any of us in the position of the Minister sitting in that chair might well have done the same thing.

I ought to add that the matters that I am now rehearsing represent the unanimous view of the Committee which understands the Minister's position; but it means that, by the end of the year, the following position has emerged. After nearly 10 years, we have a proposal, albeit a modified one. We recommended a debate many years ago on this topic, but we have a debate recommended on the proposals but there is a possibility that the Government will agree to them in substance prior to debate and—here I quote from our memorandum of 20 December—

"agree to adoption of these proposals prior to a debate being held. In essence, the Minister anticipates that it may be possible to trade willingness to agree at the Internal Market Council on 21-22 December for the Government's preferred choice of Treaty base."

That was a new element that the Committee espied in these matters: in our view, there was a very big jump between package bargaining over a fairly wide area, which we well understand must take place, and the fact that, in order to change the treaty base, one must agree to the substance of the proposal.

[Mr. Nigel Spearing]

The Minister kindly wrote to me again on 9 January and I will put what he said on the record. He has dealt with us scrupulously on this matter, and I want to emphasise that. He said:

"At the IMC on 21 December it was noted that neither Danish nor United Kingdom Parliamentary scrutiny procedures had been completed; there was further discussion, but no final agreement, on the question of legal base; and a number of other, minor, issues remained unsettled. As a result, no vote was taken on any of the Directives. The Presidency recorded, however, that political agreement on the substance of the texts had been reached, subject to the completion of Danish and United Kingdom Parliamentary procedures, and suggested that the IMC should give further consideration to the draft Directives at its next meeting on 22 February."

In his opening remarks, the Minister told us that that expectation was to come—the expectation that the treaty base will be changed—but of course that does not really alter the fact that at an earlier stage the Government were willing to go ahead—perhaps justifiably, perhaps not—before a debate in the House, and that the issue of trading —these are the words we used—treaty base in substance has in our judgment probably occurred.

Therefore, the Committee issued another report, which I hope hon. Members have been able to get from the Vote Office, on 17 January, HC II-VII of this Session, which says:

"The Committee was therefore surprised to learn that political agreement was reached on the substance of the proposals at the Internal Market Council on 21-22 December, subject to United Kingdom and Danish scrutiny reserves, and that the only remaining issues for consideration are the appropriate legal bases for the Directives and a number of minor matters. In effect, the Government appeared to have agreed to the substance of the proposal, albeit with a Parliamentary scrutiny reserve, without securing agreement on its preferred choice of legal base."

I interpolate here a reference to what the Minister said at the beginning of the debate, which was that that was expected, and of course it could well be part of the political agreement to which he referred.

The report continues:

"The Department's Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum makes it clear that the Government now accepts that it is reasonable to interpret Treaty provisions on freedom of movement for persons as applying to non-economically active as well as to economically active Community nationals. It is also content that amendments to the proposal have strengthened the understanding that beneficiaries should not become a burden on host Member States. The Committee notes the Government's view that the draft Directives do not pose any major or unacceptable policy implications for the United Kingdom, and its position on the relevance of Article 235 as the appropriate Treaty base in each case. Nevertheless, the Committee maintains its recommendation for the early consideration of these proposals.

The Committee remains disappointed that the Government has not found it possible to afford the House the opportunity to consider these proposals in the decade since the original recommendation until after substantive decisions on their content had been taken. It also reiterates its concern that the Government should have regarded, in this or any similar circumstances, the choice of Treaty base as being negotiable in a similar fashion to the substance of a Commission proposal, given the possible legal implications of adopting Community legislation on inappropriate treaty bases.

In view of the intrinsic importance of the draft Directives, and the circumstances which led to political agreement being reached at the Internal Market Council, the Committee considers the debate which it has recommended should be held on the Floor of the House, and not in a Standing Committee on European Community Documents."

There was a motion down for this batch of documents to be sent to a Standing Committee, but representations were made and that is why we are here now. I place that on the record for the judgment of hon. Members as to the relative importance of this matter—whether it be of substance or procedural, and whether it should have been debated on the Floor of the House or in committee.

The amendment put down by the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) is entirely on the matter of procedure. Whatever his own views may be on substance, and he has not told us them—not that I necessarily expect him to be here—his amendment reflects absolutely the view of the Select Committee. It has not been selected, and I make no complaint about that, but I wish to put it on record that the unanimous view of the Select Committee is in line with the sentiments expressed in that amendment.

The womb of law in the United Kingdom has been until fairly recently this Chamber and that of the other place. We are now, of course, in a completely different situation; and the linkage between what Ministers do in the Council of Ministers and the influence that we can bring to bear on them before they go to the Council—the extent, to use an in phrase of the moment, of pre-legislative glasnost—is very important. I can only hope that the rather lengthy and perhaps tedious quotations that I have had to put on the record this evening will assist in improving visibility in these matters in the future.

10.29 pm

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): I am particularly grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for setting out so clearly and carefully the full effect of the draft directives in relatively few minutes, and I shall try to be brief.

I appreciate the full importance of the EC as a trading bloc, and its necessity to our future prosperity, but I should like to make a few comments on these fairly wide-ranging measures—especially wide-ranging for a Thursday night.

I understand the three draft directives to some extent. I certainly understand the first, which concerns students, and the second, which concerns employees and self-employed pensioners. However, the third directive causes me some concern. It involves the rights of residence for nationals of member states who do not enjoy this right under other provisions of Community law, and members of their families. I thought that my hon. Friend mentioned that this amounted to only a few groups of people, in which case, I must be, as usual, totally naive, because I looked at the directive again and again and I have come to the conclusion that it could apply to everybody.

As the directive concerns only a few groups, can my hon. Friend say whether he has any idea of the potential numbers of people involved, particularly in view of paragraph 23 of the explanatory memorandum, headed "Financial Implications", which says:

"there should be no direct increase in costs as a result of these proposals."

If that is so, presumably no great numbers of people will be involved. Once we know the number, perhaps we will be able to say what effect it might have on the housing situation, because in this country we have a greater

population in a smaller number of square miles than many other member countries, and therefore that is of particular importance to us.

Can my hon. Friend say what will be the position of the citizens of East Germany if Germany reunites? Will they automatically have the right of abode here?

The third point I would put to my hon. Friend—and I appreciate that this involves some detail—is that I have always understood that citizens of the French overseas territories have rights of abode, and presumably that will apply in Britain, but it seems unfortunate that some of our own dependencies and protectorates do not have the same privileges. Could my hon. Friend comment on that?

I am not—I say this almost thankfully—a member of the Select Committee on European Legislation, but I read the note that the Committee

"was surprised to learn that political agreement was reached on the substance of the proposals of the Internal Market Council on 21 December."

That seems to be very strong meat.

The criteria used to determine sufficient resources in this case seem to be pretty basic—nothing like the Hong Kong £150,000. How do we determine whether there are sufficient resources? Is some form of means test involved, and how will it be brought about in practical terms?

I also have a copy of the supplementary explanatory memorandum on European Community legislation which I see is somewhat ominously entitled "final" on the front page. Turning to what I guess is the main issue, I see that paragraph 14 suggests:

"the legal base for all three draft Directives remains under discussion pending final agreement."

I wonder, therefore, whether my hon. Friend believes that this is the most suitable time to debate this matter. There seem to be several fairly profound legal and political implications.

Indeed, paragraph 15 describes the full operational procedures, and I am afraid that I must read it out in full. It says:

"Proposals based on Article 7 or Article 49, among others, attract the Co-operation procedure. If, however, the Commission were to revise their proposals by substituting Article 235, as the legal base for each Directive, the Co-operation procedure would not apply. Until there is agreement on the question of legal base it is not possible to be certain whether the co-operation procedure is relevant."

That seems to me to be of paramount importance.

Mr. Spearing: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way, especially as I made a long speech. He has raised an important point—the bifurcation of a second reading by the European Parliament. He may be under a certain misapprehension about the timing of debates. There has always been a feeling in the House and the Committee that debate at an earlier stage rather than when the final document is ready is more likely to influence the Minister in the Council of Ministers, particularly prior to the common position being taken if the matter is debated a second time. Therefore, rather than having a debate too early, the feeling has been that, for the reasons that I have outlined, it is rather too late.

Mr. Knapman: Perhaps I should have said that we should be careful about drawing conclusions at this stage. Perhaps that would be more acceptable.

Should we be applying to the European Court of Justice to determine these matters, or should we be insisting on article 235? At what stage will my hon. Friend consider whether a veto should be used to force the matter?

Paragraph 16 states:

"Similarly, until the legal base is settled it is not possible to say what the voting procedure will be. However, in the event of Article 235 being chosen, each draft Directive will require unanimity."

Does my hon. Friend accept that it is vital to know whether majority voting or unanimity is applicable? Unless we know, we are taking something of a leap in the dark.

If national frontiers are to become things of the past —that is not putting it too strongly—we must be certain that the frontiers of Europe assume even greater significance.

10.36 pm

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A great many points have been raised. The House would not take it kindly if I tried to address each of them, so I shall comment on what I consider to be the crucial and essential points. I apologise in advance if I leave out any items that hon. Members consider important. If they draw my attention to them during or after the debate, I shall reply to them in a letter, which I hope will be as full and frank as the one that the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) commended for its content if not for its conclusion.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) said little about the directives, so I presume that he was not too unhappy with them. He wanted us to harmonise the rules that we in the United Kingdom operate for the immigration of dependants from third countries with the European rules governing the movement of dependants between EC countries. We have the rules that best suit our circumstances and we should take decisions on them in the light of our particular national needs.

However, I understand the hon. Gentleman's interest in changing them in certain directions. The EC rules for the movement of those who are economically active predate our entry into the Community. We had no hand in formulating them; they existed during the Labour party's last period in government. The Labour Government did not seek to bring them in line and I quite understand why.

If the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central feels able to tell us now, would he change the rule for dependants so that the maximum age for child dependency is not 18, as it is in our immigration rules for third countries, but 21? The House would be interested to know, and so would I.

He asked about Schengen. We are not associated with Schengen. We do not have observer status there. We are extremely interested in what eventually emerges. No treaty has yet been signed. If it is, I disagree with the hon. Gentleman's assumption of what our attitude would be. We do not regard it as a blueprint or model for the rules and arrangements in the wider Community.

Mr. Darling: I am surprised by that, because I had always understood from official and unofficial sources that, first, the Government are kept informed by a civil servant at Schengen and that, secondly, as everyone in Schengen is a member of Trevi, in which the Government are represented, it would be inconceivable for the Benelux countries, France and West Germany to adopt the Schengen rules but seek to do something entirely different by Trevi. If I am wrong, I should welcome a Government statement on that. The previous Home Secretary made a

[Mr. Darling]

helpful statement—I am not suggesting that he made an admission—saying that the general thrust of what I am saying is right.

Will the Minister explain why a Frenchman and his wife and family are allowed to enter this country, whereas a British citizen and his wife cannot automatically do the same? That shows the inconsistency in the definition of the "family".

Mr. Lloyd: The French are responsible for those who enter France from third countries. That is not regulated by Community law; nor are our immigration rules. Movement of people from one Community country to another is regulated by Community law. Community nationals are of primary significance and their dependants derive their rights from the EC national. That is why a distinction is made, but it is a smaller problem than the hon. Gentleman thinks.

We are not part of the Schengen discussions. We know only what we are told, what we learn and what we read. Obviously, we are kept in touch, but not in the detail that the hon. Gentleman believes. I have made it pretty clear that what we believe may have been the objective of those discussions, but which has not emerged yet, ought to act as a blueprint for the rest of the Community.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central asked about the common visa. Again, that has little to do with the directives or with immigration. Discussions are being held to see whether we can agree similar rules for visas for short-term visitors to the Community—not people who wish to settle, but holidaymakers or people who are visiting for a limited period—so that each member country does not have to issue a new visa if a visitor wants to visit several countries and to make it easier for visitors to move between countries. That bears no relation to the directives that we are discussing or to long-term immigration for settlement.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) said that the directives drive a coach and horses through our immigration controls, but they do not. They extend the rights of movement and residence in the Community, but the reality of those rights exist already for the economically active, who are most likely to move and who represent the greatest numbers. They are not completely insignificant, because pensioners may decide to move to another country if they have the resources to do so. Well-resourced pensioners from the south of France or the Mediterranean may move to the midlands because they like the weather, but I suspect that the movement will tend to be in the opposite direction.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South also thought that the category of "dependant" was extremely unclear. In fact, it has been clear since before we joined the European Community, because it is set out in regulation 1612/68. We are writing in the category in detail and we especially wanted to insist on that because there were proposals in the European Community that the rules should be expanded. We wanted to be certain that no expansion appeared in the new directives as a result of changes to which we might agree elsewhere or which might have taken place without our agreement, so we wanted to insist on that detail. What my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South found most confusing was really a recognition that there was discussion over regulation 1612/68 which at present governs this area, but which may not if it changes. However, there is no doubt that the definition is there to be read and is easily understood.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South and my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Knapman) also asked about non-economically active people. They comprise everybody who does not come under some other category and who has sufficient resources to maintain himself at or above the social security levels in whichever European Community country he determines to settle. There is no question about such a person becoming a cost, because he will not be eligible for benefits or social security payments. My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud thought that there must be a cost somewhere. To the country, there must be a movement in of resources because people must bring with them the resources with which they will maintain themselves and any dependants whom they might bring with them.

Mr. Janman: I appreciate what my hon. Friend is saying about the cost effect if such immigration were to occur. However, immigration is a subject about which the people of this country feel very strongly, not only in terms of the possible costs to the taxpayer, but as a result of the other concerns, about which I am sure my hon. Friend is aware and about which I do not need to go into detail. If one used his logic about the weather and the direction of immigration and emigration, clearly we should have had massive emigration from Britain to the West Indies and the Indian sub-continent as opposed to immigration into Britain from those places.

If one takes the matter in the context of the European Community, there is a danger of fairly substantial immigration from the countries within the Community that have a lower gross domestic product per head than we do, such as countries in the more southern part of the Community. The concerns about which my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, South (Mr. Aitken) has hinted are very real.

Mr. Lloyd: If there is any such danger—and I do not want to go down that track with my hon. Friend now, as the clock is ticking on—it already exists because of the treaty and because of the movement of the economically active, which has nothing to do with the directives. If there is a movement upwards, it will be as a result of the freedom to migrate that people have. There certainly is a movement towards the Mediterranean, which is manifest in the number of British pensioners who are currently resident in Spain. My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman) may have a point, but it is related not to the directives, but to the treaty itself and to the freedom of movement of those who are economically active.

The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) is not here at present, but I want to respond to his point. He suggested quite unwarrantably that queues are used as a weapon and he seemed to be thinking especially of the Indian sub-continent. The queues that were very long there have been reduced sharply in recent years and they are far shorter than they were when we came to office. We have increased the number of officers there in an attempt to make the queues shorter, and we have succeeded in that.

The points made by the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), who is the Chairman of the Select Committee on European Legislation and was speaking on behalf of the Select Committee, were most important. I

understand his concern that there was a suggestion that there would be full agreement on the issues without a debate. He is right to press the point and I understand why he does. He spent some time going into the background, about which I wish to say a few words.

We were advised only a few days before the meeting on 21 December to which the hon. Gentleman referred that the presidency appeared to be determined to bring the matter to a conclusion before the end of its presidency. The base for two of the directives—I refer again to the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud—was a qualified majority. It was extremely likely that not only the substance of the directives but a legal base that we did not think right or justified could have been imposed on us.

The hon. Member for Newham, South is frank and honest. He said that he understood that, if he had been in my right hon. and learned Friend's position, he might have made the same decision. We came to the conclusion that, because the directives were to be decided by qualified majority voting, we had to use our best endeavours to ensure that the legal base was changed. We judged that the best way was to agree to the substance and the changes made in the few weeks beforehand, which we were basically in agreement with, but stated that we were not satisfied with the legal base.

I disagreed strongly with the hon. Gentleman when he suggested that the legal base was negotiable. It was not negotiable by us. We have always been prefectly clear that there is only one proper base—article 235. We have stuck to that. The whole purpose of agreeing to the substance of the directives was to give us more leverage to ensure that we secure the proper base. It now looks as if we may be successful. We have had this debate before a final agreement has been made. I am happy on both those points. I hope that the hon. Gentleman takes some satisfaction from that.

Mr. Spearing: I am not sure that I can. It is for the members of the Committee to read the report of the debate. I understand from the Minister—perhaps we have not given adequate weight to this—that the changes in the proposals were conterminous with speeding up the timetable. I concede that the Minister was placed in a difficult position with the presidency, but apparently that is how it works. We regret that there was no opportunity for a debate. There should have been one before Christmas and perhaps one fairly soon afterwards.

Mr. Lloyd: We regret that there was no opportunity for a debate. We should have regretted it even more if we had been lumbered with the directives on the wrong legal base. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman and his Committee agree with that.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): The main principles of the measures will be widely welcomed by the people affected by them. Although the treaty base is regularly discussed by the British Government and the Commission and may ultimately be referred to the European Court of Justice, the thrust of the measures is welcome. Will my hon. Friend confirm that they do not affect the British interest because under the treaty of Rome, Britain still has powers to protect the national interest from drugs and other dangers?

Mr. Lloyd: That is absolutely right. We retain those rights both at our frontier and under the fairly narrow but real public policy limitation to remove EC nationals whom it is against the public interest to have here.

I emphasise that, under the treaty of Rome, EC nationals already have freedom of movement and residence to take employment or become self-employed in any other member country. All that the directive does is extend the rights that are implicit in the treaty in defined terms to the other groups that I mentioned. In the process, we wish to make sure that people do not become an expense to our Exchequer or those of other member countries. I commend the proposals to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 7706/89 and the Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Home Office on 8th January 1990 relating to rights of residence; and supports the objective of facilitating the free movement of European Community nationals.

[Mr. Lloyd]

Oil Seed Rape (Allergy)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.]*

10.54 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): My purpose in drawing this subject to the attention of the House is to air an issue that is important to the health of the many sufferers who blame flowering oil seed rape for their allergies and to meet the needs of those involved in agriculture, for whom this crop is an important source of income. Both the public and farmers have a right to seek action from the Government in producing a solution to a proven problem.

Oil seed rape is a relatively new crop, appearing in the mid and late 1960s in England and Wales and from 1981 in Scotland. Its popularity, encouraged by Common Market subsidy, has seen a 25-fold increase in its planting in Europe, a 47-fold increase over 21 years in the United Kingdom, and a spectacular rise in Scotland from 0 per cent. to 14 per cent. of the United Kingdom total in only nine years. There has been an estimated 25 per cent. rise in the planting of the crop this year alone.

To clarify the extent of the situation, perhaps the Minister will inform the House, if he can, of the acreage of oil seed rape and of spring-sown oil seed rape that will be grown in 1990 as a percentage of previous years. What are the Government's figures for the acreage of brassica compestris or turnip rape that is to be grown in 1990 and its percentage change? I ask that because I should like to know whether the Minister is aware of the extent to which those forms of rape will extend the flowering period of the rape crop and thus the period during which complaints may occur. If he does not have those figures to hand, perhaps he will respond in writing at a later date, because far from going away, the problem is here to stay and is increasing rather than decreasing.

Oil seed rape is a popular and lucrative cash crop, which is very much suited to Scottish conditions. It is a major agricultural income-earner and has seen a massive and rapid expansion in its planting and thus in the exposure of the public to its effects on health. That creates problems for the general public, agricultural workers and livestock. The Minister may be aware of reports suggesting that oil seed rape may cause disease in animals, especially horses and dogs. I should be grateful if the Minister could make it clear whether he believes that the problem requires urgent investigation.

Other factors such as spring sowing, mild winters and new varieties are extending the oil seed rape flowering season and are adding to the problems. Quite simply, this is a situation on the move. Changes in varieties are occurring, especially from single to double low breeds, and in species, with the introduction of brassica compestris rape as well as of spring-grown brassica napus rape with its extended flowering period. All those changes in agricultural techniques will increase and influence allergic responses among the general public and agricultural workers.

Has the Minister any information to hand about the effect of the introduction of double low varieties of oil seed rape on allergic responses? Can he provide any facts about the effect on human health of sulphur-containing matabolites in cruciferous crops? On what exactly is the present policy of non-intervention based? There is now solid evidence pointing to oil seed rape as a source of health problems. Stories of harmful effects of the crop on health were at first anecdotal, with patients who reported to general practitioners' surgeries showing a wide range of symptoms during the oil seed rape flowering season. Doctors in Angus have consistently drawn that to my attention over many years.

Oil seed rape, with its bright yellow flower and heavy scent, is in some ways a very obvious and easy target at which to direct blame for a range of allergy symptoms, such as eczema, hay fever, coughing, sneezing, headaches, asthma and simple general debilitation. The question is: is it the culprit? Now, thanks to the Angus district council and Dundee university joint research project, there can be no doubt that there is a definite link between oil seed rape and allergic responses. Nor can there be any doubt that the problem is widespread, posing the real possibility of a public health nuisance and of a specific health hazard to agricultural workers.

During the 1989 flowering season, an epidemiological study was carried out in the village of Bowriefauld near Letham, in Angus. Angus district council, to its great credit, funded that study in response to allegations of public health nuisance. Eighty-five adults and 40 children were studied, and medical information obtained before, during and after the flowering season—using questionnaires, diary cards and standard skin and blood tests, along with the monitoring of pollen counts, wind-speed direction, temperatures and pollen collected by the Scottish Crop Research Institute in Invergowrie.

The results were both startling and clear: 46 per cent. of the study population reported symptoms at the time when oil seed rape pollen counts were high and when no other pollens were present. The culprit is clear. Half of those individuals confirmed positive allergy tests. Allergy skin testing revealed that reactivity increased from 5 per cent. before the flowering season to 38 per cent. after the season. That is a massive rise compared to the 20 per cent. sensitivity normally shown for most allergic substances.

Many previously non-allergic persons became reactive —suggesting that oil seed rape is a very potent inducer of allergy. Individuals sensitised to oil seed rape were very likely to become sensitised to other substances also, such as grass pollen, animal danders, and house dust mites. All that suggests that oil seed rape might well be triggering off allergic reactions to other substances. That must be a cause for concern.

As almost half the study group had symptoms that were due to oil seed rape, does the Minister agree that it is reasonable to infer that half the population in areas where oil seed rape is grown may equally be affected by these problems? Do the Government not regard it as alarming that oil seed rape may contribute to the development of other allergies and that it may seriously disturb the immunity of people in contact with the crop? If that is not a spur to action, what would be?

The study gives rise to major doubts about oil seed rape and should have been the stimulus for further detailed research to discover the exact nature of the problem and its solution. But, so far, Government funding has not been forthcoming. Previous experience at the Scottish Crop Research Institute reinforces the evidence and has revealed similar problems for staff working with brassicas as well as other related plants. The problems range from rashes and

blisters, especially on the face and hands, but occasionally more widespread—for example, for staff wearing shorts or short-sleeved shirts—all the way to asthma and hay fever. For some staff the problems have become so severe that they have had to discontinue work with brassica crops. For others there has been a need to avoid contact with those crops, most usually at the time of flowering, either by not entering the glasshouses or seed production tunnels where the plants are in flower, or by wearing gloves or using barrier creams.

There has always been some doubt as to whether pollen alone is involved. Some staff complain of discomfort from breathing what they describe as acrid vapour given off by flowering brassicas. Others are aware of a strong smell, often as far as half a mile from the flowering crop, but suffer no ill effects. Yet others cannot smell the crop but suffer ill effects, which disappear as soon as they are no longer in close proximity to the crop. The men and women working with the crop know and confirm the views of the wider population.

The Minister will know that the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland has funded research into the harmful effects on deer of ingestion of oil seed rape. That shows an odd sense of priority, given the human suffering. The Minister disagrees, but, as far as I am aware, money was made available for research on animals but none has so far been provided for research on human beings. That is the point of raising the matter.

The Government denied any link between ill health and oil seed rape when I first raised it. I note that in his reply to me of 29 June 1988 the Minister, Lord Skelmersdale, admitted:

"Oil seed rape pollen may be allergenic and affect the upper respiratory tract causing allergic rhinitis and the airways causing asthma."

The Angus district study confirms that. Deeper and more detailed probing is required.

The scale of scientific investigation has to be expanded to ensure that the high responses observed initially are maintained in a larger study, and to relate more closely the symptoms observed to specific events in the growth and flowering of oil seed rape. We need to ascertain whether the problem relates purely to pollen release or involves chemicals released by the plant, some of which are mustard oils, which are known from other work to cause acute irritation to skin and mucous membranes.

Given the economic importance of oil seed rape to the Scottish economy, the problem should be resolved by modification of the crop's characteristics and not by its elimination or its restricted growth in unpopulated areas. The required research is such that funding from Government agencies is essential. That is my plea to the Government.

In view of the fact that in Tayside there is an established research group, drawn from several institutions, with the necessary expertise to research the problem, and that two and a half years of experience is already credited to the group, can the Minister explain why it has not been funded, and why funding has not been made available for studies during the 1990 flowering season? Again, is the Minister aware that medical, immunological, agricultural and environmental expertise have been co-ordinated through the environmental health department of Angus district, the Scottish Crop Research Institute at Invergowrie and the medical school of the university of Dundee?

The ability to tackle the problem exists already. Is the Minister aware of any other research group with such expertise? If so, has the problem been studied in depth over a period? I am anxious that those with expertise should tackle the problem and produce solutions. The means of solving the remaining parts of the medical jigsaw puzzle are there. Is the Minister aware that the problem has been investigated in Tayside for two and a half years? Will he not use the existing expertise and knowledge urgently? I ask him to introduce immediately a two-pronged attack on the problem, with the funding of research into new, non-allergic strains of oil seed rape which would ensure that agriculture will not awaken in a few years to find the health risk totally proven and a major financial crisis on its hands. That can be avoided by action now to investigate and eliminate the problem. Failure to do so will represent serious neglect by the Government.

The second line of attack must be to discover through medical research the exact nature and cause of the allergies which would lead to their elimination and to the end of the suffering of large numbers of people whose only crime is to live near or pass by fields of flowering oil seed rape.

I pay tribute to Les Cameron, the director of environmental health, to the convener of the committee, who happens to be my wife, Councillor Sheena Welsh, and to the councillors of Angus district who have supported the work done by Dr. Parratt of Ninewells hospital and Bill McFarlane Smith of the Scottish Crop Reserach Institute, all of whom have done a public service in providing scientific evidence to track down the source and cause of this major health problem. We do not know the exact nature of the problem, although the symptoms and the human misery attached to it are clear and obvious.

The Angus district study shows that 40 per cent. of persons living in one rural environment become sensitive to the pollen of oil seed rape during the flowering season and many have hay fever symptoms as a result. Conventional grass fever affects at most, only 15 per cent. of the population. Oil seed rape is a major environmental hazard during the months of April to July. That period may well be extended because of the extra growth in the new types of crops.

The position deserves closer attention to seek out the truth and remedy the problems. The Government must act now, rather than awakening later, in a year's time or so, to find a major crisis in one of the nation's leading crops. If oil seed rape is poisoning the general population, we must find out why and cure the problem. Inaction will only inflict greater misery on the population and unnecessarily endanger the livelihoods of farmers. The Government should act now.

11.10 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office (Mr. Michael Forsyth): I congratulate the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) on securing an Adjournment debate on a matter of considerable concern. It was first drawn to my attention by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith). I know that the hon. Member for Angus, East has been active on the matter. I join with him in passing on congratulations to his wife and others who have spent some time in considering the issue.

Many people have been worried that oil seed rape has increased the severity of hay fever attacks or has affected

[Mr. Michael Forsyth]

people not previously prone to hay fever. The Government are aware of those concerns and, through various research agencies, are promoting investigations into those links.

The hon. Gentleman asked me a number of questions about the acreages of various types of oil seed rape under cultivation. I am happy to write to him, but it would be best if he put down written questions to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton), who is present, because I know that there is wider interest in the issue.

It is true that we currently produce around 1 million tonnes of oil seed rape a year. Production of rape seed oil is encouraged under the EC oilseeds regime, under which subsidies are paid to processors of Community seed. Oil seed rape is grown for the production of rape seed oil and meal, which are extracted from the seed by oil seed processors. The oil is used mainly by the food industry, as a cooking oil or in the manufacture of such products as margarine, shortenings and confectionery.

As the hon. Gentleman said, it is an important alternative crop to cereals for United Kingdom producers. Unlike cereals, which are in surplus in both the Community and the United Kingdom, we are not self-sufficient in seed oils and meals. Rape seed is thus a valuable crop for United Kingdom farmers and makes an important contribution to both our food industry and our balance of payments.

The question of allergenic responses to oil seed rape has to be seen against that general background. The growing of oil seed rape does seem to be associated with an increase in the number of those suffering from allergic reaction. Those reactions may be severe; they may cause headaches, cold or "flu-like symptoms", sneezing, coughing, sore throats and even asthma.

Of course, some people are likely to be sensitive to the pollen of oil seed rape, just as others are sensitive to the pollens of other plants, grasses, trees and various natural substances. Oil seed rape pollens may well cause respiratory symptoms, as do other pollens in those that are sensitive to them. Oil seed rape pollen is heavy and, unlike other pollens, is not widely disseminated by the wind. It is therefore usually localised in its distribution. While these allergic conditions are generally not life-threatening, they are obviously upsetting for the individuals concerned.

The hon. Gentleman argued for research to find out the nature of the problem, but throughout his speech he appeared to have identified the nature of the problem. Contrary to what he implied, there is no conclusive proof of any link between the growing of oil seed rape and any increase in numbers of allergy, hay fever and asthma sufferers.

Mr. Andrew Welsh: The reason I am sure of my facts in the matter is that the study conducted in Angus, which was almost pioneering work, showed a definite link and, though on a small scale, it showed enough of the open window to require more study to be conducted. That additional study may lead us to the exact route and nature of the problem. The Angus study showed a definite link. The important point is to find out what it is—whether it is the pollen or some associated chemical—and I am pleading for funds to ensure that a wider study takes place to pin down the exact nature of the problem.

Mr. Forsyth: I am, of course, aware of the studies to wich the hon. Gentleman is referring. Mr. Leslie Cameron, to whom he referred—the director of environmental health for Angus district council—has published has findings from a study which was based largely on anecdotal evidence of people living in villages surrounded by oil seed rape. About 45 per cent. claimed that their health had been affected by the crop.

That was interesting, but I hope the hon. Gentleman will agree that it was not necessarily conclusive. Indeed, I understand that a separate, and as yet unpublished, study undertaken in Oxfordshire is likely to contradict those findings. I understand that those results will be subject to professional peer review before publication.

The Medical Research Council is the main agency for the disbursement of public funds on medical research, including research into allergy and oil seed rape. It has ready access to the best scientific advice on the selection of projects and has great experience in the selection of soundly based and promising research proposals. The MRC currently funds £1 million of research into allergies. So the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that the Government are not providing resources in this area was a little unfair.

I am able to offer something to the hon. Gentleman in response to his criticism that there is no research in this specific area. I am pleased to say that my right hon. and learned Friend recently offered financial support for a project based at Aberdeen university. The grant of some £63,000 has been awarded to the department of environmental and occupational medicine for a three-year period.

That important project will involve a cross-sectional epidemiological study of 2,000 adults in three north-east Scottish general practices with the aim of measuring the prevalence of seasonal allergic symptoms in oil seed rape and non-oil seed rape-growing areas. People with seasonal symptoms will be selected as cases for case-control studies, with particular reference on allergy to oil seed rape and fungi associated with oil seed rape and exposure to volative chemicals associated with oil seed rape plants.

At the same time, the pollen levels in the air in the study areas will be measured and chemical analyses of volatiles, especially dimethyl sulphides, about which the hon. Gentleman is particularly concerned, arising from oil seed rape fields will be made. The results of this research should identify the size of any health effects of oil seed rape cultivation and point towards possible causes.

I have mentioned the grant for the work at Aberdeen university and I have described the study. There is also the question of agricultural research. The Scottish Crop Research Institute, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, has considerable expertise in the characterisation of crops, varieties, pollens and volatiles as part of its programme of research and development on brassica crops, commissioned by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland. To listen to the hon. Gentleman, one might think that the Government were doing nothing in the matter.

Mr. Andrew Welsh: Not enough.

Mr. Forsyth: It is all very well for the hon. Gentleman to say that, but we are clearly doing more than he was aware of when he rose to speak in the debate. The expertise developed by the institute through that programme would be available to medical researchers.

DAFS officials have already had discussions with the institute director about the possibility of more detailed research on oilseed rape, such as research aimed at eliminating or altering in a breeding programme the substance thought to induce the allergic reaction.

The director is currently arranging a meeting of interested parties, the main aims of which would be to review the evidence for and against sensitisation by, and allergic reaction to, oilseed rape, for which the hon. Gentleman was asking; to review the need for further research and development, which meets the hon. Gentleman's point; and to consider the requirements for, and targets of, such research and development.

The meeting, which is to take place at the Scottish Crop Research Institute in the near future, will be attended by representatives of the institute itself; Angus district council; the department of medical microbiology, Ninewells hospital, Dundee; the department of environmental and occupational health medicine, Aberdeen university; the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; and DAFS. Following the meeting, the institute director will make a further report to DAFS. Obviously, in matters of this sort questions of research priorities must be addressed, and it is important to be clear about the true causes of the allergic reaction before proceeding further with a breeding programme, but it should be clear from what I have said that the Department has the matter under active review. The report, and any recommendations it contains, will be given very careful consideration.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Angus, East for raising this matter. I hope that what I have said will serve to reassure the House that my Department and the other Departments involved take this matter seriously and that work is currently being undertaken to establish the role of oil seed rape in allergy. The support that the Department is giving to the research project at Aberdeen university should lead to a greater knowledge about the real, or perceived, effects of oil seed rape.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-one minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 9 February 1990

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITIONS

Roding Valley

9.34 am

Mr. Paul Channon (Southend, West): On behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. McCrindle) who, as the House knows, has been ill, and whom we all hope and expect to be back in the House very soon indeed, I beg leave to present a petition from the members of the Roding Valley conservation group signed by several hundred people whose lives and work are severely affected by the proposal of the Amey Roadstone Corporation in the green belt near Chipping Ongar in Essex to extend its clay extraction, clay processing and landfill operations. The proposals would cause severe damage to local people and to the environment until the year 2039 and possibly beyond and they are opposed by local people, three parish councils, two district councils and the county council.

"Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House will urge the Secretary of State for the Environment to refuse planning permission for ARC's proposals and thus prevent that company from destroying part of the irreplaceable Roding Valley.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray".

To lie upon the Table.

Student Loans

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): I beg leave to present a petition on behalf of, and collected by, the Inverness college students association. The petition demonstrates widespread concern in my constituency and in other parts of the Highlands about the introduction of student loans. The loans are felt to create a significant disincentive to groups whom we should be encouraging to enter higher education. There is also an awareness, not apparently shared by the Government, of the particular problem of four-year courses in Scotland:

"Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House do reject the proposals for the payment by students of tuition fees or student loans; furthermore, that access to further and higher education be improved and not be inhibited by inability to pay.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray".

To lie upon the Table.

Orders of the Day

Computer Misuse Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

9.36 am

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

As the title of the Bill suggests, it deals with certain forms of computer misuse. Perhaps I had better begin by explaining what I mean by computer misuse.

There are three main categories of computer misuse. The first is unauthorised access to computers and computer systems. The second is unauthorised access with further ulterior intent, such as fraud, and, finally, there is unauthorised modification, which is the computer equivalent of criminal damage.

The Bill would make those three forms of computer misuse criminal offences. The underlying principle is to safeguard the integrity—what I call the trustworthiness—of computers and not to protect the information that computers contain. I do not want the House to be under any misconception about that.

Computer misuse probably costs the United Kingdom between £400 million—the CBI's figure—and perhaps as much as £2 billion a year, in terms of damage to systems. Those figures are based on estimates from industry sources, users of systems and manufacturers of computer hardware and software. I am afraid that there are no reliable statistics, because there is no central recording of incidents. Unfortunately the perception is that there is a very low probability of successfully prosecuting computer misuse under present law. That leads to organisations being reluctant to admit unauthorised access because they see that as a bit of an embarrassment.

It is significant, for example, that of 270 cases that have been verified by the Department of Trade and Industry as involving computer misuse over the past five years, only six were brought to court for prosecution and only three of those were successfully prosecuted for fraud. There must be some inadequacy in the law as it stands.

Costs from misuse arise because any unauthorised access undermines the trustworthiness of a computer. An organisation usually cannot tell precisely what has happened when access has been achieved. As a result, it must spend resources on checking and restoring computer software. When there are several computers in a system that process can be very expensive—probably costing tens of thousands of pounds. For example, I may hack—that is the jargon for unauthorised access—into a local hospital's computer. Whether or not I succeed in modifying medical records for some malicious purpose, a computer manager in the hospital, having discovered me, which he can do because I would have left electronic footprints around, must check and verify perhaps all computer records. If I succeed in modifying the system, it could be disastrous, as I am sure hon. Members will appreciate.

Another possibility is that I will render the computer and any others connected with it in the network inoperable, and the cost of cleaning up such a network can amount to hundreds of thousands of pounds. The first conviction for such an activity has just occurred in the United States.

[Mr. Michael Colvin]

That is occurring when we are in the vanguard of countries seeking to encourage greater use of information technology to create wealth and when we are doing our best to attract inward investment to the United Kingdom, with 1992 and a single Europe in mind. The United Kingdom is one of the few major western industrial countries that have no computer crime laws to deal with a serious problem. There is a real risk that, if nothing is done, the United Kingdom could become an international hackers' haven.

Why is our law unable to deal with computer mischief? It is principally because it simply has not kept pace with the rate of progress and because computer misuse is fairly new. My "Oxford English Dictionary", which was published in 1964, does not even mention the noun "computer". The pace of technological development has been so rapid that, over three or four decades, computers have come into widespread commercial use. In one decade —the 1980s—the technological revolution has extended to the home, with the use of personal computers. Undoubtedly, in the next decade many further advances will be inevitable. In the 1980s, we witnessed a vast increase in knowledge of computers and the production of easier-to-use machines. Computers are much more user friendly. Prices have tumbled, and computer technology is now available to virtually everybody.

Modern telecommunications enable one to connect with a computer through a modem. Some people think that a modem is an expensive and bulky piece of equipment. I have a modem in my hand. Hon. Members can see that it is rather smaller than a cigarette lighter, and not very costly either. With such a device people can connect into telephone networks. International networks are expanding quickly and are carrying many more messages since the introduction of fibre optics. Anyone with a simple home computer and a modem can access another computer if it is connected to the telephone network. That vastly increases the speed of modern communications and aids the welcome free exchange of information, but it leaves computers vulnerable to misuse.

Security fears block the free flow of information. Scientific and social progress can take place only in the open. The paranoia that hackers leave in their wake stifles work and forces administrators to disconnect their links with network communities. Open systems need trust, but hackers destroy trust. The information technology industry has recognised that risk. Responsible vendors and service organisations have put in place comprehensive development programmes to create secure information products and services—not least Her Majesty's Government, through the work of the Central Computer Telecommunications Agency staff, to whom I spoke only yesterday. However, the fact remains that the lack of appropriate legislation in the United Kingdom provides a loophole for hackers, particularly if legitimate user systems have been outmoded by rapid technological advances. We find ourselves in the 1990s with new, well-defined mischiefs that the law does not address at all or does not address with any certainty.

I have been asked why, as someone who is barely computer literate, although I am learning fast, I should bring forward a Bill on computer misuse. I may not know much about computers, but computers know a great deal about me, and that is why the Bill is of general interest. I am still counting, but, so far, I have identified 102 computer systems in Britain that contain personal information about me, and the same is probably true of all hon. Members.

Most homes now boast a personal computer of some sort. Certainly, many people sit at computer terminals at work. Most hon. Members have invested in computers or word processors to cope with the flood of constituency mail that we receive. Unfortunately, since the fall in the price of such instruments and the growth in user friendliness, our constituents are also investing in such machines. One computer is now talking to another computer, and hon. Members sit somewhere in betweeen. There are probably as many computers in offices, factories and homes as there are cars outside.

Just as at the beginning of the century, when the first motor cars appeared on our roads, we had to introduce special laws to govern their use and misuse, in spite of existing legislation on horse-drawn carriages, so too are special laws required today to cope with computers. The Bill would provide such laws.

I have closely based the Bill on the excellent and well-reasoned recommendations of the Law Commission of England and Wales in its report No. 186, which was published in October 1989. So that the Bill should apply to Scotland as well, I have drawn on an earlier Scottish Law Commission report, No. 106, which was published in 1987. I offer my thanks to Mr. Richard Buxton QC of the Law Commission of England and Wales. He is a principal member of that commission and has been closely involved in the preparation of the Bill. The Law Commission stated that an adequate deterrent would not be provided against the threat of computer misuse simply by trying to stretch or patch up existing criminal law. It took the view that society needs to say clearly that unauthorised access to any computer system is now so anti-social as to be a criminal offence.

That view is shared by a large majority of the 100-odd organisations and individuals who made submissions to the Law Commission of England and Wales when it conducted its year-long study of the nature and extent of computer misuse, following the publication of its working green paper No. 110. Evidence came from a wide range of organisations—computer users in the public and private sectors, computer software manufacturers, hardware manufacturers, and the law enforcement agencies—to many of whom I have spoken in the past five weeks, and I thank them most sincerely for their help.

In carrying out its review, the commission was considerably helped by the report of the Scottish Law Commission. Primarily, the extra evidence that has been provided by the passage of time and the difference between the two legal systems in Scotland and England and Wales led to slightly different recommendations. Since publication of the commission's report, some well-attended public debates have shown a broad consensus of support, if some difference on specific details.

I owe much to the parliamentary information technology committee—PITCOM—and to the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson), who I am pleased to see in her place, and who has probably forgotten more about computers than I will ever learn. But for the luck of the draw, my hon. Friend would almost certainly have been bringing forward an update of her own Bill on this matter.

My hon. Friend has done a great deal to raise public awareness of this issue and I am delighted to have her as a sponsor of my Bill.

To show the sort of twisted culture that the Bill is trying to stamp out, I have with me an extract from a bulletin board, which is a sort of electronic newspaper that is used by computer operators. It regards my hon. Friends enthusiasm as extremely unwelcome, stating:

"who's seen the news in the 'Sunday Times' . . . page A5 about hacking . . . and phreaking Mercury . . . they also want restrictions on BBS's . . . it's that stupid cow . . . the devon MP 'computer expert' . . . don't make me laff . . . could be bad news tho . . . maybe someone should assassinate her?"

Did somebody suggest that hacking is a harmless culture? All that I can say is that it is a privilege and I am honoured to join my hon. Friend on the hackers' hit list.

Now to the Bill and the underlying policy——

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): I heard my hon. Friend's dulcet tones on the radio this morning, but one point about his Bill needs clarification. We all recognise the need for this action, but is he satisfied, first, that the police forces of this country have the professional ability to find out when there is a crime, and secondly—and perhaps more importantly—what about the Crown prosecution service? Will it be able to do an effective job if, as I hope, we give the Bill legislative effect?

Mr. Colvin: I welcome that intervention. I shall be coming to those points later but, briefly, I am satisfied that the police have adequate powers at present to enforce the law, and I am sure that the Crown prosecution service will be careful about assessing evidence before it agrees to proceed with prosecutions. It is clear that what the Bill proposes by way of penalties means that it will be an adequate deterrent to put off a lot of the hacking that is now taking place.

Mr. James Arbuthnót (Wanstead and Woodford): I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way again. He has just been talking about bulletin boards and I have been following and agreeing with what he has said so far. Obviously, a great deal of action is necessary and the Bill is extremely good. However, I caution my hon. Friend about attacking the idea of bulletin boards because they are a bit like any other form of communication—they can be misused, but perhaps that misuse, rather than the medium through which the misuse is occurring should be controlled. Does my hon. Friend agree that attacking bulletin boards as such is a bit like attacking books?

Mr. Colvin: That would be an extremely dangerous thing to do. The whole essence of my Bill is that I am improving freedom of information, which is fundamental to this country. A bulletin board is like a newspaper, but if I persuaded somebody through a newspaper to commit an offence, I would be guilty of incitement. Bulletin boards must be extremely careful about what they say. My hon. Friend's point is extremely valid.

The Bill has two main elements. Clauses 1 to 5 make provision for the new offences. Clauses 6 to 11 introduce new rules governing the jurisdiction of the courts to try cases. Clauses 12 to 19 are consequential provisions, making technical amendments to the body of criminal law or amplifying the offences themselves.

I shall concentrate first on the main elements—the offences. Clause 1 creates a new offence triable summarily —that is, in a magistrates court—of unauthorised access to programs and data held in computers. The maximum penalty is six months in gaol or a £2,000 fine, which is the maximum that a magistrates court can hand out. The objective is to deter deliberate, unauthorised access or attempts to gain access, which is usually referred to as hacking. It is also aimed at insiders who try to get into parts of a system where they know that they should not be. "Intent" is the key element. It would be wrong to seek to catch the person who secures access simply because he or she is inattentive, incompetent, careless or not properly informed about the limits of his or her authority. It puts the onus on employers to ensure that, within contracts of employment or other instructions, employees are left in absolutely no doubt about what they are entitled to do. If they have authority, this law would in no way attempt to penalise them.

Clause 2 creates an offence, triable either summarily or on indictment, of unauthorised access with the intent to commit or to facilitate the commission of a more serious further offence, such as fraud or blackmail. The offence provides substantially greater penalties to deal with those who have distinctly criminal intentions. The maximum penalty would be five years in gaol and, of course, the fines would be unlimited. It is what lawyers call a preliminary offence, because it bites before the further offence is committed or attempted. If I use a computer to get information with which to blackmail someone, I have committed a clause 2 offence even before I have sent the blackmail note.

Clause 3 is the corresponding clause for Scotland. The formulation that is proposed for the rest of the United Kingdom would not work in Scotland because of the differences in the Scottish legal system. The formula that I have adopted is similar to that suggested by the Scottish Law Commission in its report on computer crime, to which I have already referred.

Clause 4 creates an offence, triable summarily or on indictment, to deal with the unauthorised modification of data or programs held in computers or computer storage media. The intention is to remove the current uncertainty that exists in the law concerning damage to intangible property, such as data. It is not intended to cover physical damage to a computer or to disks which would remain within the ambit of the criminal damage laws. It is intended to cover forms of conduct such as erasure, or the putting into circulation of disks that are infected with a computer code—the jargon is "virus"—that is designed to impair the performance of the computer. It is much like the, flu virus that replicates itself in the body and slows one down. Incidentally, it takes a real expert about two hours to write the software for a virus but, on average, about 350 hours to check out a system that is infected and to correct the damage that might have been caused.

There seems to be a whole zoo of malicious software. Since I have been investigating the matter, I have met Trojan horses, logic bombs, viruses, worms, bacteria and even rabbits. I am not sure that I can always tell one from another, but I know that they are all pretty nasty.

Hon. Members may have heard something about this little devil I have here. It is a diskette. The note accompanying it stated that it is an "AIDS introductory diskette". It was mailed to over 20,000 personal computer users in December last year. Those who loaded it into their machines found that it was extremely malicious in that it instructed them to sent money to a Post Office box in Panama or else the program contained on the diskette

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would impair the computer's memory after 90 accesses. Many organisations were affected. This one was posted to Kenya from London W1.

Dr. Lewis Popp was arrested last Saturday in Ohio for circulating the disks. He was charged with extorting money with menaces. If he did it, I hope that the police can make the charge stick. If they cannot, the accused will probably get away scot free because circulation of an infected disk, such as this, is not an offence. However, the Bill will make it one.

The prospect of new offences has stimulated considerable debate and interest and a number of views have been expressed about it, most of them in favour. However, there are some dissenters on specific issues and it might help the House if I were to comment on some of the reservations that have been expressed.

It has been argued that the basis of the offences should not be the safeguarding of the computer's trustworthiness, as I propose, but the protection of information, perhaps by conferring a property right on information. That has certain intellectual attraction but the Law Commission rejected that approach. Property rights to information raise complex issues about freedom of information, privacy, confidentiality and how information is valued—which have not been considered in depth. I suspect that it will take a long time to study them properly and to reach a consensus.

We are living in what people call the information society, so it is necessary to consider such issues for the future. We should not let present mischiefs go unchecked for 10 years while we debate freedom of information, privacy and confidentiality.

When pondering issues such as this it is natural to consider whether there is another more suitable and simpler remedy. The Law Commission concluded that there was not. It considered whether users could prevent unauthorised access or modification simply by taking security precautions. In much the same way as we lock our doors to deter burglars, it is possible to protect computers, and many people do.

There is now among users a far greater appreciation of the threat to computer systems and the need to take proper precautions. My research on the Bill certainly proved that. However, there is no complete form of protection for computers. High levels of security can be achieved but they are horrifically expensive, in terms of money, inconvenience or both. Security systems tend to slow up the computer. When speed is the essence, that can be extremely costly. We do not expect householders to turn their homes into Fort Knox. We expect them to take sensible precautions and we add to that the support of sound laws against burglary. That is precisely my approach in the Bill.

Computer owners do not have a statutory duty to protect their computer systems. When I discussed this aspect of the Bill with the Data Protection Registrar, Mr. Eric Howe, he pointed out that the Data Protection Act 1984 requires computer users who process information about individuals to follow certain good practices. These are laid down in the data protection principles. One of those principles is:

"appropriate security measures shall be taken against unauthorised access to, or alteration, disclosure or destruction of, personal data and against accidental loss or destruction of personal data."

I do not accept the argument that, once misuse is made a crime, computer users will pay less attention to their security arrangements.

The House will agree that good security requires constant vigilance and that computer users should be aware that their responsibilities under the Data Protection Act will not be diminished simply because they have legal protection against hacking. I stress to users that I do not see legislation as an alternative to computer security but as a complementary protection.

The response among users has been encouraging and there is clear recognition that legislation does not obviate the need for proper security. It would be wrong to think that all is well and that everyone is acting properly. Not everyone is acting properly. I know that the Government have launched an awareness campaign to do something about that and I look forward to hearing what my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry has to say when he replies to the debate.

The creation of any new offence invites comment on enforcement. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) has already intervened on that point. This Bill is no exception. I spoke to the police and others, when formulating the provisions on enforcement. I am satisfied that the powers and expertise necessary to enforce the offences are available. I have no doubt that it would be possible to extend the powers currently available to gather and present evidence. I know that the House takes police powers seriously, but we should not change them without a convincing case.

I propose no provisions to reform the law on evidence. Under the current law, computer records would, in principle, be admissible. There is no firm evidence that the law is deficient and no consensus about how it should be changed if deficiencies were found. If, following enactment of the Bill, it were thought that the law in respect of evidence needed to be changed, that should be referred back to the Law Commission for further consideration.

The Law Commission recommended against reform of the existing law on evidence and I am prepared to accept its advice. If any hon. Member is still not satisfied on that and if we achieve a Second Reading, we could discuss the matters in depth in Committee. I am not yet convinced that the Bill needs to say anything on evidence.

People have expressed anxiety about the Bill because many of the people with the skills to commit the offences are juveniles under the law. I have been asked how my Bill will apply to them. My answer is that it will apply in exactly the same way as the general criminal law. The law lays down rules for the treatment of offenders between the ages of 10 and 20. The law would affect them in the same way, but the manner of trial and the penalties available are different. Nevertheless, I hope that the Bill will be as great a deterrent to them as to everyone else.

The Bill does not aim to cover electronic eavesdropping which is the remote monitoring of electromagnetic emissions from computer equipment. But certain forms of eavesdropping could fall within the meaning of access, as described in clause 18. There is insufficient evidence that eavesdropping is a serious mischief. If I included it in the Bill it would raise wider sensitive issues, outside the scope of the Bill.

Clauses 6 and 7 and 8 to 11 are closely related and cover jurisdiction. Here again, I am indebted to the Law Commission. Its computer misuse report set out the rules that should operate in offences where cross-border activity is a significant feature. Its detailed recommendations are spelt out in "Jurisdiction Over Offences of Fraud and Dishonesty With a Foreign Element"—Law Commission report 180, which was published in April 1989.

Currently the rules provide that United Kingdom courts have jurisdiction only if the offence is regarded as taking place in the United Kingdom. That implies that the last act or event necessary to complete the offence took place here. Those rules are unnecessarily restrictive and are inadequate to deal with computer misuse committed across national boundaries, as happens more and more today. It is intended to make it possible to prosecute for the computer misuse offences if the accused or any affected computer was in the United Kingdom at the relevant time. In doing that, the Bill is trail-blazing. It will be the first piece of legislation to which these new elements on jurisdiction have been added.

I also intend to make parallel changes to the rules on the associated offences of conspiracy, attempt and incitement. I confess that those apparently straightforward provisions appealed to me greatly, so I was staggered when I saw the statutory provisions—the words in the Bill—that are needed to make them work. No doubt hon. Members who turn to the relevant pages in the Bill will be puzzled, too. I am reassured that the complexity of the provisions is necessary to keep the jurisdictional reach within acceptable bounds and to ensure that the provisions will make sense when read with the existing body of law.

The House will know that I am no lawyer, but my advice comes from impeccable sources and I ask the House for its trust on this matter. The detail can be examined in Committee. For the most part this is a Bill which even I can understand on a quick read. The House is indebted to the draftsperson. She has done a remarkable job. Although it is conventional not to mention names, the House should commend her on the way in which the Bill has been drafted. With private Members' legislation it is vital that the drafting is good. Hon. Members will appreciate that the time wasted on redrafting such a Bill can have a serious effect, especially as time is of the essence to get it onto the statute book.

Clause 12 contains "savings" for law enforcement powers under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, the Finance Acts 1985 and 1988, the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949 and common law enforcement powers in Scotland. It preserves the authorities' existing powers to access computer records and to enter premises and access computers to obtain data in exercise of their investigatory powers without, committing the offence of unauthorised access which is provided for in clause 1.

Clause 13 provides that proceedings must be brought within six months from the date when the prosecutor decided that a prosecution was justified and not later than three years after the offence was allegedly committed. Clause 14 provides for the courts to convict a person of a clause 1 offence, the basic offence of unauthorised access —the long-stop offence—even though the court might have acquitted the person of clause 2 or clause 4 offences. Equivalent provisions for Scotland in this respect are set out in clause 15. Clause 16 covers extradition and clause 17 contains certain provisions needed to give proper effect to the Bill in Northern Ireland. Clause 18 covers interpretation.

This is a well-thought-out and well-defined Bill. It deals with specific mischiefs that I have no doubt are serious enough to merit the attention of the criminal law. I hope that the debate will dispell any lingering belief that the computer hacker is some sort of Raffles of the microchip, a harmless irritant whose principal damage is to his own telephone bill. It is impossible to draw the line between a mischief-maker and the dangerous nuisance or professional criminal.

It is time for Parliament to say that hacking is always serious, even if the intention is mere mischief. I believe that it is time to give the Bill a Second Reading.

10.11 am

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): I find myself in a rather strange position. I used to attend the House every Friday morning when I was the Opposition's deputy Chief Whip. When I was finally paroled from the Whips' Office I said to myself that I would attend the House on every Friday to speak on everything as it offers a wonderful opportunity for hon. Members to do so. The packed Opposition Benches clearly demonstrate that this morning. Everyone will be relieved to learn that I have not spoken every Friday, and that I have reserved myself for this occasion.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin). He described himself as being computer illiterate, but he did not come over as such. He made a most competent and authoritative speech which demonstrated that he is thoroughly conversant with every provision of the Bill.

The hon. Gentleman is also to be congratulated on managing to draw a place in the ballot for private Members' Bills. We know that Government Departments are not happy with the private Members' Bill procedure because they always wonder what will happen and Ministers do not know what may be in store for them. On the basis of experience, I believe that such Bills must be short, well focused and clear in their objectives. This Bill fulfils those criteria.

I also congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his broadcast this morning on the "Today" programme on Radio 4. He argued his case concisely against a well-informed and well-organised opposition. That programme has a massive national audience and it was important for the Bill's case to be made on it. The hon. Gentleman succeeded in making that case, and I believe that the Bill will be well received.

So often a specific industry or interested parties seek to knock the proposals in a private Members' Bill and to suggest that it does not represent good legislation. They argue that the Government alone should introduce such legislation. The Bill, however, is well drafted—I do not believe that anyone who has read it would disagree—and I do not expect that it will detain us long in Committee.

Mr. Colvin: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there are some advantages in this subject being dealt with in a private Member's Bill? We are attempting to maintain the precarious balance between introducing a new criminal law and police powers. If the Government had introduced

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such a Bill, it might have been heavier and, therefore, might have provoked a certain amount of opposition. As it is, the Bill has all-party support, which is welcome.

Mr. Hogg: I am aware of that and it is welcome. If its sponsors propose to be members of the Committee, it will be a useful Committee and I am sure that there will be a great deal of interest in it. When the Minister replies, I hope that he will welcome the Bill and that he will say that there is no need for extensive alterations to it.

The case for such legislation was first identified in Scotland. It is amazing what comes out of Scotland. I can say with conviction that it is a country where the question of law and the making of law is tackled cautiously. We are properly jealous of what we do with our law. Part of the agreement which led to the Union was that Scottish law would be maintained. I am no lawyer, but the basis of law in Scotland is different from that in England and Wales.

Mr. Colvin: I cannot resist intervening because, as I am three quarters Scottish, I agree entirely with what my hon. Friend has said. It may interest him to know that in a reckless moment I thought of introducing a simple one-clause Bill that would bring all the laws of England and Wales into line with those of Scotland.

Mr. Hogg: The case for the Bill gets stronger and stronger. *[Interruption.]* The Minister intervenes from a sedentary position and, as a member of the Chairmen's Panel, I must say that that is most improper.

In 1984 the Scottish Law Commission made a report on what changes should be made to the law in this respect. The report was published in 1987, and I am pleased that the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside saw fit to have regard to the needs of the law in Scotland.

The Bill is wanted by industry, and we have been well briefed by the Confederation of British Industry. I do not always agree with the CBI and I do not know what my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) will say, but the briefing paper from the CBI makes it clear that it wants the Bill. I also believe that the computer industry will welcome the Bill because it cannot build into its technology the necessary safeguards to prevent hacking or other offences. At the moment such safeguards are technically impossible and, therefore, the law must fill the gap. That is important. The hon. Gentleman was right when he said that companies throughout the country have branches that are linked by computer. A few years ago the only tool to link them was the telephone, but now computers and information technology provide that communication.

Only a week ago I visited two companies in my constituency, both owned by British Oxygen—Transhield and Storeshield. They control the stock for Marks and Spencer. All Marks and Spencer's goods, as far north as Inverness, as far south as Warrington and west to Belfast in Northern Ireland, come from my constituency where a massive stock is held. Each day, and almost every hour, trucks leave the company for all the Marks and Spencer stores in the huge area of the United Kingdom. The stock control—filling the trucks and despatching goods—is done by computer.

I do not believe that Marks and Spencer's computers would be broken into or that its competitors would seek to do that—of course not. However, other companies that control their organisations by computer might be vulnerable to the kind of offence that this measure seeks to regulate. Therefore, the measure is worthwhile.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): The hon. Gentleman may already know, or may like to know, that I have just received an answer from Marks and Spencer to a survey that I carried out last year. I have a letter dated 18 January 1990 from Mr. Andrew Steet, the manager for finance and computer auditor, who must be known to the hon. Gentleman. In it, he says that he supports the measure and is happy to be included in any further debates and surveys although, quite properly, as the hon. Gentleman said, Mr. Steet has stated that, to the best of his knowledge, Marks and Spencer has not been affected by computer viruses or hacking. However, the company sees the dangers and warmly commends the measure.

Mr. Hogg: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, whose point serves to underline my own. I did not know that Marks and Spencer had expressed a view about the matter. Clearly what it says underlines the fact that it could face unfair competition due to the use of unlawful means. The Bill will get round that problem.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) referred to policing. I shall certainly want to know about that in Committee. I thought that the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside dealt with that, but perhaps we can go into it in greater detail later.

The Bill is a good example of a private Member's Bill and it will reach the statute book, which must please the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside. We shall have brought the law to a sector where it does not presently exist. It will do a great deal of good, and I am sure that the House will support it.

10.24 am

Mr. William Powell (Corby): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg) and, on this occasion, reflect on his proud statement about the wonderful things that come out of Scotland. As a Member of Parliament who represents at least as many Scots as most Scottish Members, I heartily concur with his statement that wonderful things and people come out of Scotland, including my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin).

I congratulate my hon. Friend on his immense good fortune in securing a leading position in the ballot for private Members' legislation and having the good sense to take up this Bill. It has been made perfectly plain to the House today that this is a necessary measure, and I congratulate my hon. Friend on sponsoring it.

I should like to join in the warm tribute that he paid my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson), who has played a most distinguished part in preparing public and parliamentary opinion for the necessary change in the law that we are considering. Without the slightest doubt, without her active and committed sponsorship, those changes could have been delayed for quite a long time, with immense potential damage to the industry and public.

I declare two interests. First, in my misspent youth I was a practising member of the Bar and spent much time dealing with criminal work. The Bill involves the extension of the criminal law into subjects that are imperfectly

covered at present. My interest is indirect because, alas, I no longer practise. However, I hope that at least some of my erstwhile friends will enlarge their knowledge of human behaviour as a result of the Bill.

Secondly, I am vice chairman of the Federation against Software Theft, commonly known as FAST. The House may recall that five years ago I sponsored a change in the copyright law in the Copyright (Computer Software) Amendment Act 1985, which cleared up uncertainties and difficulties for the software industry. Since the passage of that Act, I have remained actively interested in the subject and more recently have been involved in trying to eradicate breaches of the Act and the criminal law by pirates in the software industry. I have a large range of contacts in the industry, and all of them have been immensely impressed not only by the way in which my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside has taken up the case, but by the rapid way in which he has mastered what can be a most difficult subject. Through its vocabulary and scientific mechanisms, it is almost designed to deter those of us who had a rather more primitive education than that currently available to our children.

I introduce a slightly critical note. I was disappointed, as were so many in the industry, that the Government did not decide to introduce this as a Government Bill. Private Members' legislation has certain advantages, but it has one massive disadvantage: it is the subject of arbitrary processes. It was perfectly plain from the Law Commission and the consultation processes both in Scotland and England that there was a problem that needed to be urgently addressed. My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West addressed the problem when she first brought the subject before the House and has pursued her campaign to change the law in a most determined way. I know that she would have wished to introduce the Bill if she had had the good fortune in the ballot that my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside has had. He knows that if I had had the immense good fortune to come top in the ballot I would have sought to introduce the Bill, as would other hon. Friends and even the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg).

However, there was always a real chance that the hon. Members who emerged at the top of the ballot might have had other priorities and this measure might have missed the legislative process in this Session and, who knows, in the next Session as well. The best way to deal with openings in the criminal law that emerge as a result of scientific and technological development is for the Government to take the initiative when it becomes plain that that mischief must be quickly eradicated.

Mr. Colvin: My hon. Friend has raised a valid point which I touched on in an earlier intervention. When the Law Commission makes a report it usually attaches to it a draft Bill. In this case the Law Commission report was produced in October and there was no time to attach a draft Bill to it, although to some extent that illustrates the degree of urgency in producing the report. As the House knows, by that time the Government have usually agreed the contents of the Queen's Speech. There is a limit to the amount of legislation which even this Government can force through the House. The extension of the criminal law requires careful thought. Because it is a private Member's measure, the legislation cannot go too far, and that is always the danger.

With respect to my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson), her measure may have gone further than mine, and had she succeeded in getting her earlier measure debated on the Floor of the House it might have been resisted by certain elements within the House. My hon. Friend has raised a valid point, and if the Minister of State catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he will probably explain why it was not a Government measure.

Mr. Powell: I am immensely grateful to my hon. Friend for that explanation which may have helped to show people outside why the Government did not include this among the measures outlined in the Queen's Speech as part of their legislative programme for this Session. I propose to leave that point, save to say to my hon. Friend the Minister of State that no one is a more welcome companion than a sinner who has repented. I know that, whatever may be the explanation why it was not in the Government's legislative programme, we can now expect from him the most robust and enthusiastic support for the Bill as it progresses through Parliament.

The main burden of my speech concerns police and enforcement. My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) raised valid points which the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth commented on absolutely correctly. I have some experience in law enforcement in these difficult areas which are rather different from ordinary police activities. Some years ago, when we were dealing with software, it was perfectly obvious that chief constables and members of the police forces regarded it as an unusual area of activity to which they might be reluctant to commit the necessary resources to ensure that those engaging in criminal activities were brought to justice. Then a special unit was established by FAST to collect, collate, analyse and prepare evidence for placing before prosecuting authorities in Britain. That unit, headed by a former chief superintendent in the Metropolitan police, has become the most expert unit not only in Britain but throughout Europe for tracking down computer criminals. That expertise is widely sought within the industry and internationally.

It may be necessary for those people who are affected by computer hacking to group together, just as the software industry did, to ensure that they engage in the collecting, collating and preparing of evidence to place not before the court but before the police and the prosecuting authorities to assist them in carrying out their responsibilities to the public and Parliament. I want to pay tribute to the way in which chief constables, the Crown Prosecution Service, the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Lord Advocate have been extremely helpful in dealing with various software matters which often involve substantial breaches of the criminal law.

By extending the law to cover computer crime the Bill will make the enforcement of a civil law, which is even more important, much easier. There are often hurdles to overcome in the preparation of necessary civil proceedings, but if one can ultimately fall back on the criminal law it is often easier to get the necessary civil admissions to avoid the danger of criminal conviction and so ensure that the civil law works more effectively. That has certainly

[Mr. Powell]

happened in the software industry, and I expect that it will be an inevitable consequence of the Bill. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister of State will comment on the international dimension. It may not be appropriate to include the international dimension in the Bill, and certainly I have no proposals to make to the Standing Committee in that regard. Of couse, computer crime is often international crime. It is all very well for us to have an effective law in Britain, but we must ensure that similar laws exist in other major countries. The really serious criminal activities are likely to be netted through international co-operation across frontiers rather than by laws which are limited to activities in Britain. Of course the proof of guilt in British courts will be exactly as it always has been, but cross-border co-operation is becoming increasingly important.

Yesterday I received a letter from a constituent who is a leading official in one of the world's leading banks. He asked me to support the Bill, and I am happy to assure him that I do so with enthusiasm. I do not suppose that he would have taken the trouble to write to me unless his bank was being troubled by hacking activities. That illustrates the menace that the Bill seeks to address. My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West, in a seminal article in *The Times* last April, identified some of the specific activities of hackers and the consequences of their hacking in financial and other terms. But specific evidence of individual cases is hard to come by because of quite understandable reticence about commercial activities and confidentiality. When such an important official troubles to write to a Member of Parliament about a specific piece of legislation, knowing the background of his career I have not the slightest doubt that the menace of hacking and its consequences is widespread.

Hacking may be innocent fun for some, but it is burglary. Much of the problem of dealing with computer crime stems from the fact that what would otherwise be perceived to be criminal activity, because it involves computers, is often thought of as being entirely innocent and, in some cases, just good clean fun, which is what the first offence that my hon. Friend proposes seeks to address. But there is malice in so much hacking and it is extremely important to punish the malicious.

Mr. Colvin: I am glad that my hon. Friend has touched on that point, because it has also been suggested that the hacker actually provides a service to society, and we should thank him because he is identifying weak links in the network chain and systems which are insecure. He may well be doing that, but if companies really need that service they can authorise the hacker to access and if he has the authority to test the system he is not committing the crime provided for in the Bill.

Mr. Powell: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. I am unable to accept the argument that the house or warehouse burglar performs a public service by breaking into premises and revealing shortcomings in the security system. The hacker who says that he is performing a public service is doing exactly the same as the burglar who advances by way of mitigation the argument that he is performing a public service. In my time I have advanced many interesting arguments to Her Majesty's judges about why clients should receive prison sentences less severe than those that they were about to receive, but I have never had the cheek and the gall to suggest that such a line of mitigation would be likely to commend itself to judges.

We must think of hacking as a form of burglary. We must stigmatise such criminal activities for what they are. Because computer buffs use a different vocabulary and have a method of thought different from the conventional method that we all use does not alter the fact that the principles of criminal law are just as clearly at stake.

We must also bear in mind that, although some criminals will always stick to the traditional areas of robbery and violence, the more sophisticated ones will move into areas where they will hope to get ahead of the law enforcement agencies who will be unable to catch up with their dishonest activities. The Bill will go a long way towards making it perfectly plain to such people that they will engage in such activities at their peril. If their malice and greed are considerable, they will face the same sort of penalties that are imposed on people engaged in more conventional forms of fraud.

This is an excellent Bill, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside on his good luck and judgment. I wish the Bill godspeed and I enthusiastically support it.

10.42 am

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): I am glad to be able to support the Bill and I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) for including me in his list of sponsors. We have a hefty batch of sponsors with a great deal of knowledge, as has been demonstrated by the hon. Members who have spoken.

This is a Bill of great importance, and in years to come society will thank us for it. I see it as the beginning of a package of computer misuse legislation. It builds on the Copyright (Computer Software) Amendment Act 1985. It also builds on the tremendously influential and important Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 which followed it and which modified and built on the original clauses that were in the original Bill.

A private Member's Bill in the context of computer law has thus already proved its worth. The route is excellent and can lead to good legislation. After all, the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act is now the model for the directive from Brussels on copyright for computer software throughout Europe. People in the British computer industry who worked on the Act advised Brussels on how to frame the directive.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside said, it is not easy to translate very technical potential crimes into easily understood legislative words and phrases. We are fortunate that the computer industry speaks English. Hon. Members have said that perhaps it is not a form of English that comes easily to the ear. Hon. Members are highly literate and well versed in the English language, and the very brevity and simplicity of computer language may not fall easily on them. Those of us brought up on duodecimal and binary notation believe that the clarity of methemical thought is infinitely superior to the English tongue and, to us, the simplicity of computer language greatly commends itself. The English language now reigns supreme throughout the world and that is

probably due to the computer and aviation industries rather than to the beauties of Shakespeare, the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer.

Dr. Lewis Moonie (Kirkcaldy): What about Greek and Hebrew?

Miss Nicholson: My copy of the Old Testament in Hebrew is, sadly, not opened very often.

Through the adoption of the English language as the computer tongue, the computer world has spread so widely that it has become international. That has been mentioned. It is so international that the very beginnings of the computer language in French have long since gone into oblivion. When talking to a French computer specialist no one thinks of a computer as a cerveau electronique. The very idea of an electronic brain makes one feel a little uncomfortable, but the word computer is international.

It is international because computer hardware has tumbled in price. Unlike the prices of so many consumer durables, hardware prices have gone down and down and so has the purchase price of computer software. The marvellous breakthrough is that computers have not just become human friendly, but are used everywhere. However, the very cheapness has brought an enormous problem. The simplicity of use and the widespread investment by companies and individuals in computers means that anybody who wants to can have access to a computer. It is also easy for people to have access to other people's computers.

The open-systems interconnection was introduced in 1978 when the great mainframe manufacturers agreed to make computer hardware and software interchangeable for practical purposes so that users could have free competition and free choice. People were able to buy one piece of equipment or software from one manufacturer and compatible equipment from another, whereas in the old days compatible equipment was available only by buying from the same manufacturer.

The introduction of open-systems interconnection has meant free access into other people's systems, and that freedom of access has attracted the criminal fraternity. I do not mean a burglar in an old-fashioned eye mask carrying a jemmy and with a sack over his back who, I hope, will end up in striped pyjamas in Dartmoor. I am talking about some very unpleasant people in the international criminal fraternity.

Mr. Colvin: My hon. Friend is canvassing for more constituents, but there is a point that needs to be made. We all welcome the introduction and development of open systems of which the Unix system is one. Without legislation that is agreed internationally, to the effect that unauthorised access is a crime, there is a real danger that owners of computer network systems will be encouraged to erect ring fences of security around their systems. One has in mind university systems that are useful for sharing information and data. Without the law to convict unauthorised users of those systems, there is a danger that the systems will be less open and less available and that society will suffer as a result.

Miss Nicholson: I fully agree with my hon. Friend. The introduction of Janet, the joint academic network, has led to an enormous exchange of intellectual knowledge between universities, but it has also opened up those universities to unpleasant intruders. Under excellent Government initiatives, universities and research institutes are now undertaking private contracts. I am thinking of the movement towards near-market research which means that many Government-sponsored institutes take on outside contracts. They may undertake contracts that involve commercially sensitive information and which have wider implications. One professor told me how difficult it was for him to leave his computer on-line in the evening, having used it for some important research, knowing that in the morning he would wake up wondering whether someone had used it overnight to rifle a company's files, or even data about his students or his research. Janet and the open network system make it difficult to maintain confidentiality.

The Open university has suffered immense harassment and is being compelled to change the way in which it educates its students about computers. That university's telephone bills have risen dramatically and most unfairly because its computers have been used as a launch pad by hackers wishing to enter other computers internationally. If one thinks of it in ordinary terms, the university's telephones have been used to call computers in the United States and elsewhere in the world. Those of us who also receive large phone bills may sometimes wonder if hackers have not used our numbers through which to make their calls, because current technology makes that possible.

Mr. Colvin: If my hon. Friend will allow me to intervene again, and if you will permit me to do so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it may remove the necessity for me to catch your eye later to wind up the debate.

My hon. Friend's point emphasises the importance of proper audits. She may recall that a book entitled "The Cuckoo's Egg" revealed that a deficit of only 75 cents in the accounts of an American university led to a major investigation into computer hacking, which unearthed an international network of intrigue and espionage that was extremely damaging to the western powers.

Miss Nicholson: It is crucial that proper audits are undertaken, and audit partnerships are in the forefront of those supporting the Bill. My hon. Friend referred also to Clifford Stoll. It is unlikely that we shall ever see as a Member of this House someone having his intelligence quotient. He has been attacking the international hacking problem, with the consequence that a case will soon come before the courts in West Germany. However, proper auditing remains crucial.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside referred to the somewhat unflattering description of myself that he received through a network. I am pleased that those responsible recognise that the dominant industry in my constituency is not computer hacking but the production of milk. I may tell the House that one farmer in my constituency was overheard remarking to another, "I cannot understand why she is worried about commuter hacking. We don't go to London to work."

My hon. Friend made the point that the Bill will offer protection to bulletin board users. None of us wants to interrupt the free flow of information between bulletin board users, most of whom are private individuals who enjoy using their personal computers for exchanging information and knowledge in a way that has not been possible before. I can cite a particular example illustrating how important it is to encourage and not restrain bulletin

[Miss Nicholson]

boards. The members of one international club of disabled children use that facility to communicate with each other, gain knowledge and experience, and to make new friends in a way which would otherwise be a physical impossibility for them.

The Bill will protect such users in two ways. First, it will safeguard databases. Hackers are now playing nasty games with bulletin board users, by entering their systems and wiping out databases for no particular reason, but just to be nasty. If one has built up a database in one's spare time in the evening, for example, finding that it has been completely wiped out is a particularly miserable experience. That happened to one club in this country with 20,000 members.

Hackers are also breaking into bulletin board networks with pornography. I was foolish enough—but I have been told that—to ask someone to send me an example. All I can say is that I am very glad that I could not see it moving. It was repugnant. That is a particularly beastly thing to do to private bulletin board users, whose fun and interest is being wrecked by their screens being flooded with unspeakable pornography. Any right hon. or hon. Members or members of the public encountering such pornography should report it to the police.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Does my hon. Friend agree that bulletin boards, like telephone chat lines, are potentially beneficial and useful adjuncts to communication but have the potential for being misused? It is not that misuse that should be controlled, rather than the chat lines themselves?

Miss Nicholson: Of course. At one time, computers were used by only a few professors and very disciplined professionals, to communicate with one another, but the tremendous growth in microcomputing has meant the entry into the arena of the unspeakable. I am confident that the parliamentary draftsman has the fine tuning right, so that bulletin board users will be protected and not squashed out of existence.

There are even nastier implications and even more unpleasant people involved—if there can be people even more unpleasant than those who peddle pornography or force it upon others. The "Electronics and Computing for Peace Newsletter" published last summer shows a bomber and a hand emerging from a computer terminal. It also organised a bulletin board debate on my earlier Bill, even though it had already been withdrawn; that simple fact did not seem to have got through to those responsible. That newsletter commented that my earlier Bill

"would have serious consequences for investigative journalists and campaigning organisations who have to gain information in order to maintain democracy. How is it possible to campaign for decent social justice if you do not know what the Government is doing?"

That was matched by a letter that I received from a Green supporter who is fighting the Bill, who said that for their purposes Green supporters had to penetrate the secret files of companies and Government and that stepping outside the law for that purpose was crucial. That gives some insight into the minds of people who believe that they have a right of access to all knowledge and that everything should be out in the open—and should specifically be open to them.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): Have those who have contacted my hon. Friend and told her that they need access to electronic data also said that they should be able to commit burglary and other such crimes to gain access to information?

Miss Nicholson: There were comments on burglary in that same "Electronics and Computing for Peace" newsletter and they bear out what my hon. Friend said.

What is happening internationally? Towards the end of last year the Paris publication, *L'Express* identified much the same sort of movement and referred to the hackers of Hamburg. According to *L'Express*, in a few months the hackers of Hamburg were in touch with the Red Army through a contact derived from Amsterdam—it is a very international affair. In under a year the group had accessed and gone through a number of highly protected and important networks, including those at NASA and at CERN, the nuclear research institute near Geneva on the borders of France and Switzerland. They had been through Philips of France, and, through INTERNET, they had gained access to 20,000 American and European naval and military computers. In the same period, an active sympathiser of the Red Army had gone into the electronic mail boxes of the German post, which contained sensitive information emanating from officials and Government bodies. The problem has been identified not only in *L'Express* but in a mass of other publications; it is no idle worry.

An anarchist magazine called *Insurrection*—a British publication—gives us the key to the matter:

"Information systems and the data they contain have become the backbone of capital and of the State. They could be compared to the blood circulation. What is certain is that the present economic, political and social information can no longer function without this network which is taking on greater and greater proportions."

Pages of fine detail follow, telling supporters how to access Government, military and private computer systems. The understanding implicit in that article matches and surpasses the Law Commission's understanding of viruses and networks, and certainly surpasses all our knowledge, in telling us the physical details on how to break into computer systems. The article concludes:

"Without doubt any revolutionary prospect today also bases inself on the need to destroy the apparatus of dominion through the deepening of a knowledge of the arms which the class enemy has at its disposal."

That may be rather poor English, but the message is clear.

The Bill is also important on the domestic scene. Increasingly, the Government have sought to maximise our resources and minimise our expenditure by computerisation. That is especially true in the National Health Service. My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside, briefly mentioned medical records. It is crucial that we should consider that question because we have computerised hospital and GP databases and the smart card or care card, a concept launched in Exmouth, whereby a small credit card-type card carries a microchip which can link in to a mainframe containing even more medical information. Computerised medical records bring maximum danger for the security and privacy of the individual.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside has already said that there is no privacy in the United Kingdom and that no value is placed on information. We are unique among western nations in that respect. Nearly every other country has some sort of protection of the citizen's privacy and of information that is kept about him. I believe strongly that we need to

address that concept before too long. It would be wrong, foolish and shortsighted to try to address it in the Bill, which is not about information but about computer systems security. They are two different concepts, and we should remember that a computer can store worthless or invaluable information.

Following the Law Commission's document No. 110 on information, which was published in 1983, I believe that we should most seriously reconsider the question. In the wake of the Bill—once it has reached the statute book—we must look into the problem of information.

I know of cancer victims whose medical records have been accessed. Such patients may not have told their husbands, fathers or employers how bad their cancer is or what their likely expectation of life is and they certainly do not want the information to be given to others without their agreement. They may not—dare I say it—even know themselves; the doctor may have deemed it better to keep the knowledge from the patient, in which case the decision was probably wrong, although that is another matter. In France there are well-documented cases of the most easily visible problem. AIDS victims can be discovered through their blood details and then they can be blackmailed. That is an extreme example but one can imagine other uncomfortable circumstances in which people's medical records are known by others who do not have their best interests at heart. Extremely unpleasant things have happened in the United States, where people have tried to kill patients in hospital by accessing their drug records and altering their prescriptions on computer. It is important to consider the implications as we rapidly computerise medical records in the United Kingdom. I know that we shall have to look into the matter.

The problem also applies to social security records. We have 22 million records on line—that is the number of social security claimants. Not only are those records on line; they are local, and it will therefore be difficult to protect them. With the introduction of the community charge, too, much information about individuals will be collected by local treasurers for the first time and held on computer. The only way in which to manage the community charge economically is to place the information on computer. I have heard of cases in Lothian and in other parts of Scotland where it is said that hackers have accessed district treasurers' computers and wiped out records of people over 18 and alive who are eligible to pay the community charge and substituted dead people's details. In my area, a gentleman who now resides in a grave received a demand for the community charge. The vicar who received the form on his behalf filled in the box in which one is asked to identify the head of household with "God".

I use those examples to point out the increasingly important part that computers play in the administration of Government services locally and nationally. The large computerisation programme being undertaken by the Inland Revenue is also crucial. It is most important that the extensive new computer systems are kept properly secure. The Inland Revenue has properly invested in the best possible security systems in terms of both hardware and software, but even so, that does not allow for the fact that, under current legislation, breaking in—I use that term, although we are not talking about physical break-ins—to a computer system, looking at people's records and corrupting those records is a wholly legal activity.

It is no good saying that people must increase their protection, because hackers are very clever. They will find a way round every form of protection that one buys or creates. That is what they are there for. They make a great deal of money out of it and the German hackers, at any rate, support a drug-based lifestyle on their activities. I was about to say, "enjoy", but I should certainly not enjoy a lifestyle based on drugs. Because drugs are expensive, hackers need to make a great deal of money to support their lifestyle.

Government computerisation has made us all a great deal more vulnerable, as has company computerisation. The City of London money markets, Lloyd's and all sorts of financial organisations that have made Britain financially great and far advanced depend upon computers.

I am proud to say that all the main clearing banks support the initiative to outlaw hacking. I have letters from them all—and from the Bank of England and the great financial institutions of the City of London. The banks have been most public spirited. I do not hesitate to name Barclay's bank. Sir John Quinton was the first to say that Barclays had a problem. He was public spirited enough to stand up and be counted. When I carried out my research 18 months ago, everybody was willing to admit privately that there were problems, but nobody was willing to admit that publicly. Other great supporters of the initiative are the mainframe manufacturers, in particular IBM and DEC. Their chief executives have provided great help. A number of membership organisations have come forward, such as the British Computer Society, where John Brookes and his colleagues have been working so hard, and the CBI where John Banham and Judith Vinson have worked tirelessly on the problem and have been incredibly helpful to all of us.

At this point I ought to refer to the amendments that I intend to table in Committee. If the Committee turns them down, that will just be hard luck on me, but at least they will have been given an airing. They will at some point have to be incorporated in legislation. This may not be the right Bill in which to incorporate them. I shall propose that electronic eavesdropping should be outlawed and that computer evidence be receivable in court. I cannot believe that Judge Pickles will be able to understand how a computer crime may have been committed if he does not have in front of him a couple of print outs. I do not know whether he will ask the sort of questions that his colleague asked about Miss Bordes. I despair of our judges. I should prefer some of my colleagues who are computer literate to be the judges in such cases. They are wasting their talents. They ought to be where they would count.

Mr. Colvin: My hon. Friend gave the impression that under section 69 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 computer evidence is not admissible in court. It is, in fact, admissible in court. Will she clarify that point?

Miss. Nicholson: I should prefer to clarify it in Committee or I shall have to deal in detail with my amendments. I know that my hon. Friend does not want me to do that today. There is a time and a place for that.

There are ways in which computer evidence receivable in court can properly be strengthened. The Law Commission thought that the ways in which computer evidence could be receivable in court had not been properly explored. I, and others, believe that it would be

[Miss. Nicholson]

sensible to address the problem now and to incorporate a provision covering that aspect in the Bill. That is why it took the form of a clause in the Bill that I introduced.

Apart from the police needing more resources to track down criminals, we shall also have to consider how the police go about that task. When the police investigate, say, a burglary they have to obtain a magistrate's warrant. That is the way in which the police ought to pursue these almost invisible criminals. I shall also table an amendment on electronic picketing.

As this is an international problem, we must fall into line with our international partners. However much we may wish to retain our sovereignty within the European Community, the fact is that there is no electronic sovereignty. Whether we like it or not, this is one world and we are late in introducing legislation to combat computer misuse.

The Netherlands, the Federal Republic of Germany, Iceland, Canada, the United States and France have already introduced legislation. France introduced a law in 1985. It is a very complicated law because the French language is so refined, with the result that they have gone so far with definitions that they have never been tested. Our law, drafted in English by our parliamentary draftsmen will be capable of being used.

The United States legislated in 1984 against hacking. They are now legislating against viruses. Switzerland's constitution contains a clause that relates to the protection of a citizen's reputation. They have used that clause against computer hackers. Switzerland now believes that comprehensive legislation is required.

Britain is a Johnny-come-lately. I do not accept that the Secretary of State could not have included a Bill covering computer misuse in the Queen's Speech. He has seen the light too late. If a Bill can be introduced now, it should have been possible to prepare one in time for Government legislation. That is where it rightly belongs. I give all credit to my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside for having recognised the importance of introducing a Bill on computer misuse and for having taken up the matter with great energy and vigour. I am positive that he will ensure that it reaches the statute book. I most warmly congratulate him on introducing the Bill.

Legislation that may follow may point in two different directions. We shall have to address the problem of access to information. The second problem relates to the use of computers. This Bill is concerned with computer misuse. Standards vary greatly. The amount of information held on computers affects all our lives. It matters, therefore, that high standards, especially in the public sector, should be maintained. The United States has introduced much legislation to cover that aspect. I hope to introduce similar legislation after the Bill reaches the statute book.

I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in the debate. I thank in particular lawyers such as Stephen Saxby, the chairman of the faculty of law at Southampton university, the British and Irish legal education and technological associations and other lawyers who have worked so hard to ensure the introduction of this Bill. I commend it to the House. I shall assist in what I hope will be its speedy passage on to the statute book.

11.17 am

Dr. Lewis Moonie (Kirkcaldy): I preface my remarks with an apology to hon. Members for the fact that I shall be unable to stay until the end of the debate. I have a pressing family commitment early this afternoon. I apologise to the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) and to his hon. Friends and mine for that discourtesy.

I have many years of experience of working with computers. In the computer sense, I remain semi-literate. I know a great deal about what they ought to be able to do and what they can do, but I know very little about their methods of operation. I have used them in industry, in a personal capacity, in my work in the National Health Service and in local government. I can testify to the damage, so eloquently described by the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson), which can be done to crucial health care systems. The unauthorised tampering with files relating to diabetes cases has had a serious effect on the management of a group of seriously ill patients. I hope that the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside will forgive me if I direct mild criticism not at him but at his colleagues on the Front Bench.

The Bill is both important and necessary. It is a belated recognition of the growing and serious problem of unauthorised breaches of, and access to, computer files. The problem is compounded in many cases by interference with or destruction of the material in those files. The motive for many of those acts is simple to understand—human greed. We are all familiar with greed—not with personal greed, but as a general principle.

Although we do not condone theft, we can possibly understand the need or personal circumstances which may drive someone to commit that act. That is not the case with the kind of computer misuse that we are discussing. Very often the people involved are educated professional people and they have the wherewithal to afford to carry out such behaviour.

Mr. William Powell: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not overlook the fact that, while greed is obviously important, so is malice.

Dr. Moonie: I was coming to that. Although we may not accept greed, we can understand it. The motive for malice is more difficult to comprehend. I can understand it thanks to my background in psychiatry. I have seen more examples of the human reasoning behind such apparently senseless and vicious acts which can result in wanton damage to someone's well-being or property.

The motives for malice are very complex. I believe that they are related to the kind of person who promotes pornography through bulletin boards and who then has a secret and nasty chuckle to himself in the security of his own room. They are similar to people who make obscene telephone calls or misuse short-wave radio. There are many kinds of people involved and most, although not exclusively all, are men. Although I have never professed to have espoused the cause of Freud in my psychiatric work, I believe that a profound sexual inadequacy is often related to such behaviour.

Miss Emma Nicholson: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is extremely unfair that amateur radio enthusiasts are strictly controlled by law, while amateur computer enthusiasts or professionals are not?

Dr. Moonie: I agree wholeheartedly. The hon. Lady has said that she will introduce amendments in Committee, and the Opposition will look at them with great sympathy and interest to see whether we can support them.

As has already been said, the consequences of computer hacking can be very serious. Information technology, including the storage of data in computer files—which is what we are particularly concerned with today—and the ability to transfer it instantaneously anywhere in the world, plays a crucial role in modern society. Without it, many things that we take for granted would be either inconceivable or, at the least, extremely difficult and time-consuming to perform.

I have had wide experience of computer systems, but I have yet to see one that saves money for the organisation that employs it. The system may allow the organisation to do much more with its information, but sadly it will not save it money. Saving money was always the motive that we advanced in local government when requesting greater and better computer systems to operate our financial management and housing. I have yet to see a system which saves money, but they have become indispensable.

In many cases details of records and transactions are held only in electronic form—certainly only in the immediately retrievable sense. As a consequence, there are vast savings in storage space as the former manual records would have taken up a great deal of room. The electronic systems are therefore particularly valuable for small organisations for which space is often at a premium.

The loss of data in electronic form would be a crippling blow for many social and commercial organisations. One of the nastiest cases involving such loss of data occurred last year when a very worthy charitable organisation had its files interfered with by a so-called computer virus and suffered catastrophic loss of data as a result.

Every authority recognises that interference with electronically held data is growing. However, the true extent of the problem is still, sadly, difficult to estimate. After all, only the most florid examples hit the headlines —for example, major frauds and the so-called AIDS diskette to which the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside referred. Those obvious examples hit the headlines while others do not. The evidence suggests that very few of the detectable offences lead to successful prosecutions for fraud.

To summarise the present position, I can possibly do no better than to quote the CBI briefing, possibly a rare occurrence for an Opposition Member. The briefing refers to three principles. It states:

"There is a need for the law to keep pace with changes in modern information and control technology and its uses.

The risks that accompany many forms of computer misuse are considerable.

There is substantial evidence of the damage and losses that computer misuse can cause."

The case for legislation is overwhelming. As the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) asked, why must we have a private Member's Bill to introduce this worthwhile legislation rather than the Government introducing their own primary legislation? Most hon. Members agree that action is urgent and necessary. I do not accept the defence that there was not enough time to introduce a Bill because of the timing of the Law Commission report. There may not have been time to mention a Bill in the Queen's Speech, but that did not prevent the introduction last year of a Firearms (Amendment) Bill when it proved necessary. Nor did it stop the Government introducing the Football Spectators Bill, which was not included in the previous year's Queen's Speech. There are ample precedents for the Government to introduce legislation when there is a pressing need for it.

I am a representative of the Opposition Trade and Industry team, and I find it bewildering to understand why the legislation is being introduced through the Department of Trade and Industry and not through the Home Office. The Minister for Industry may have had his arm twisted to deal with the Bill, but he is well versed in the operations of the Home Office and perhaps he can bring that slant to our proceedings.

I am concerned that important and necessary legislation should be subjected to the vagaries of the private Member's Bill procedure. Often over the past few years worthwhile measures have bitten the dust because they ran out of time or because someone was not too keen on the following private Member's Bill and decided to use the present Bill as a means of thwarting someone else.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Is not one of the advantages of the private Member's Bill procedure that we hear excellent speeches from Opposition Members? They look at the measure on its merits instead of deciding how to oppose it?

Dr. Moonie: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the Labour party always considers measures on their merits. The fact that we find very little merit in most of what the Government do, does not preclude us on occasions accepting and even supporting measures. However, I accept that the Bill might have been framed more widely by the Government and we might have found more in it on which to take issue.

Mr. Colvin: Further to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce), supporters of a private Member's Bill are encouraged to make useful and constructive interventions in Committee. However, with Government legislation, they often sit in Committee like a lot of tailors' dummies.

Dr. Moonie: That is one way of describing them. That is perhaps an argument for timetabling all Bills and, frankly, that is a measure which I for one would wholeheartedly support in the interests of adequate debate. However, I recognise that there might then be an overwhelming number of very long and boring inconsequential speeches from the Government Benches rather than from the Opposition Benches, as some would say happens at the moment.

Mr. William Powell: Are we to detect a change in Labour party policy? When the matter was discussed and voted on previously, Opposition Front-Bench Members rejected it.

Dr. Moonie: It is an accepted convention that, on Friday mornings when a private Member's Bill is being debated, Front-Bench Members often speak in a personal capacity. I assure the hon. Member for Corby that that is what I am doing. *[Interruption.]* That was another sedentary intervention by the Minister. I am certain that he will defend his case with his customary vigour. When he defends the Government for allowing the private Member's Bill procedure to be used for this measure, it will be interesting to note by how many decibels his voice rises. I have served on many Committees with the Minister and

[Dr. Moonie]

I have noted an almost 100 per cent. correlation—the louder the Minister's voice, the more inadequate his case. Opposition Members will listen with great interest.

On initial reading, the Bill is well drafted, and I compliment those who are responsible for it. The notes are excellent and comprehensive. However, the Bill should cover various degrees of offence. I shall not refer to all the clauses in detail, but I disagree with the suggestion that the Bill should not attempt to define a computer. We need to apply more thought to whether a computer can be defined in terms that are broad enough to act as a catch-all for future development.

Mr. Colvin: I thought long and hard about definitions. The problem is that it was six weeks ago when I first defined the word "computer" to my satisfaction. That definition is already out of date. The passage of time and the pace of development within the computer industry mean that any definition of a computer or a computer system would soon be out of date. We would have to write in provisions for secondary legislation so that, every year, a Standing Committee could consider the matter and Ministers could redefine what they meant by a computer system. On balance, the matter is far better left to the courts to decide.

Dr. Moonie: Perhaps that is an over-mechanistic definition of "computer". Computers could adequately be defined by function.

Miss Emma Nicholson: I recommend that the hon. Gentleman, whose acuity I cherish, looks at the French law. It was difficult for the Library to find the French law, but the staff kindly sent for it from France. I was interested to see the definition in French, largely because, when hon. Members were working on the Copyright, Designs and Patents Bill in Committee and I tabled new clause 13 which outlawed hacking for copyright purposes, the French copyright Act was much in my thoughts and reading. The French law against hacking, which was introduced in 1985 and has not yet been tested, amounts to many pages. The French brain, with all its brilliance, loves to define and redefine. The French have ended up with a mammoth Bill that is full of technical definitions which, as far as I can gather, have not been used.

Dr. Moonie: Of course, there are also the inadequacies of the French language to contend with. We cannot really expect the French language to legislate in English.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I was interested to hear the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) say that he did not include a definition of a computer because it was difficult to do so. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is a rather poor excuse? Does not the lack of a definition create a great catch-all? The law could be brought into disrepute if people are charged with something that the House presumably does not presently envisage will be a crime but which will become a crime because there is no definition.

Dr. Moonie: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Hon. Members will be interested to hear what he says on the subject. Perhaps we can return to it in Committee.

I am grateful that Scottish circumstances have been properly covered. That is consequent on the Scottish Law Commission's report. I assume that the relevant clause has been drafted exactly as it proposed it and that, therefore, there will no difficulty with Scots Law.

I may have some difficulty with two clauses. For example, I should like an explanation of why clause 11 does not extend to Scotland. As a layman, I assume that it is because of some difference between the laws of the two countries. I may also have some difficulty with clause 12. I shall need an assurance that full and proper control will be exercised over access to computer files by the police or any other authority. I am not certain whether anomalies will be created by clause 12. Sadly, it is not inconceivable that a police officer will commit an offence under the Bill, and I should not like him to be protected by the wording of the clause. However, I accept that full discussion can take place in Committee. I have no comments to make about the remaining clauses.

The Bill is generally accepted as being worthwhile and necessary, and it will receive substantial support from both sides of the House. Of course, that does not mean that Opposition Members are entirely happy with it or that we shall not seek to amend it in Committee. I am quite certain that the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside and some of his hon. Friends will attempt to do so.

There remain several fundamental questions that are probably common to criminal legislation. First, will the Bill provide adequate deterrence? It may deter the occasional recreational hacker, but the seriously disturbed person who perpetrates serious offences may not be adequately deterred by it. People will not be deterred if there seems to be little chance of being caught. Will the Bill be practicable and will the police be able to enforce it? The hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) asked whether adequate training would be available for police officers to carry out proper investigations. It is easy to assume that the passage of a law makes it possible to convict people under it, but we must catch them first. It is not easy to locate someone who is committing a computer offence. With the development of electronic tracing, whereby a number is accessed—most computers are accessed through a modem—the source of the call can be immediately traced. That matter should be looked at carefully. We may need to make provision for it in the Bill in case there are difficulties. Will inventive minds find some way of circumventing the Bill? I hope that its drafting is secure enough to prevent that.

I support the Bill in principle. Its internal structure is sound, but it is a matter of conjecture whether it will do what it is purported to do.

11.38 am

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) on bringing forward one of the most important private Member's Bills in recent years and on his extremely comprehensive presentation. My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) must also be considered to be one of the true begetters of this important legislation.

Nobody really knows how widespread computer-linked crime is, both internationally and in this country. I use the phrase "computer-linked crime" because much of the wrongful activity that one associates with computers is already criminal. A great deal of what one might call "insider abuse" by people who work for a company or who

have been dismissed by that company falls in that category, especially when they damage the company's programs or software.

One difficulty is that while we are aware of the tip of the iceberg, we do not know how much lies below the surface. With most crime, people realise that they have had a crime committed against them and it is a matter of detecting who has committed it. However, with a great deal of computer-linked crime, if one is aware that a crime has been committed, it is sometimes possible easily to identify the perpetrator.

There are signs that the activities that have been discussed this morning and other similar activities linked with computers exist on a vast scale. It is interesting to consider the position in Hong Kong because, remarkably, it has been estimated that at least 80 per cent. of the computers in Hong Kong are or have been infected with at least one kind of virus. Indeed, about eight different viruses are doing the rounds. Perhaps one reason for that is that even quite large companies in Hong Kong tend to use pirated software. That is another problem to which the House has devoted its attention and to which we shall doubtless return. That problem is compounded in Hong Kong because the security procedures there are often disregarded. A computer consultant with Price Waterhouse, Mr. Jimmy Mah, has said:

"It's quite simple. If I wanted my competitor to go bankrupt I would just anonymously send someone in that company an infected games disk."

That happens on a large scale in Hong Kong. I endorse everything that has been said about the Bill not being a substitute for security, but unless there is reasonable security, backed up by legislative provisions, we could face in Britain the dangers that have been well demonstrated in Hong Kong.

Some would say that the existing provisions in the law are adequate. However, they have been tested only once or twice. Reference might be made to the famous instance in 1987 when the Duke of Edinburgh's Prestel mail box was penetrated. In what has come to be known as the "Gold and Shifreen" case, the House of Lords ruled that falsely persuading a computer that certain information had originated from a specific individual did not amount in law to forgery.

The applicability to computers of other offences such as false pretences and misrepresentation has yet to be tested by the courts. However, the whole area is shrouded in great doubt. It is right that the House should be sufficiently up to date to take account of the changes in technology that necessitate a modification of our existing law.

As has already been said, some people have suggested that some of the low-level activities that are dealt with in clause 1 do not do a great deal of harm. However, that is doubtful. It is worth considering the valuable work that has been carried out by Mr. Tim Hackworth of the British Computer Society, which has drawn attention to the serious harm that may sometimes have been caused unintentionally. Two French hackers, for example, broke into a life-support system in a hospital's intensive care unit and, perhaps unwittingly, turned it off. There are several known instances of people breaking into air traffic control systems. One trembles to think of the dangers of that. I shall refer later to actions that are being taken in respect of such critical systems. In another instance, somebody who was HIV-positive had his medical records penetrated and was subjected to blackmail. In another instance, an insurance company's records were penetrated and aspiring burglars had access to information about items that householders had declared as being of special value. Finally, and perhaps most commonly, there are many known instances of disgruntled employees disrupting their firm's records and perhaps taking commercially confidential product information with them in the hope of attracting a new employer or of selling it to the competitors of their previous firm.

The Department of Trade and Industry has done a great deal of work on the safety of critical systems and it is likely that, in future, systems such as those linked to air traffic control will be much more secure. It is important that such systems should not be accessible via the public network. I believe that we can be assured by a great deal of the work that is being carried out in that area.

Mr. Colvin: As one with an interest in civil aviation, I have investigated this issue and have been assured that the air traffic control system in the United Kingdom is on a closed circuit and that it is therefore virtually impossible for a hacker to gain access. That is vital, because otherwise one might start a lot of alarmist reporting that would give people the feeling that they were in danger in the air. I am assured that our ATC system is safe.

Mr. Waller: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Whatever the secure system, it is absolutely right that it should be backed by the law. It should be clear that there are severe penalties—such as those provided in my hon. Friend's Bill—to show that society regards such activities as absolutely indefensible.

My hon. Friend and others have already dealt with the question of the intention to cause harm and the beliefs of some people about those who indulge in hacking only as a hobby, without any wish to cause harm. It could be argued that drunken drivers have no intention of causing harm, but that would not be regarded as an excuse. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) has said that he has never used the defence in court that a burglar had burgled a house for the public good.

That brings me to my next point, about security. It has been suggested that if the security is not very good, that in some way mitigates the offence. It is interesting that in West Germany, where similar legislative provisions exist, the degree of security is taken into account. It would therefore be possible for a computer hacker or somebody who penetrated a system there to argue that its security was inadequate. However, if my hon. Friend the Member for Corby were presenting a case, I do not think that he would suggest that it was a defence that the house had an inadequate lock. Everybody should be encouraged to apply the maximum security, but the fact that such security does not exist to a sufficient extent is no defence for somebody who might be accused under the Bill.

Reference has been made to the arrival of the single European market in 1992. Much work is being done in the computer sector to prepare for that. Open-systems interconnection work is moving along fast. It is a set of internationally accepted technical standards which enable the computer system to operate across national boundaries with almost any other computer system, irrespective of the national or commercial origin of the hardware or software. That makes it even more urgent not only to press ahead with legislation in this country, but to discuss with our partners within the Community and

[Mr. Waller]

indeed, outside it, the need for measures in other countries. It must be generally accepted throughout the Community and internationally—to the extent that that is possible—that computer misuse is a criminal act for which appropriate sanctions must exist.

When discussing the damage that can be done, it is worth pointing out that even the police national computer has not been free from penetration. Someone successfully interchanged several criminal records on its database. When he was caught he argued that he had not destroyed, stolen or, indeed, falsified the information, which was still intact. He had simply moved it around. In that case, the person involved was successfully prosecuted for falsifying evidence put before a court. One wonders whether there are other instances where information was not obtained and put before a court because such action was carried out successfully. Here again, we come to the tip of the iceberg syndrome and the need for action to be taken. It is another reason why the Bill is welcome.

I pay tribute to the work of David Frost, who is a partner in the data security group of Price Waterhouse, a company which already has considerable experience in this matter. Mr. Frost has done a great deal of research into the position in other countries. It is interesting that the number of countries with legislative provisions against computer misuse is growing all the time. It includes Australia, Canada, Japan, Holland, the United States of America and West Germany.

Two incidents have arisen recently in north America. In one, four college students were arrested for making $20,000 worth of long-distance telephone calls by using a program that dialled toll-free numbers. The program then took control of the company's electronic switch so that the calls could be re-routed to any part of the world. In another case, a university professor was suspended after making improper use of the university's computer facilities for his own purpose.

A wide range of people are prepared to take advantage of loopholes in the law. My hon Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside is plugging an important loophole with his Bill. By doing so, he is doing a service not only to the House but to the nation.

11.53 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I congratulate the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) on winning a high position in the ballot, but he could have chosen a better Bill. I have serious doubts about it, and not because I approve of hackers or believe that those who misuse or gain unauthorised access to a computer are doing something harmless.

The Bill is ill defined. We have heard aleady that it does not define what a computer is. It is lopsided and does not tackle the most important aspects of computer misuse, its implications have not been well thought out. For example, it contains unnecessary criminalisation, and in years to come will affect areas which the sponsor does not envisage.

I wish to make a few comments about the parliamentary process surrounding the Bill and the involvement of the Government and the Law Commission. The Law Commission was harassed by the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) into producing quickly a report on computer misuse. It is one of the few Law Commission reports that I have seen that has been published without accompanying draft legislation. That haste means that we have no means of comparing the intricate details of the legislative proposals in the Bill with those that would have been produced by the Law Commission.

One difference between the Bill and the Law Commission recommendations that I have noticed is that the sentence has been increased from three months to six months imprisonment. I assume that that is to do with the rate of inflation. Perhaps the sponsor will reply to that point. Is that the only way in which the Bill differs from the Law Commission's proposals? For example, the first sentence of the explanatory memorandum of the Bill says:

> "This Bill gives effect, with modifications, to recommendations made by the Law Commission in its Report on Computer Misuse."

That sentence is unhelpful. If we do not know how the Commission's proposals have been modified, how can we properly discuss the Bill? The sponsor should furnish a complete list of the modifications when the Bill goes into Committee.

The Minister for Industry (Mr. Douglas Hogg): The hon. Gentleman asks what the Law Commission would have recommended by way of legislation. If he cares to look at page 35 of the commission's report, he will see a concise and useful summary of the main recommendations. With slight and few exceptions, the Bill reflects those recommendations.

Mr. Cohen: Of course I shall do that. However, the usual process was not employed. Normally the Law Commission produces its own draft legislation which can be compared with the Bill. I take the Minister's point. It testifies to the haste with which the Bill has been brought forward.

On 10 October last year Mr. Peter Casey, the director of computer security at the Department of Trade and Industry, sent out a letter asking for comments on the Law Commission's report by the end of October. He allowed only three weeks for people to respond. The letter said that its purpose was to ask for supporting evidence that would help establish a case for or against legislation. It said that the Government aimed to legislate in the current Session. Clearly he assumed in October that the legislation would be in Government time.

In early November something happened. We had smoke signals from the old fag end himself, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. They suggested that, because of the pressure of legislation in the Queen's speech, Government time would not be found for the Bill. In true Marie-Antoinette fashion, he was quoted in the press as saying something like, "Let them find a private Member to promote the Bill."

Private Members' time is precious. It should not be taken over by the Government. The Government may rewrite and help with the Bill, but they should not use a private Member to promote their Bill. We are dealing with a 19-clause Government Bill promoted by a private Member. That is an encroachment on our time by the Government.

Mr. Colvin: The hon. Gentleman should direct his remarks at me rather than at my hon. Friend the Minister. If he had been in the Chamber earlier, he would have heard me say that I believe that there is decided merit in the Bill

being introduced by a Back Bencher. If the Bill was introduced by the Government, they might be persuaded to exceed the recommendations of the Law Commission's report, especially with regard to police powers. Perhaps my hon. and learned Friend the Minister will comment on that. My Bill has stuck closely to the Law Commission's recommendations, which have been debated at great length, just as the working paper No. 110 on which the Law Commission based its recommendations has been the subject of debate for some time. Many people gave evidence and many have written in support of those recommendations.

The hon. Gentleman is a strong supporter of the rights and privileges of Back Benchers to introduce legislation. I am sure he would be the first to agree that, as a Back Bencher is promoting this Bill, any temptation to add to police powers—about which we must all think carefully —could be resisted.

Mr. Cohen: I accept that point, and I agree that any Back Bencher may introduce any Bill that he likes, but the signs suggest that this is a Government Bill. It is a big Bill and I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) that there would have been advantages in the Government presenting it. It then would have been subject to scrutiny and the Government would have been obliged to defend its proposals, whether or not they went beyond the Law Commission's recommendations. A barrage of civil servants would also be available to provide information. When the Bill goes to Committee, the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside and his colleagues may not have all the detailed facts available. The Government, however, could present such details about the change in the law.

It is worth noting the contents of early-day motion 412, which condemns:

"the unprecedented taking of Back Benchers' rare prime debating time by a Front Bench Member"—

referring to my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), who introduced a ten-minute Bill on the ambulance dispute in an attempt to get it settled—

"thereby usurping a Back Bencher's customary prerogative."

The Government, however, are using Back Benchers' time to introduce this Bill. The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside and the hon. Members for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) and for Coventry, South West (Mr. Butcher), who are sponsors of the Bill, signed the EDM about Back Benchers' time being usurped, yet here they are supporting a Bill that does just that.

The Bill criminalises the act of unauthorised access to a computer, irrespective of the circumstances in which that is done. A person might access a computer to read something that he could obtain in a library—for example, a Shakespearean sonnet. Such an act will become a criminal offence subject to six-months' imprisonment. By contrast, an unauthorised person who reads the most sensitive manual files can get away with it, but such action is far more offensive.

We would be misleading ourselves if we believed that the Bill is anodyne or uncontroversial. The heated argument that occurred when the British Computer Society had a meeting on 27 November in a Committee Room of the House demonstrated that. That argument was between Professor Brian Niblett, a Home Office adviser and an eminent specialist in computer law, and the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West. My researcher, together with about 130 computer specialists and barristers, was present. At the end of the debate the vote was close, 3:2 in favour of the Law Commission's proposals, which demonstrates the depth of division about the Bill.

That division was highlighted by the press release from the Data Protection Registrar, whose job is to achieve a balance between the users of personal data and the individuals affected. The headline ran:

"Some Hacking Should Be A Crime"—

not all——

"But exclude younsters for simply misbehaving".

The Bill is all about hacking and the press release stated:

"In response to the Law Commission, the Data Protection Registrar has given his views on 'hacking' into computer files. The CBI recently commented on these views. The Registrar, Mr. Eric Howe, supports the criminalisation of some cases of hacking, but emphasises the duty of computer users to protect their own systems and data adequately. 'This is not a simple issue', Mr. Howe said."

The promoter of the Bill is treating it as such because he is treating all hacking as illegal. Mr. Howe continued:

"I take the view that, rather than creating a single blanket offence, a selective approach is more appropriate.

One offence should be related to an intent on the part of the 'hacker' to gain some advantage for himself or another, or to damage another person's interests. A second category could arise when actual damage is caused to data or software, whether inadvertently or not. And finally an offence barrier should be established for some particular kinds of systems which affect the health or safety of individuals and with which any attempt to interfere might endanger life. These could include, for example, air traffic control and medical systems.

Mere misbehaviour, for example by youngsters, is not a matter which we normally would seek to criminalise unless it has some significant effect. To criminalise all unauthorised access or attempts at accesss regardless of whether there is damage or risk of damage would be to take a serious step which I find hard to justify as a matter of principle.

I believe that it would be wrong to criminalise those who have no criminal intent and create no hazard. This is analogous to a case of trespass where no damage is caused. There may be a case, however, for dealing with persistent unauthorised access.

We should not lose sight of the fact that computer users ought to protect their own systems and, as regards personal data, this is a duty clearly established in the Data Protection Principles. You've only yourself to blame if your neighbour's cattle get into your unfenced field."

That press release presents a much more sophisticated case for what is criminalised or not than does the Bill, under which all hacking will be illegal.

Some barristers are also against the proposals. In *The Times* of 21 April 1989 Alistair Kelman, a barrister specialising in computer law, said:

"The only gap in the law is when a hacker gains access to a computer and just has a look around."—

that is the key phrase.

"But the existing laws of fraud, theft and criminal damage cover cases where financial loss or intentional damage occurs."

He queried why those who access a computer just to have a look around should be guilty of an offence. If a hacker breaks into a medical database and uses the information to blackmail someone, he would be caught by the law on blackmail. The hacker who broke into a defence computer and sold its secrets would be prosecuted under the Official Secrets Act 1989. As a result of the Bill, someone who accesses a computer just to have a look round will be guilty of a section 1 offence. The Bill's net is being cast far too wide, and it will lead to many people, some vulnerable, committing a crime where none now exists.

The word "computer" is not defined in the Bill. On 13 March 1989 there was a debate in the House at 3 am to

[Mr. Cohen]

which the hon. Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) and my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) contributed. Given its timing, some hon. Members may be unaware of it. The debate was about the lack of legislation covering electronic surveillance devices. Those hon. Gentlemen were rightly trying to pressurise the Government into controlling surreptitious electronic surveillance devices which can be bought cheaply and which are being used increasingly to infringe privacy. The then Minister of State, Home Office, now the Government Chief Whip, said that when controlling such devices there was a major problem about their definition. He said:

"The Government are not persuaded that it is practicable or necessary to extend the criminal law to cover electronic or other surveillance or eavesdropping, objectionable though such activities can undoubtedly be. A criminal offence must be clearly defined, well understood and capable of effective enforcement. It would be difficult to define an offence in this area without making it so narrow that it was easily evaded or soon overtaken by new technology, or so wide that it was unreasonable and unenforceable in practice."—[*Official Report* 13 March 1989; Vol. 149, c. 187.]

The Government gave that as a reason why they could not legislate, and yet the Bill legislates without a definition. That approach is inconsistent.

If the Bill attempted to define a computer, I appreciate that there would be a problem because it might not cover the next generation of computers. It would have to be continually updated to stay the course. However, it would be better to have a definition than none at all because otherwise the Bill could bring the law into disrepute by making too many actions criminal.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The hon. Gentleman has argued the case for defining the word "computer". I am sure that he will keep well in mind the fact that in paragraph 3·39 of the Law Commission's report precisely that point was considered, and the Commission recommended against defining that word.

Mr. Cohen: I appreciate that, but how can the Minister make that point and justify the former Minister of State, Home Office, saying on 13 March that the Government could not legislate against electronic surveillance machines because they could not produce a definition. That is inconsistent. If they could not legislate for such machines because they could not define the word "computer" they should not legislate for hacking. If they can legislate against hacking because they do not need a definition, they should legislate against electronic surveillance. The Government cannot have it both ways.

By omitting the definition, the Bill will not only apply to mainframe and personal computers and other computer technology, but will extend to a range of consumer electronics that currently have, or will have, programmable or computer-type functions. I am sure that the sponsor did not think that that was the case, but it could happen. In years to come, the Bill could apply to a washing machine, controlled by a chip, electronic car locks or programmable compact disc players, light switches, pocket calculators and watches. That is nonsense.

Let us suppose that an hon. Member finds an electronic personal organiser in the street and presses a button to find out whose it is so that he or she can hand it back. He or she would fiddle with the on-off switch, and, under clause 1 of the Bill, could be imprisoned for six months. Let us suppose that someone gets a brand new Rolls-Royce, parks it in the street and a young, east end lad who is dead keen on cars—there are plenty in my area—goes out, touches it and sets off the computer. He will be committing an offence under the Bill.

Mr. Colvin: Earlier the hon. Gentleman made great play about the question of intent. The intent must be there. The access may be unauthorised, but unless the hacker intends to get access to a computer system he or she will not be committing an offence.

Mr. Cohen: I take that point. However, the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West earlier spoke about how judges will interpret the provision. I would not like to think how Judge Pickles would interpret a lad touching a lock. He might not do it in an attempt to open the car and gain entry, but he might touch off the computer and that could be interpreted as intentional.

London travel cards contain conditions to the effect that they can be used only

"by the person shown in the accompanying Photocard".

Those cards cost a lost of money and, if the carrier of the card goes through computer ticket machines he or she will have to carry his photocard at all times. We are on to the ID debate. The House has never accepted that everybody must be immediately identifiable, but this Bill does so, by the back door, for people with travel cards. If carriers do not have their photocards with their season tickets, it could lead to six months in the nick for them. The Bill can apply to every-day facilities. Surely that was not the intention of the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside.

Even defining unauthorised access provides further problems. The Bill tries to do this in clause 18(5), which brings into play the employer-employee relationship. At present, someone might use an office typewriter to do a bit of personal typing, such as wedding invitations or matters relating to the local chess club tournament, and an employer would turn a blind eye to it. However, if it is done on a computer and the employee does not have authorised access, under the Bill he or she can be prosecuted and can get six months' imprisonment. That interferes with employer-employee relationships. It would be bad for the employer because the advice to employees would be to use the computer only if they had received specific authority from their employer.

These may seem extreme examples, but that is not necessarily true. A fly-on-the-wall programme in the late 1970s followed the Thames Valley police in their work. At one stage, a constable said to the desk sergeant, "Sergeant, I cannot find anything in the book to charge him with." The sergeant answered, "Go and look in the bigger book." He meant the constable to find an offence to fit the facts. The Bill, drawn as wide as it is, could easily give a policeman who wants to arrest someone the chance to do that when a computer is involved. That is wrong. An offence under clause 1 would have almost universal application whenever any electronic system was switched on.

The Bill is one-sided because it deals with private hackers, but computer misuse is much wider than that. The Government are one of the biggest, perhaps the biggest, computer misuser, yet they are not even touched on in the Bill. I tabled early-day motion 416 about the electoral register. The Government replied that they had no plans to let voters decide for themselves whether they wished their names and addresses to be sold, inform voters

that this had been done, provide guidance on privacy issues to electoral registration officers about the disclosure of information on individuals or protect those at risk should their names and addresses be sold or disclosed—for example, women who had suffered violence from their male partners. That is one example of Government abuse not touched on by the Bill. Why should the Government be allowed to get away with this without let or hindrance and pick on a few private hackers? Why should the owners get away with it without having a duty of care with regard to privacy?

The argument behind the Bill and the Law Commission's report is that we need special crimes concerning access to computers because computers are special and unauthorised access can cause damage. If computers are special, the owners of them should have special responsibilities. We have legislated to the effect that the owners of guns have to keep them in lockable, custom-built storage cupboards, yet computer misuse can also cause death and there is no duty on computer owners to maintain security.

The Bill does nothing to enhance security. First and foremost, it should encourage all computer users to improve all aspects of computer security. The hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside would have done better to pick up the recommendations of the Younger committee in 1972 to criminalise electric surveillance and eavesdropping and to tighten up the Data Protection Act 1984 which is now regarded as one of the weakest of such measures in Europe.

The Bill should not be restricted to hacking. There are three other basic ways in which computer misuse can be prevented. First, the basic security of data should be guaranteed; secondly, the procedures used should ensure that the reliability and integrity of computer operations remain intact and are properly tested; and, thirdly, privacy should be protected. Those three elements are absolutely crucial and are not addressed in the Bill.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I know that the hon. Gentleman has listened carefully to virtually all the debate, but unfortunately he was not here when my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) was introducing the Bill. He will find that many of the points he is raising were adequately covered by my hon. Friend. Perhaps he should read *Hansard*. I am sure that we would welcome him in the Committee if he wished to pursue those matters.

Mr. Cohen: I did not miss all of the speech of the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside. I apologise for missing the initial part of his speech, but I was here for the last part of it, and I heard much of what he had to say.

The hon. Gentleman's intervention does not deflect from the argument that private hacking is only a small element of computer misuse. The Government data network is not even considered in the Bill. The Government have recently answered questions from me saying that they are extending their data network into other sectors. How can we discuss unauthorised access to data as defined under clause 18(5) of the Bill when the Government refuse to define their own internal authorisation procedures? Someone might break into the Government computer network and get done under the Bill, yet the Government refuse to define what is authorised and what is unauthorised.

Probably the best and most well-known hackers are the security services. The Bill does not touch them. They have the freedom to hack at will and cause whatever damage results from that hacking. I have raised the matter on a number of occasions. I asked for a code of practice, and the Government refused. I suggested there should be independent oversight of the security services, such as the Data Protection Registrar. He is in place already. The Government should give him independent oversight over the security services if they start hacking and causing damage. But the Government will not do it. The security services represent much more hacking than a few private individuals, yet they are not recognised in the slightest in the Bill.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Perhaps such measures are being introduced simply because there is concern about commercial practices as computer use has become overdeveloped in certain commercial sectors, instead of concern about the matters that my hon. Friend mentioned. One example was the Government's insistence on trying to develop the football ID card system which they still have in cold storage. Under such a system there would have been a computer terminal in the shed at Halifax Town and it would have been very tempting for some people to interfere with that, given the problems regarding football spectators. Therefore, the Government have to introduce increasingly draconian measures in an attempt to protect their position as they have done in regard to the poll tax legislation.

Mr. Cohen: My hon. Friend is alsolutely right. The Bill has been drawn very narrowly, confining computer misuse to one group of misusers, and left out all the other groups. The duty of care has been left out altogether.

The best way forward would have been to introduce legislation to enhance the three crucial elements that I mentioned: basic security, integrity and reliability of computer procedures, and privacy, which never gets a look in. There should be duties upon owners of computers. Damages and compensation could be awarded to people affected by computer misuse by the owners of computers or by the Government. A duty of care would require owners of computers and producers of software to produce software that had been tested because if they were taken to court and could prove that the system had been properly tested they would get off, but if it was discovered that it had not been tested and damage had occurred they would be fined, and therefore the available software would improve.

Section 23 of the Data Protection Act should be extended to relate to all data, not just personal data, so that owners who did not take care to maintain the security of their data would have to pay compensation for any damage that occurred. The point made by the Data Protection Registrar about cattle in an unfenced field is right. In fact, it is more serious than that. Let us suppose, for example, that some hacker breaks into an aircraft control system and causes the aircraft to crash. The hacker would go to prison. But if those in charge of the aircraft control system had not taken care they should also be penalised for their slack procedures and should have to pay damages. That is not covered by the Bill.

In summary, the Bill fails to address the three aspects of computer security that most concerns the public: basic security, reliability and privacy. The Bill should provide

[Mr. Cohen]

that computers will have a special part to play in our future. Computer owners who expect a profit must take special care to ensure that all three aspects of computer security are addressed. The Bill is myopic in looking at only one aspect.

12.29 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): In a way I am relieved that the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy, (Dr. Moonie) is not in his place. To have one's arguments tested by a psychiatrist is bad enough but to have them tested by a computer-literate psychiatrist would give even the most robust Member the kind of nightmares that not even Freud could dream of.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) said that in the six weeks that he has been studying these matters closely, things have moved on. However, it seems that some things do not move on, because according to the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy, most hacking is due to sexual inadequacy.

I welcome the Bill as a step forward. However, it is important that the arguments advanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside are tested, and that is what I shall seek to do by asking some questions. Friday debates are often dominated by enthusiasts. Although I did not agree with everything that the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) said, he asked many worthwhile questions that need to be answered by my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry.

The Bill is similar to two Bills that we have discussed on Fridays in this Session. They were worthy Bills, but there were problems about enforceability and about whether in some aspects current common law and statute law is not sufficient to deal with the problem.

In terms of clause 1 we seek an assurance from the Minister that the innocent hacker—if one can describe any hacker as innocent—will not be put in an invidious and impossible position.

On clause 2 we want to be assured that existing law is not adequate to deal with the problem. I shall go through those problems and take up some points made in the press by commentators on these issues. The first comment is by Terence Wright who is a computer conferencing specialist. He makes a worthwhile comment when he says:

"There is a wide cultural gulf between those who learned computing in 1961 and those who learned in childhood more recently."

Is my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) able to distinguish hitting keys 1980 style from hacking? Can the courts? Will they convict the innocent because they did not do what the manuals said they should do?

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside assures us that under clause 1 hacking must be deliberate, but we need reassurances from the Minister about that. Mr. Wright also says:

"The great Prestel 'hack', which is so often cited, was a case of a wide-open door, and not of security being broken. There was no security and there should have been."

I hope that the Bill will become an Act, but no one would want it to absolve people in the computer industry from being responsible for closing doors. That is their responsibility.

We heard much in the debate about bulletin boards. Terence Wright said at some length that we do not want to ban bulletin boards in the same way as in the past people wanted to ban books. Hon. Members have reassured us about that, but perhaps the Minister may also wish to speak about it.

The substantial questions about the Bill relate to clause 2 and whether what it seeks to ban is not already covered by statute law. A person who steals money by using a computer can surely be charged under the Theft Acts of 1968 and 1978. In the case of a person who has access to a database for which charges are made the same Acts can apply. Anyone who maliciously or recklessly deletes or contaminates computer files should fall foul of the Criminal Damage Act 1971.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No.

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend the Minister says no, but perhaps he will deal with the matter more fully when he makes his speech because the matter has been raised in the press and should be answered by the Minister.

Anyone who manufactures a magnetic strip card or a password-bearing disk to access a computer could be charged under the Forgery and Counterfeiting Act 1981. Perhaps the Minister will also deal with that. There has been much sensational publicity about access to secrets. Will the Minister assure us that if there is such access the Official Secrets Acts are not sufficient to deal with the problem?

I hope that the Minister will deal with the problem of enforcement. We are reminded that out of 150,000 police officers in England and Wales only five are mainly concerned with computer crime. We have not gone into that in detail. Fewer than 100 have received even the minimum four weeks basic training and the Serious Fraud Office has one computer-knowledgeable official. I read that in an article in *The Guardian* written by Hugo Cornwall but I do not know whether it is correct. If it is, it is alarming and must throw doubt on whether the provisions of the Bill will be enforceable.

Mr. Colvin: My hon. Friend raises an important issue. I have spoken to the police and I have been assured that the courses at Bramshill police college and at Hendon police school include specific courses on computerisation and the issues that are addressed in the Bill. There is also provision for the police to call in expert guidance and assistance, notably from British Telecom which provides the means for networks to be established. My hon. Friend mentioned Hugo Cornwall. Mr. Cornwall has done the country a service by drawing attention to the whole ethos of hacking. He has produced a new edition of "The Hacker's Handbook". If the Bill becomes law he will have to produce yet another edition to take on board the issues addressed in the Bill, or he might find himself straying perilously near to incitement.

Mr. Leigh: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It is important that we tease out these issues. The Minister for Industry is a former Home Office Minister. I see that he is consulting his civil servants or, more likely, he is giving them instructions. *[Interruption.]* It appears that he is talking about his lunch. My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside raises an important matter and we need to have some answers about what is going on in the

police force. Does it have sufficient resources to deal with this serious problem? The hon. Member for Leyton quoted Alistair Kelman. The quote intrigued me. He said:

"The only gap in the law is when a hacker gains access to a computer and just has a look around . . . But existing laws on fraud, theft and criminal damage cover cases where financial loss or international damage occurs."

Was the hon. Member for Leyton suggesting that if someone intentionally has a look around he should not be liable for criminal prosecution? I see that the hon. Gentleman is nodding. "Having a look around" at a computer can cause immense damage and has done so. My hon. Friends the Members for Romsey and Waterside, for Torridge and Devon, West and for Keighley (Mr. Waller) all dealt with the damage that that is doing to industry.

Mr. Cohen: I share the view expressed in the press release issued by the Data Protection Registrar, that

"if damage is caused inadvertently or not, then someone should be liable".

But if no damage is caused by someone who just enters a system to just look around it, my view is that such action should not be criminalised.

Mr. Leigh: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman amplified his earlier comment, and perhaps my Friend the Minister will take up that point. It is a principle of English criminal law that action must be intentional. Whether an action that is found to be intentional but which causes no damage —though that may be difficult to quantify—can be deemed criminal is an interesting question of jurisprudence which I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will want to pursue. A more moderate and sensible comment was made by Chris Pounder, head of the Hoskyns information protection and management division, who agrees that unauthorised access to a computer should not automatically be a crime. He believes that a criminal law could be oppressive, because it would apply only to instances where no theft took place and no intentional damage was done. He says:

"Are we really saying that members of staff who make unauthorised use of a firm's personal computer to produce their own CV or to every perpetrator of a childish prank that their misdemeanour is worthy of a criminal record they will keep for the rest of life?

One may not agree with that view, but it is one worth consideration by my hon. Friend the Minister.

Mr. Arbuthnot: The answer to the question raised in the quote given my hon. Friend is clearly no. The Law Commission says that if one has authorised access to a computer but uses it for unauthorised purposes, one will not be caught by the Bill.

Mr Leigh: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I am sure that his point will be emphasised by the Minister.

All hon. Members surely agree that there has been far too much romanticising about hackers. Theirs is not a romantic activity. Tony Fainberg writes that hackers are often not very skilled operators and because that is so, they can cause much damage.

He refers to a particularly worrying case:

"The person who put this program together appears to lack fundamental insight into some algorithms, data structures and network propagation. A true expert could have produced a far more virulent piece of electronic vandalism".

Hacking damages industry, but we should also cut away some of the sensationalism that it has attracted. A headline on 14 May in *The Observer* read:

"Hackers 'teach KGB' to break data secrets.'

Although the problem of hacking is serious, the Bill can address it. Perhaps amendments may need to be made in Committee, but I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside on presenting it, and I wish the Bill speedy progress to the statute book.

12.41 pm

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): The debate has been very refreshing for two reasons. There has been almost total agreement among right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House about the seriousness of the problem of computer abuse, and the debate is concerned with the problems of a modern industry—an industry of the present and of the future. On so many occasions during my time in the House we have spent far too long debating industries of the past.

I must declare a personal interest as an adviser to the Digital Equipment Company for some time. Therefore, I am aware of the deep concern felt by that company and by the computer industry generally about the growing problem of computer abuse.

Information technology, which is most welcome, is used throughout the whole of British industry and commerce. Electronic mail and the other electronic devices used in today's paperless office, which I welcome, replace conventional paperwork by electronic communication. As that has grown, so, too, has the need for new regulations, to bring within the criminal law, and thus eliminate, practices that can damage industry.

Whole new industries depend on computers. My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) spoke of the damage that can be done by illicit access to health records. She made several good points about the harm that could be caused by people with mal-intent accessing health record systems. I greatly welcome the initiative of my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) in presenting his Bill.

We should nail once and for all all the criticism that is made about introducing such legislation in the form of a private Member's Bill rather than of a Government Bill. Private Members are fully entitled to legislate and I welcome the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside has brought forward a Bill that is so badly needed. It is a waste of time to carp at the Government for not bringing in such a Bill. We would be better employed in congratulating my hon. Friend on the work that he has done and the care and attention to detail with which he has brought the Bill to the House. I am confident that under his guidance, if the House gives the Bill a Second Reading today, it will go through Committee stage healthily, and will become law very soon. I think that we will be grateful to him if that happens.

The proper functioning of the computerisation of personal records, whether medical, data information or whatever, in business and industry is crucial. There is a safety angle as well. Nowadays, many of our great industries, such as steel or the chemical industry and most manufacturing industries involve some computer control and programming. They have to do so to be able to compete in the world. It is a horrific thought that people might have illegal access or fool around with computers. I say, with great respect, to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) that even if people fool around but do not have criminal or bad intent, they can cause damage and one has to be careful.

[Mr. Michael Grylls]

It is crucial that the computer programs on which industries depend have proper integrity. As more and more electronics come into British industry, we have to be able to protect them, and to provide a law to do so. If we do not, we will damage competitiveness and could cause loss of life or injury to people working in industry if computer systems break down or go wrong.

Other hon. Members have mentioned the cost of illegal entry to computer systems, and that can be high, but we must also remember that there can be damage, and it can cause loss of life or injury.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) that industry has a prime responsibility to ensure that systems are secure. In exactly the same way as perimeter fences, doors and windows should be secure, it is crucial to ensure that computer systems are secure. However it is right that the Government should bring forward legislation, although a responsibility remains with owners and operators of computer systems to ensure proper security.

As anyone who has ever suffered from a burglary knows, however hard one tries to make something secure, occasionally people break in, and great damage can result. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce a law into this area, and if our industries are to prosper in the computer and electronic age it is right that they should have proper protection.

I hope that the House will give this well-thought-out Bill a Second Reading to enable it to go to Committee, and I wish it godspeed through the processes of the House. I hope that it will become law this year, and very soon.

12.47 pm

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, North-West (Mr. Grylls) about the necessity for the Bill. Like many hon. Members on both sides of the House, particularly on the Conservative Benches, I do not like legislation for the sake of legislation. When I was first approached about the question of computer misuse and hacking, I thought that the law must surely be adequate. I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) was not an enthusiast for legislation on computers and hacking, but he was persuaded by the strength of the argument and the concern felt by many companies.

I help to represent the views of members of the Telecommunications Managers Association in this place, and they are extremely concerned to protect their companies from unauthorised outside access to telecommunications networks. That concern has been reflected in committees of the House—the parliamentary information technology committee and the parliamentary and scientific committee.

BP is a large employer in my constituency. When it invited me to lunch I thought that we would be talking about drilling at Wytch Farm but it turned out that the company was concerned about computer misuse and hacking and large international companies' problems in seeking to protect their business from such activities. Only last week I went around one of Sainsbury's hi-tech stores. All the refrigerators at that store are controlled by computer, and for purposes of out-of-hours maintenance, those computers are accessible to maintenance staff via a computer terminal. They were worried that someone dialling into the system and gaining unauthorised access could switch off all the refrigerators.

We must kick into touch the romantic view of hacking. The crucial difference between hacking and other types of damage is that the law does not cover the mechanism whereby access to the information is gained. If a doctor has a row of filing cabinets in his surgery, he can lock them, and although it is probably not an offence to look at the files, it is certainly an offence to break a window or a lock or to force entry to the premises or cabinet to look at the data. The Bill would provide that if one broke an electronic lock, one would be breaking the law as surely as one would by breaking a physical lock. I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) and the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) who feel that the matter is already adequately covered and that we do not need additional legislation.

When I read the Law Commission's report, I was worried that someone who dialled the wrong number when trying to log on to another computer would be caught by the Bill. But clause 1(1)(c) makes it clear that to commit an offence one must intend to gain unauthorised access. The point is well covered in this extremely well-drafted Bill, which has my full support.

If one gets a crank telephone call or a hacking telephone call it is often very difficult to trace the caller. I understand from my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside that it is already open to British Telecom and Mercury to give the information that is necessary to trace the perpetrators of such crimes. Perhaps we should consider BT making available special telephone numbers so that all those who dial the numbers can be logged. The relevant records are already there, because when one dials a number, BT or Mercury records the call and the charge. But the link between the caller's records, which are already held on computer, and the number itself is more difficult to establish. Such a system would help not only in solving the problem of computer hacking but in dealing with crank calls, threatening calls, and sexual nuisance calls.

I used to work for Sinclair, and I am well aware that companies such as Sinclair, Amstrad and IBM have brought down the prices of computers, giving people easy access to them. Those who believe that it is their God-given right to have access to other people's computers do not need to be put out of business altogether. All that groups of hackers need to do is to set up tests for each other on their computers and say, "You are authorised to try to break into my system." They could create puzzles for each other, similar to crossword puzzles. That would be a harmless enough hobby.

We spent three months getting all the data into the first computer that the recruitment company for which I worked obtained. We did not have access to outside telephone lines, but a computer misfunction caused the data to crash. To find, after three months of hard labour, working long hours and getting everyone involved, that it is impossible to get access to computer data because of a virus can lead to an almost suicidal frame of mind.

The effect of the Bill will be similar to what happened after the law on seat belts was introduced. Few people have been prosecuted under that legislation. The vast majority of people are law abiding; they have observed that law. I believe, therefore, that the hackers, and others,

will decide to play fair by the law and desist from what they are doing. It is a timely and sensible measure which I fully support.

12.55 pm

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): An overriding concern has already been mentioned to you, Madam Deputy Speaker—the Minister's lunch. I shall therefore be as brief as possible.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) on his good fortune in doing so well in the ballot and on choosing to introduce this Bill. One should not believe everything that one reads in the newspapers, but I have read an article which suggests that at first my hon. Friend was disinclined to concentrate on this Bill but that he changed his mind when the AIDS diskette was disseminated throughout the country.

Mr. Colvin: Another issue tipped the balance in favour of the Bill. A staggering amount of damage is being caused by computer misuse to UK Limited. I mentioned that it amounts to probably £400 million a year, but perhaps as much as £2 billion a year of damage is being caused to our computer systems. I did not believe that the nation could wait for another year before a Government Bill was introduced; action was needed straight away.

Mr. Arbuthnot: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. He is quite right.

My hon. Friend said that he believed that the Bill would make the sending of the AIDS diskette a criminal offence. As a matter of purely technical detail, I doubt whether the Bill would cover the sending of that diskette. I am not sure under which clause it would be caught. If my hon. Friend suggests that it would be caught under clause 4, I refer him to its wording, which is that a person is guilty of an offence if

"he does any act which causes an unauthorised modification of the contents of any computer's memory".

The writing of a computer program does not cause modification of the contents of a computer's memory. The sending of a diskette through the post to anyone does not cause modification of a computer's memory. What causes the modification is the user of the computer putting the diskette into the computer, switching it on and trying to access that diskette. The wording of the clause ought to be examined to ensure that it catches the kind of virus that was produced by the AIDS diskette.

The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) referred to the sexual inadequacies of hackers. I have seen an article in *DEC News* that refers, interestingly, to the personality profile of hackers. It says that hackers

"may well be unemployed because they spend all night hacking, and lose their job because of poor performance or bad time-keeping, or they may have been sacked for hacking whilst at work. So despite being very intelligent, they find it difficult to hold down a job, and consequently the are often poor. The next stage in the downward spiral is that they find it difficult to reconcile being poor with the fact that they have a tremendous amount of knowledge about computing. This contradiction is usually rationalised in one of two ways. They either go in for fraud, or become 'security consultants' who sell their ability to safeguard your computer system from other hackers, usually after breaking into it, which is little short of extortion."

That is an interesting and almost certainly accurate profile of the convinced hacker rather than the juvenile.

Various arguments have been raised against the Bill. One of them, which was not ventilated at length today, relates to trespass. While hacking may be trespass, trespass on to land is not regarded in this country as criminal per se. The argument runs that if that is so, why should entry into a computer be considered criminal?

We have already heard some of the answers to that question. Innocent hackers can cause amazing damage because they might not know what they are doing. In In that sense, an innocent hacker may be like a bull in a china shop. However, there is a more general problem. If a company is aware that its computers have been attacked, it suffers a loss of confidentiality. The company cannot be sure that its computer processes will work in future and that its transactions will produce the intended results. Therefore, the company will have to reorganise all its computer data bases and that will mean that the computers will not be available to the company. If a company's activities are time-sensitive, they may be marginalised and the company might be forced out of business. The latter is an exceptionally serious result of the apparently harmless activity of hacking.

A leader in *The Times* recently stated:

"The Commission's proposals will make it plain that hacking is always serious, even if the intention is mere mischief—that the silly game is finally over."

The issue is whether criminal law should be available for trespass into computer systems. We must remember that trespass is criminal in certain circumstances either where statute makes it so or where there is wilful and malicious damage. For example, statute law makes trespass criminal where trespass occurs on certain property and in particular on British Rail property for which fines are rightly imposed. Similarly, it is a crime to trespass on certain property if no damage is done, but firearms are being carried or if someone trespasses in pursuit of gain. Therefore, there are precedents for trespass being criminal and it is simply a matter of statute making such trespass criminal. I believe that computers should be the kind of property on which to trespass would be criminal, because of the damage that such trespass can cause.

It has been suggested that if we clean the hackers off the computing networks, we will simply allow computer companies to sell insecure systems. To a certain extent that is true. If we solve the problem of burglars, we might allow people to leave their doors unlocked at night. That might be beneficial for this country. I share the astonishment expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell) at the argument that hackers should be thanked for exposing security weaknesses. My hon. Friend expanded that to burglary and I will expand it to mugging. Perhaps we should thank muggers for exposing our physical weaknesses in being unable to stand up to them. That is an extraordinary idea which we should reject completely.

It is true that some forms of computer security should be improved and a great deal can be done. A study of 20 European companies carried out by Coopers and Lybrand showed that 19 had inadequate standards of security which were a real threat to the economic development of those companies. The report said:

"The catastrophic effects of poor security are likely to discourage organisations from becoming any more dependent on their network systems."

That suggests that there may be a level of complexity in our society beyond which, because of safety interests, we may be frightened to go. If hacking increases our fears,

[Mr. Arbuthnot]

there will be damage to the cohesion and organisation of our society. That is a perfectly good and sufficient justification for the Bill.

1.4 pm

The Minister of Industry (Mr. Douglas Hogg): This has been an unusually interesting debate, not least because it appears to have attracted almost unanimous support for the Bill. It may help the House if I outline the Government's position on the Bill.

I begin, as have other hon. Members, by paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) for having brought forward this Bill and, perhaps more to the point, for having mastered the complexities of the subject and for the persuasive and lucid way in which he explained the Bill and responded to a range of specific questions. In short, the House is indebted to my hon. Friend.

The House is indebted also to my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson). She was kind enough to mention to me that, unfortunately, she has a pressing constituency engagement. She has done more than any other hon. Member to draw attention to the problem of computer misuse. Last April she brought forward a Bill that was later withdrawn, and she has been extremely active in drawing Ministers' attention to the relevant problems. It is right that the Law Commission report should have paid special tribute to my hon. Friend for her special work.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside instanced the wide range of uses to which computers are put. For example, he said that his name appears on 102 computers. He modestly suggested that the same was true of other hon. Members, but I rather hope that it was particular to him.

Perhaps it is desirable to remind hon. Members that computers are not only a sophisticated way of collating and storing information. Even more important, they have operational purposes, and they are fully defined in the Law Commission's report. Good examples can be found at paragraph 1.15, where hon. Members who are interested in the subject will see a range of operational purposes. They include

"world-wide inter-bank fund transfer systems . . . air traffic control systems, and hospital systems for calculating drug dosages"

and many others. We are not discussing exclusively the storage and collation of information; we are also discussing the use of computers as an operational tool. That emphasises why computer misuse can be serious.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside said that, once a system is entered, the owner must spend substantial sums of money and utilise much manpower in putting the system back into good order. However, other consequences can flow. Those who have access to or try to achieve access to air traffic control systems could be putting lives at risk. Those who achieve access to hospital computer records which provide for the delivery of drug dosages could have the same effect.

Hon. Members may have noted the specific case referred to at paragraph 1.16 of the Law Commission report. A factory worker was nearly killed because somebody had misprogramed the program that caused robotic machines to operate and, in this case, to malfunction. The consequences of computer misuse are therefore capable of being serious and are not limited only to financial issues; they can, in certain circumstances, threaten lives and property.

The Bill closely reflects the contents of the Law Commission's report that was published in October 1989, differing from its recommendations in only minor respects. The hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) complained that the Law Commission had not annexed the draft Bill to the report and went on to say that we do not know its intentions. I do not agree with that conclusion. Anybody who reads the Law Commission's report, and who carefully studies the contents of page 35, will have the clearest possible view of what the Law Commission had in mind and in detail.

The Law Commission considered the vital question whether there are important gaps in the existing law in the context of computer crime. My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) touched on that, and I shall refer to his points later. In broad substance, the Law Commission concluded that there are three specific gaps, and they are addressed by the Bill. However, it also stated that most of the crimes involving computer misuse are covered by the existing law. To make an obvious point, the use of a computer to steal is, in most circumstances, covered by the law of theft. Computer misuse resulting in death or injury is, of course, covered by existing criminal law if those consequences were intended or the actions were done recklessly and the results were a consequence of that intention or recklessness. Therefore, in most respects—although not in all—the existing law covers the mischief to which the Bill is directed. It does not cover the entirety of the mischief, which is why the Bill is so important.

It might be helpful to the House if I turned now to the detail of the Bill and to some of the purposes that it is designed to achieve. Clause 1, with which I can deal briefly because my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside has explained it so very well already, provides for the offence of unauthorised access to a computer. Standing alone, that offence is not covered by the existing law. If the House will forgive me, I shall identify the prohibited act or the actus reus and the intent of the mens rea, as lawyers say. The prohibited act is that of accessing a computer to perform a function without authority. To establish an offence, there must be the act of causing a computer to function and that activity must be unauthorised. The prosecution must establish both elements before a conviction can be obtained.

On the issue of mental intent, it is necessary to establish both the intention of securing access and the knowledge that the authority for that act is not possessed. My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle expressed the anxiety that innocent folk might be caught. I do not believe that they would. A specific intent is required—the intent to secure unauthorised access. If the prosecution cannot establish that mental intent, it will fail.

A broader question was raised by the hon. Member for Leyton. It was answered in an eloquent intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot). It is the question of the justificaton and intellectual underpinning of the clause 1 offence. My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside said—and I agree—that we are not dealing primarily with the protection of confidential information. That may be a perfectly legitimate purpose, but it is not the prime

justification for the Bill. The prime justification for clause 1 is to reassure people who have computers about the integrity of their system. I believe that that is of fundamental importance.

As I have already said, computers are used for a multiplicity of purposes both operational and for the collating and storing of information. That purpose will continue. People will expand the range of computers and their functions. The integrity of systems needs protection to the extent that the law can provide.

The hon. Member for Leyton characterised the clause 1 offence as directed at those who simply have a look around. In many circumstances, the fact that someone has a look around places on the owner the requirement to remedy any defects caused, put in place new software, check out the system and spend large sums of money. Once someone has had a look around the system, it has been broken into and its integrity put at risk. That activity is not right and the computer owner has every reason to complain. The clause is directed against such a threat.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford drew a distinction between the law of trespass and the law of trespass with grave effect which was apt.

Trepass is not a criminal offence because usually it does not give rise to damage. However, trespass in the case of computers gives rise to damage because the owner of the system is put under an obligation to carry out remedial works. There is a distinction in principle, and I find what my hon. Friend said entirely persuasive.

Clauses 2 and 3 are interrelated. Clause 2 deals with the offence of unauthorised access with intent to commit a serious crime. There is not so much a gap in the law as a need to strengthen it. Clauses 2 and 3 reflect the particular nature of computer misuse and the speed with which crimes involving computers can be carried out. The final act in a fraud carried out using computers may take only the time necessary to make a telephone call. However, it is likely that a good deal of preparatory work has been carried out prior to that event—for example, searching for passwords or exploring the security arrangements of a bank's computer.

The offence created will enable the police to catch offenders at the preparatory stage rather than when they have carried out the fraud and spirited away the profits into a foreign bank account. It would also catch offenders who committed unauthorised access to prepare for a crime —for example, blackmail, or even murder. My hon. Friend for Gainsborough and Horncastle asked an important question about whether that is covered by existing law. That question represents one of considerable difficulty, but my opinion coincides with what appears in the Law Commission's report. In substance, many of the acts covered in clauses 2 and 3 constitute attempts in law, because we are dealing with preparatory acts. The problem is that to constitute the offence of an attempt in law the acts complained of must be sufficiently proximate to the commission of the offence.

In the case I instanced of, for example, gaining access to a bank account, a range of safeguards—passwords and security systems—will be present. The question is whether the computer hacker, who is trying out those passwords to get access, is committing the offence of attempt or committing some other criminal offence. The Law Commission examined this point and came to the conclusion that the process of trying out the passwords would not constitute the offence of attempt because it was not sufficiently proximate to the ultimate offence. I share that view. But, the Law Commission also concluded that those particular acts should constitute an offence because the length of time between those preparatory acts and the final offence can be extremely brief, having regard to the nature of computer use. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle will appreciate that there is a need for the type of offences that are encapsulated in clauses 2 and 3.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle also pressed me closely about clause 4, which is designed to close the gap the Law Commission identified in matters relating to damage done to intangible property. Thus, if I may give a crude example, I may be prosecuted for smashing an axe through a computer since I have caused damage to physical property. It is by no means certain, however, that I could be prosecuted for introducing a virus into a machine that destroyed many thousands of hours of work stored on data in that machine. That is because it is by no means certain that damage of a non-physical kind is damage for the purposes of the Criminal Damage Act 1971. That is a lacuna because damage to data and damage to the software is not of itself necessarily damage within the malicious damage legislation. For that reason, the Law Commission thought it necessary to recommend the change now contained in the Bill. I agree with that recommendation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford also raised an extremely interesting and nice point relating to the AIDS diskette. He asked whether a person who sends a diskette, received by another and put by that other into a machine, is causing damage for the purposes of clause 4. The answer is yes. The Law Commission intended that effect, and I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Romney and Waterside has achieved it in the Bill. If my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford would care to look at clause 18(6), he will find that my hon. Frined the Member for Romsey and Waterside has provided that any act

"which contributes towards causing . . .a modification shall be regarded as causing it."

The truth is that there are a number of causes, the sending of the diskette being one and the act of the person feeding it into a machine being another. Any one of those causes is a cause for the purposes of clause 4.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside has gone into considerable detail about extending jurisdiction to acts committed outside the normal jurisdiction of the courts of England, Wales and Scotland. His approach to the matter is entirely right.

I intend to sit down at about 1.30 pm. Therefore, I shall concentrate only on one or two other criticisms that have been raised.

Considerable concern has been expressed by a number of hon. Members, most notably by my hon. Friends the Members for Corby (Mr. Powell) and for Torridge and Devon, West about the enforceability of the legislation. They focus on two issues. The first is whether the police require enhanced powers of search to enforce the law, particularly under clause 1.

The second, and quite different, issue is whether the provisions of section 69(1), of PACE—to use the jargon —will exclude statements produced by a computer that are relevant, credible and probative. That point was considered in detail by the Law Commission. I refer hon. Members to paragraphs 4.8 and 4.9 of its report. The Law

[Mr. Douglas Hogg]

Commission concluded that the provisions of PACE did not have the effect I have just described. It concluded that, in most respects, the provisions of section 69(1) would not prevent the admissibility of relevant and probative evidence.

However, the argument goes a little further. The PACE provisions are of general application and have not as yet been fully tested. I urge the House to be slow about changing provisions that have not been fully tested and may well not have the effect suggested by those who are concerned about them. There will be other opportunities in subsequent Sessions, perhaps in a Criminal Justice Bill, to fill any gaps that may subsequently appear. I do not think that there is a weakness, but if there is we can put it right when it becomes apparent.

Whether we should extend police powers is a slightly different matter. In broad terms I have some sympathy with the hon. Member for Leyton, who is reluctant for police powers to be extended, as am I. The Law Commission considered this matter quite carefully in its report, and its arguments are concisely summarised in paragraphs 2.20 and 2.21.

The House will appreciate that we are concerned only with clause 1 because clause 2 gives rise to arrestable offences within the definition of PACE and, therefore, the ordinary principles applied by PACE apply to clause 2 offences. The House will note that there are already considerable investigative powers available to the police that touch on clause 1 offences. They are summarised in the two paragraphs to which I referred.

Hon. Members must consider two issues, one of principle and one of tactics. I hope that the House will forgive me for saying that private Members' legislation is a fragile vessel, and if we start taking action that many people find unacceptable we could lose the Bill. There is no doubt that if we were to extend the police powers to search in the context of clause 1 we could arouse much antagonism to the Bill that would not otherwise be aroused. I would be sorry if that happened.

On the issue of principle, I would not wish to extend police powers unless I was persuaded that it was wholly necessary to do so. The Law Commission took that view, and I agree with it. I would not wish the law to be extended unless there was compelling evidence of need.

I shall make two final points. My hon. Friend the Member for Corby raised a most interesting point regarding international co-operation. To some extent, the matter will be addressed by the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Bill, which is wending its way through the other place and is relevant to precisely the issue that my hon. Friend has raised. So too are the provisions in the Bill regarding jurisdiction in respect of offences committed outside what is normally the jurisdiction of the courts.

The hon. Member for Leyton argued at some length that we should define the word "computer" in the Bill. To repeat what I said in my intervention in his speech, that point was carefully considered by the Law Commission in pragraph 3.39 of its report. The considered view of the Law Commission, backed, as I understand it, by the majority of consultees on the matter, is that it would be an error to define "computer". I am entirely persuaded by what my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside said on the matter.

I know that the House wishes to proceed to another measure, so I shall conclude my remarks. I hope that the Bill will receive a Second Reading and that subsequently it will be enacted.

Mr. Colvin: With the permission of the House, I shall detain it for just another 60 seconds to congratulate hon. Members on the constructive way in which they participated in the debate. I am aware that the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) is about to bring forward her measure to abolish warrant sales in Scotland, so I shall be brief.

The manner in which hon. Members have given way to me during this four-hour debate has enabled most questions to be answered and my hon. Friend the Minister of State has answered most of those that remained.

I have been checking my notes, and two specific questions asked by the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie) during the debate still require answers. The first, on clause 11, related to Scottish citizenship. My answer is simply that if the Scottish court has the jurisdiction to try a case under the legislation, under Scottish law the nationality of the accused person is immaterial, and therefore there is no need to cover that explicitly in the Bill. He also raised a question under clause 12 about controls over access to computer systems by the police in the exercise of their duties. Clause 4 is intended only to protect existing statutory or common law rights. There is no intention of giving the police or anyone else a general licence to hack. If the police seize a computer under a search warrant, they must be allowed to access it in order to read the files.

I thought that the House should know the answer to those questions as it might save time in Committee.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Abolition of Warrant Sales (Scotland) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

1.32 pm

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Before turning to the main elements of the argument I wish to propound in support of the Bill, I should like to pay tribute to my sponsors for their support throughout the preparation of the Bill, and in particular to those who have assisted me in drafting the Bill. I am sure that the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton), will appreciate that although it is a simple Bill, the schedule was very complicated to draw up and a great deal of effort has gone into it.

I should also like to mention my co-sponsor, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) who cannot be with us today because his father-in-law died late on Wednesday evening. I am sure that everyone present will join me in sending sympathy to the family in their bereavement.

We approach the Bill from two stances, particularly the principled stance which I feel is the key element to it. Many hon. Members will remember the late Jimmy Dempsey, who was the Member for Coatbridge and Airdrie, and they will recall the substantial campaign that he mounted over many years to abolish warrant sales in Scotland. More recently the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) has continued that campaign.

There is little doubt that the efforts made by those two hon. Members brought about the Debtors (Scotland) Act 1987, which substantially reduced the number of articles that can be poinded and sold for the purpose of a warrant sale. We all know from schedule 5 to that Act that the exemptions have been substantially increased. That has been welcomed by those of us who have watched the history of warrant sales in Scotland.

However, the basic principle remains that the threat of warrant sales is barbaric and a relic of a bygone age. They no longer have a place in society in the late 20th century and certainly have no place in the 21st century. We must have reached the stage when we can remove the idea of a symbolic gun at someone's head to enforce the payment of debts.

Invariably it is the poorest in society who are most affected by warrant sales. They have no alternative to which they can turn when this form of moral blackmail occurs. They do not have rich relatives or savings in the bank. They live on meagre incomes and struggle to keep the family together and their heads above water. The Scottish Law Commission says that warrant sales are a compensator for debt collection. In 1988 there were 6,173 warrants to sell, but only 714 reports of sales taking place. That information was given in the debate in the House on 10 July 1989 when we debated the Scottish courts administration. There is no doubt about the people against whom warrant sales are directed.

Page 5 of the Scottish Law Commission memorandum No. 48 says that the research shows that the majority of debtors belong to the lowest income groups. Many are unemployed or intermittently employed, depending for their sustenance on social security or intermittent earnings of small amounts. They live on the margins of the statutory level of subsistence, have no savings and their only property consists of small household goods of minimal value. Under the threat of the use of warrant sales such debtors are induced to make a promise of payment instalments which they are unable to maintain because the level of each instalment is unreasonably high.

Alongside that there is the sheer humiliation to which the families are subjected. There are psychological effects, especially on the children, and poinding draws attention to the indebtedness of the family. The neighbours and everybody else knows. That is humiliating and children have to go to the local school to face the reality of what has been done to their families. On pure grounds of principle, we should remove from the Scottish legal system this humiliating and barbaric blackmail which affects the poorest and weakest sections of our society.

I shall now deal with the element of inefficiency in warrant sales. The Scottish Office research paper on the characteristics of warrant sales is a fairly elderly document. It goes back to 1980 and took some 10 years of research. It emphasises the need for further work in this sphere and clearly shows that the sales in themselves were inefficient. The document showed that only 3 per cent. of warrant sales recouped the total debt, and that in 97 per cent. of cases the debtor continued to owe money. Virtually the same was true in commercial sales where only 16 per cent. of the total debt was recouped through warrant sales, with 84 per cent. still ending up owing substantial amounts. Therefore, warrant sales are inefficient as well as being unprincipled.

My proposals to abolish warrant sales are made against the background of the implementation of the poll tax in Scotland. All right hon. and hon. Members know that that tax is abhorred by the Scots, who delivered a clear verdict on it in the 1987 general election, when no fewer than 11 Conservative Members lost their seats and a good few others held on only by the skin of their teeth.

There are more than 500,000 non-payers of poll tax in Scotland. Some of them are making a political point, but others have no alternative, because they are too poor to pay. The Government speak of uprated social security benefits to take account of the 20 per cent. contribution that many poll tax payers must make. The reality is rather different. This morning, I spoke to a gentleman who lives in a hostel in the central belt of Scotland. He pointed out that his income support has not increased by 20 per cent. to meet his poll tax liability. I remind the Minister that when social security benefits were uprated nationally last year, no particular allowance was made for Scottish claimants who have to meet the additional burden of poll tax.

Although 500,000 people in Scotland are not paying poll tax, a parliamentary answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) reveals that at 1 January, 193 sheriff officers had been appointed to collect debts in Scotland. I have a vision of those 193 sheriff officers in wheelchairs 30 years from now, still trying to collect poll tax debts incurred in the year 1989-90.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Does the hon. Lady agree that poll tax is no longer just a Scottish problem, and that England now faces exactly the same situation that exists in Scotland? I hope that the English will take the same stand on the poll tax that the Scottish people have taken.

Mrs. Ewing: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) for his remarks. I can tell him that it was with a mixture of wry amusement and deep-seated anger that I and other right hon. and hon. Members opposed to the poll tax have witnessed the squirming of Conservative Members on suddenly realising the implications of the poll tax for their constituents when, prior to the 1987 general election, those same Conservative Members were happy to go straight through the Lobby to force the people of Scotland to be the guinea pigs for poll tax legislation.

The poll tax is unworkable, costly, and an administrative nightmare. Many are committed to stopping it by sheer determination and will power. Those hon. Members who support my Bill are showing the same determination and will power, because they, too, are determined to stop the poll tax.

The poll tax is only one element in the argument against warrant sales. I remind the House of my belief that warrant sales are barbaric and a relic of the Victorian era which should have no place in the late 20th century. Whatever may happen today because of time restrictions, we shall not give up the battle. Our arguments are based on humanitarian concerns for those in our society who most need our protection. We will be back.

1.44 pm

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): I am pleased to support the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), and I was pleased and privileged to accept her invitation to become the co-sponsor of a Bill to abolish what she has rightly described as a barbaric and medieval practice.

I should begin by declaring an interest. Last year I was threatened by sheriff officers with a warrant sale, because I had refused to pay a fine for not registering for the poll tax. I was not the only person in the central region of Scotland who received such a threat—there were more than 200 of us—but there was such a storm of protest throughout the area that the authorities were forced to withdraw the threat and none of the sales took place.

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): Has the hon. Gentleman actually been done for his £50 fine yet?

Mr. Canavan: Not yet—and I have not paid a penny in poll tax either. I do not intend to pay either the £50 fine or a penny of poll tax. I will gladly pay arrears to the local authority for services rendered as soon as any Minister can tell the House that the poll tax is to be abolished, but I am certainly not participating in the payment of an evil tax which has been imposed on the people of Scotland against their will.

Mr. Sillars: The Government have not yet caught up with the limited number of people who did not register and were fined £50 but now they have threatened to go for the rest of us, including the hon. Member, for non-payment of the tax. If they have not yet caught up with the first category, there can be no chance of their catching up with the 1 million people who I believe have not paid the tax. The sheriff officers are so few in number that it would probably take 80 years to get around to every person who has not paid the poll tax.

Mr. Canavan: It will certainly be difficult for the sheriff officers to operate the scheme, bearing in mind that there are fewer than 200 of them throughout Scotland and some 1 million people are in serious arrears with poll tax payments—including at least half a million such as myself who have not paid a penny. Some of us have not paid as a political protest against an unjust tax foisted upon us by a Government with no democratic mandate from the people of Scotland. As the hon. Member for Moray said in moving Second Reading, however, we are standing shoulder to shoulder with many people who have no choice in the matter because they simply cannot afford to pay. It is important that such people should not be isolated. That is why I have taken such a stand, and why I am not the only hon. Member to do so.

During the 1970s and 1980s I campaigned strenuously for the abolition of warrant sales—long before I was threatened with one myself—because it is humiliating and degrading for many people, particularly those on low incomes, to live in fear of a knock on the door by the sheriff officer. Throughout the 1970s and the early 1980s there was the potential ignominy of a sale taking place at a person's home or out on the front green—a public humiliation which was at least as great a punishment as the selling off of the goods.

I should pay tribute to people such as the late Jimmy Dempsey, formerly the Member for Coatbridge and Airdrie, who campaigned strenuously and vociferously from the Labour Benches to get warrant sales abolished. Unfortunately, those in power at the time did not listen to him and all we got was a slight amendment to the legislation to extend the number of exempted items.

In many cases, the warrant sale is not even an efficient method of enforcement. It is an expensive way of collecting what in most cases are relatively small debts. It costs quite a lot to obtain a warrant and it takes the time of the sheriff officer who has to visit the houses and carry out poindings of the goods in question. Then there are all the legal costs, and so on. Constituents of mine have complained to me that the expenses accumulated during the process have exceeded the initial sum due. On the basis of that argument, it is not even in the interests of the creditor to pursue a debt by means of a warrant sale.

No doubt the Minister will have done his homework and will tell us that warrant sales take place infrequently. That may well change with the advent of poll tax. In any case, it is not the execution of a warrant sale alone that the victim finds distressing—it is the whole process leading up to it. Even if the person manages to borrow the money from a neighbour or relative and the sale is called off at the last minute, he will nevertheless have been through a traumatic experience, being pressured, initimidated and harassed by the so-called forces of law and order. I hope that the Minister will bear that in mind in relation to the frequency of warrant sales.

The frequency of threatened warrant sales will almost certainly increase in the months ahead if non-payment of poll tax continues at the present level. Pickets and direct action to stop warrant sales taking place have already been threatened and if I find out about a proposed warrant sale in my constituency, I shall certainly not stand idly by and allow the sheriff officers to start badgering and bullying my constituents and selling off their goods just to try to collect this evil tax. If enough people stand firm, we can show the Government not only that the poll tax is an unjust and unwanted tax but that the system is absolutely unworkable.

I appeal to the Minister to do the decent thing, which should have been done years ago, and abolish warrant sales completely so that the people of Scotland will never again be threatened in this way. These days the Government seem regularly to combine various pieces of legislation in one Bill because they cannot raise a team of Scottish Tory Members to man a Committee. If my hon. Friend is unsuccessful today, Government action will be required. If my hon. Friend's private Bill does not get a Second Reading today the Government could solve the problem by introducing a nice simple two-clause Bill which would probably require just one day in a Standing Committee. Clause 1 would abolish warrant sales and clause 2 would abolish the poll tax.

1.53 pm

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): To take up the last point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan), I assure him that if the Bill does not make progress today the Opposition intend to introduce a new clause into the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Bill which is being considered in the other place.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) on introducing the Bill and on the manner in which she presented it. I associate myself with my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West in remembering Jimmy Dempsey who, when I was reporting these matters, rather than participating in these debates, had the longest and most honourable record of concentrating attention on warrant sales. That tradition has been followed by my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West. His record of drawing attention to the matter, long before the poll tax impinged on it, is extremely good.

I pay tribute to the print unions in Scotland. Few tributes are paid to them in this place. Those who have done most to undermine the evil process of diligence are not the Members of Parliament, journalists or other commentators who have deplored it over the years; those who have come closest to bringing the system to its knees are the print workers who have blacked the poisonous advertisements that have been an integral part of the warrant sales process.

I am proud of the fact that the newspaper that I published, a small one, was the first in Scotland to ban the appearance of warrant sales advertisements. However, the people who, in a big way, prevented them from appearing in mass circulation newspapers were the print workers. I salute them for having done so.

We in Scotland take pride in the distinctive qualities of the Scottish legal system. It has many strengths. However, we should acknowledge unanimously that the warrant sale is a peculiarly Scottish evil. It is a dreadful system. It has no redeeming feature. It is not efficient; it does not even lead to the collection of significant amounts of debt. However, it was never meant to collect debt. The system is based exclusively on the use of threat and fear.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): The hon. Gentleman is speaking from the Opposition Front Bench. Will he condemn the refusal by the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) to pay the community charge? Does not he agree with the leader of his party that people should pay the community charge? Furthermore, will he explain how he would enforce the iniquitous roof tax?

Mr. Wilson: I have no wish to emulate the hon. Gentleman as a hand-wringing humbug. I have no intention of condemning individuals for the stances that they take on grounds of personal conscience. I have made it clear on many occasions that both I and the Labour party strongly disagree with non-payment. I shall develop that point in my own way. However, for me as an individual to condemn one of my hon. Friends is not a course that I am prepared to take, just to satisfy the hon. Gentleman, with whom I agree about virtually nothing.

The warrant sale process is based on the use of threat and fear. The warrant is issued because someone has fallen into debt. That is not exclusive to the poll tax. It can be used by private companies—and frequently is—and by public bodies, such as electricity boards. Most people would respond when they were served with the warrant. They would pay up, if they had the money. The great majority of people do. However, the process grinds on for those who do not. The sheriff's officer becomes involved, at which point the expenses begin to accumulate. When the sheriff's officer arrives at the door and goes through the corrupt procedure—that is a well-chosen word—of poinding, everybody who is in a position to pay does so.

The sheriff's officers—and we will not say who they are in cahoots with—place a ludicrously low value on household goods. People may have taken a lifetime to collect their household furnishings and they must watch those people, who do one of the dirtiest jobs in Scottish society, place false valuations on their goods.

I will leave the poll tax out of my considerations for the moment because it introduces other arguments. However, at the stage that I have just described, when the sheriff's officers make ludicrously low valuations on household goods, everyone who can pay the debt will do so rather than have their goods sold at such prices. We might expect the process to end there and perhaps for 95 per cent. of people, it does.

However, the logic of the warrant sales system is that it cannot end there. The system is based on fear and, to encourage others, there must be a few victims or examples for whom the procedure goes its full course.

It is at that point that a warrant sale is advertised and that is where the poison occurs—*[Interruption.]* Madam Deputy Speaker, is it possible for the Whip's debate with the Clerk to end?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. Conversations in the Chamber are very distracting.

Mr. Wilson: As I was saying, it is at that point that those poisonous little advertisements appear in the press in the full knowledge that the great majority of those sales will not take place. However, the advertisement is the instrument of fear and it is still used in some communities. Advertising and parading the debt and difficulty of poor people for public entertainment is the real lever of fear which causes people to meet the debt if they can. Once people hear that the advertisement is to appear, they somehow scrape up the money to pay off enough of the debt to fend off the appearance of the advert.

At that stage there are handfuls of people who still cannot meet their debt. They clearly cannot meet their debt and their goods have been poinded for a ludicrously false amount. They face the prospect of seeing their goods sold. At that stage, some of the sales occur because the evil

[Mr. Wilson]

logic of the system is that if sales never take place, the process of fear that conditions every stage of the procedure might be diminished. Therefore, sales have to take place.

Mr. Heffer: It is horrible having to listen to what is happening in Scotland. However, is my hon. Friend aware that a similar procedure affects poor people in England? If people cannot meet their debts there is a pernicious system under which the bailiffs are sent in and they do much the same thing as the sheriff officers in Scotland. They take the furniture and other goods to pay off the debt. Such a system is evil whether it exists in Scotland, England or Wales. It hits ordinary working people and that is absolutely disgraceful.

Mr. Wilson: I agree with my hon. Friend. If there must be debt collection procedures, they should be based on arresting wages or capital, related to people's ability to pay over a long period.

The Minister must understand that if the debt collection procedure were efficient, there might be something to be said for it even from a commercial point of view. However, by definition, the procedure is not efficient. It is based exclusively on the use of fear against the people who are least able to meet their debts. At the end of the day, the warrant sales do not sell off tapestries and precious belongings, they sell off the pathetic belongings of the poorest people in our communities who, even under the threat of poinding and the sale being advertised and carried out, have not been able to meet their debts. It is an inhumane system that is almost beyond belief.

Mr. Sillars: I agree with the general tone of the hon. Gentleman's speech, but is he aware that, in the past few seconds, he was in danger of endorsing what happens in England as though it applies to Scotland? Because of the Debtors (Scotland) Act 1987, people cannot have their furniture, bed, bedding, cooking implements, cutlery and so on lifted. It would be a great tragedy if we transmit a false message to people in Scotland that those necessities could be lifted. The position is much narrower than it was, but the important point is the humiliation of the invasion of people's privacy.

Mr. Wilson: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. Because of the efforts of people to whom I referred who have campaigned over many years, essential items cannot be poinded and subjected to warrant sales. In Scotland and England the law defines possessions as essential and non-essential. The "non-essential" may be much closer to the hearts of the people involved. In an average household, the one family heirloom might be deemed to be non-essential and the gas cooker might be deemed to be essential. I would not urge anyone to become involved in the process of diligence because they can retain essential items. There is intrusion, fear and horror, but, at the end of the day, next to nothing is collected. It is not a process of debt collection; it is a process of intimidation.

I hate every aspect of the poll tax. It is an evil imposition. It is hated by people in Scotland. It has been the key to the downfall of the Conservative party in Scotland, and it will continue to be. The most amusing days I have seen were when the headless chickens on the Government side of the House came home to roost when they heard what the poll tax figures will be in their own areas. I have no doubt about the political impact of the poll tax in Scotland.

I disagree with some hon. Members—it is an honourable disagreement—that a Member of Parliament on £25,000 a year who refuses to pay his or her poll tax and encourages others who are in much poorer circumstances to do likewise, is doing any favour to the poorer people whom he or she so urges. I do not revel in the prospect of 1 million or 500,000 people not paying anything towards the poll tax. In terms of local government services, it means either the disappearance of home help services, social work services and so on or that many poor people, who would not countenance the idea of debt, will have to pay more. I do not endorse that strategy. It is a waste of time. I do not endorse it because, as a political weapon against the Government—my political enemies—it is useless. It is preposterous to suggest that the Prime Minister will be brought to her knees because local authorities will be deprived of 10 per cent. of their revenue. For the past 10 years, her policies have been geared to depriving them of their revenue.

I deplore the fact that local authorities, which have a legal obligation to collect their revenue and cannot make grand pronouncements about which parts of the law they will adopt for debt collection, have become the enemies and the targets of people who are running campaigns not to get rid of warrant sales or to attack the Government but to attack local authorities. I want nothing to do with that. Warrant sales are evil and they should be abolished. Eventually they will be abolished, but the Government should not try to pin them on local authorities. Local authorities are as much the enemies and victims of warrant sales as anyone else.

2.9 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): I have listened with great interest to what has been said and wish to make it absolutely clear that when the law on warrant sales was reformed not a single Opposition Member voted against the Bill——

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan) *rose*——

Mr. Canavan *rose*——

Mr. Sillars *rose*——

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: If Opposition Members felt so passionately about this, it would have been perfectly legitimate for them to table an amendment at some stage of the Bill's passage and to have forced a vote on it, but they neglected to do so. I wish to stress the improvements that were made in that legislation.

Mr. Canavan: Of course, no hon. Member would vote against the Second Reading of a Bill that would improve things. Although the provisions fell short of the complete abolition of warrant sales, they extended the number of exempt articles to bedding and heating implements. It is untrue to say that efforts were not made in Committee to achieve the outright abolition of warrant sales. Although I was not a member of the Standing Committee, I know that Labour Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey), were instrumental in tabling an amendment in Committee to abolish warrant sales completely.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There was no vote on the Floor of the House on the abolition of warrant sales. The hon. Gentleman missed that opportunity.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing *rose*——

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No. I want to answer the points made by the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson).

Mr. Sillars: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the Minister to accuse Opposition Members by saying that they did not try to abolish warrant sales at an appropriate legislative point in the Bill's passage when, as has been pointed out, the Minister is inaccurate? Is it within your power in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, to ask the Minister to have the grace to apologise?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. Perhaps I may respond to that point of order. It is not within the power of the Chair to do what the hon. Gentleman has asked. It is a matter for debate, and the hon. Gentleman has made his point.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall check the record of the Committee proceedings with care, but no Opposition Member forced that matter to a vote on the Floor of the House and if Opposition Members had felt passionately about the issue that is the least that could have been expected of them.

As the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North has said, substantial improvements were introduced in that legislation, although they are not widely known in Scotland.

First, it is not the case that all the debtors' movable goods are at risk from poinding and sale. The list of household goods exempt from poinding and sale was considerably extended to include, for instance, children's toys, medical equipment, tools of trade, books or other equipment, curtains and floor coverings, and other items that are reasonably required for the use of the debtor or any member of his household. Similarly, articles that are reasonably required for the care or upbringing of children who are members of the debtors' household are now excluded. Those improvements were introduced to avoid undue harshness.

Secondly, sales normally will take place not in the debtor's home but in the auction room, unless the debtor and any other occupier of the house gives his or her written consent for the sale to take place in the dwelling house.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill) *rose*——

Mrs. Margaret Ewing *rose*——

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No, I have a lot of points to answer and want to go through all the improvements so that they are known. As I have said, in the absence of consent, sales will take place away from the debtor's house.

Thirdly, any advertisement of the sale will not reveal who the debtor is, so there will be anonymity, which is an important point that was stressed by the Law Commission. The debtor has new opportunities to apply to the court to have his goods released or to have the sale called off on the ground, for example, that it would be unduly harsh for the sale to go ahead. In addition, the duration of the poinding was extended from six months to one year, increasing the opportunity for the debtor to come to arrangements with his creditor, and to settle his outstanding debt by instalments. It also acts as an incentive to creditors to settle the debt and to hold off instructing the sales until absolutely necessary. It should decrease the possibility of a sale taking place and increase the possibility of the debt being paid.

Mr. Fyfe: Is the Minister saying that he approves of sheriff officers taking away a family's television set, which would not be considered an essential item, but which is often the only source of entertainment for many families because they do not have the fares or the money to go elsewhere for entertainment? Does the Minister approve of taking away a family heirloom, such as a grandmother's wedding ring, or a teenager's second-hand guitar?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Law Commission looked into the matter with specific care when it considered which items should be exempted. One of its conclusions was that if warrant sales were abolished the alternatives—for example, sequestration—might be very much worse.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Will the Minister give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I shall answer the question first.

Warrant sales are the last-resort method of enforcing a debt and are seen as such by creditors. The alternatives, such as sequestration could be much more harsh. The commission considered that it would be nonsensical to regard sequestration as an alternative because it would extend to all the debtor's properties, possibly including his or her home.

The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North stated that Scotland was alone in having such a system.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No. I must move on to the other points that have been raised.

The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North suggested that Scotland was unique. That is far from the case. The Scottish Law Commission examined the system in all other countries and found that they had similar procedures. The Law Commission made it clear that such procedures exist in England and Wales.

The Debtors (Scotland) Act 1987 added to the protection for the debtor from a warrant sale in certain circumstances, including, first, undue harshness, secondly, undervaluation of poindered goods and, thirdly, that the expenses of the sale were unlikely to exceed the proceeds of the sale. The debtor has 14 days in which to examine his right to object.

Mr. Salmond: As he is the responsible Minister, the Minister should give us an answer to a specific question. Has he considered the proceedings in Fife region over the past few weeks? It has been admitted by Fife region that poindings have been carried out under illegal procedures by the sheriff officers A. A. Hutton. When those poindings were challenged in the sheriff court this week, they were discharged. The poindings were carried out under illegal documentation and other factors were wrong. They were no better than licensed burglary. Fife region says that there have been 300 poindings in Fife since 1987 when the Debtors (Scotland) Act 1987 came into force. Will the

[Mr. Salmond]

Minister investigate those 300 poindings over the past three years? The chances are that each one was illegal and was carried out under the wrong documentation.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It goes without saying that the correct procedures must be followed. In 1988 there were 14,759 poindings but only 714 warrant sales. Poindings are carried out not only for non-payment of the community charge but for debts to a whole range of creditors, many of whom are not wealthy.

I find it hard to have sympathy with those who deliberately refuse to pay their community charge when they can afford to do so. Regrettably, the sponsors of the Bill fall into that category.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Will the Minister give way?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No. I wish to make this point.

I have no doubt about the sincerity of the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) in her dislike of the community charge, but we must never forget that the non-payment campaign supported by the Scottish National party Members of Parliament and the sponsors of the Bill may result in their having a free ride at the expense of the rest of the community. I regret that some of the non-payers are Members of Parliament, not only because hon. Members should set an example but because they are relatively well-off members of the community. They earn well in excess of £20,000 a year, paid for by the taxpayers.

Mrs. Fyfe: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the Minister to mislead the House by saying that people who have not paid their community charge or poll tax will have a free ride when he must know that there are provisions for people who have refused to pay to be charged an extra 10 per cent. plus costs? Can he possibly defend——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady knows that those are not matters for the Chair but matters for debate.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Lady touches on a matter with which the Bill deals. If people were to follow the bad example of defying the law which requires them to pay taxes, they might have to face a surcharge. That matter was referred to in *The Scotsman* yesterday by a Labour spokesman from Easterhouse. It reported:

"An Easterhouse councillor, Alexander Viola, said many non-payers were telling him that they had been misled by campaigners.

Harry Revie, another Labour member, said 'We have to face facts that we are up against a sinister campaign and we must draw the teeth of these people. We must point out that there has been a positive response to the first warrants.' "

There is no doubt that warrants are effective.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing *rose*——

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No, I shall not give way.

It is monstrously unfair for Members of Parliament to refuse to pay. By their actions they are effectively putting an extra burden on less-well-off people in their constituencies. In those circumstances, it is right that local authorities should have the power to enforce payment against privileged members of the community such as the hon. Lady.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way finally; it seems that he is trying to emulate the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) in his approach today.

Although the Minister wants to resort to political attacks, his colleagues have pointed out that the level of non-payment is no different from the level of non-payment of the rates. Were people misled about the rates as well?

Will he now apply himself to the issue that the Bill attempts to address, how we recoup debt from people in a sensible and civilised fashion? When the Scottish Law Commission looked at this issue it recognised that warrant sales were used only to compel people to reach agreement on instalments. It suggested that there should be a court enforcement office to consider the possibility of doing things in a more civilised fashion. Why do the Government continue to turn their back on bringing forward something for debt collection that is much more relevant and humane?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Responsibility for debt collection lies with local authorities and it must be up to them to decide on the most appropriate method to choose. In the vast majority of cases that will no doubt take the form of the arrestment of earnings or bank accounts. The hon. Lady is suggesting that warrants should be removed as the final sanction. The hon. Lady also asked about the position of non-payers, but I must remind her that under the rating system a remarkable number of people did not pay rates.

Mr. Wilson: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. This debate is about the law of diligence and warrant sales and the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) has done well to introduce it. We are not here to listen to a political tirade about the poll tax.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: That is a case of the pot calling the kettle black, especially as the hon. Gentleman made a great number of party-political points in his speech.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is rather strange that the Labour party seems to be posing as the party of tax dodgers?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is grossly irresponsible for any Member of Parliament to support non-payment of our country's taxes. Non-payment leads to three possible results. The first is that services could suffer if enough people followed the example set by certain hon. Members. The second is that there might be redundancies as a result, which would also be undesirable, and the third is that those hon. Members' constituents would have to pay more because they, as privileged Members of Parliament, were refusing to pay. If enough people followed their example, the rest of their constituents would have to pay more. Those hon. Members are setting an extremely bad example and by their encouragement of non-payment they are rendering a disservice to their constituents.

Mr. Salmond: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Given that the Minister has been presented with evidence of illegal activity over poindings in Fife during a

three-year period, is it in order for the Minister to ignore completely that point in his reply? As the responsible Minister, is it in order for him to be unaware that poindings have been carried out, first and foremost, in the Fife and Grampian——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that the Minister is attempting to respond to the debate on the Second Reading of the Bill.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Debtors (Scotland) Act 1987 is a properly constituted Act and its procedures should be accurately followed. On 7 February the *Evening News* reported:

"Councillor Simpson failed to get a seconder when he attempted to move at today's Finance Committee that the rules for warrant sales either be clarified or changed to give clearer notice to the public that poindings were about to take place."

He did not have a seconder because everyone knew that the procedures had been greatly improved in that Act.

The hon. Gentleman raised the valid point that procedures are lengthy. Of course they are, because their purpose is to ensure that the debtor has the opportunity to pay. First, authorities issue a soft reminder when people fall in arrears by two months. When people fall in arrears by three such instalments, the authority can issue a seven-day letter requiring people to pay the arrears in seven days or lose the right to pay by instalments. If no payment is made, people receive a 14-day letter advising them that as they failed to respond to the seven-day letter they are liable for the full annual amount which must be paid in 14 days. It is only following a failure to respond to that letter that the authority applies to the court for a summary warrant. Even at that stage, a warrant sale is a long way off. There is a range of technical procedures to be gone through, and it is open to an authority to enter a phased payment agreement with the debtor.

Experience shows that a large number of people who enter into a payment arrangement with the authority pay and the warrants are highly successful in ensuring that that happens. As Mr. Revie said in *The Scotsman*, there has been a positive response to the first warrants issued.

Mr. Sillars *rose*——

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have given way many times, but, as the hon. Gentleman is on his feet, I stress that the one council in the whole of Scotland that the Scottish National party runs, Angus district council, is busy collecting the community charge. It knows that it has responsibilities of office that it must discharge properly in accordance with the wishes of the electorate. The hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) knows that he has no chance of ever having any of the responsibilities of government.

Mr. Sillars: Given the Minister's explanation of the long procedure before there are warrant sales, does he agree with the statement made the other day by the anti-poll tax federation spokesman in the west of Scotland, that, given that long procedure, the vast number of us who are poll tax rebels and the small number of sheriff officers, it will take about 80 years to get around the lot of us?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No. In Strathclyde more than 70,000 warrants were issued in relation to rates and very few of them had to go all the way to warrant sales. In the fantasy world in which the hon. Gentleman lives, he would suggest that we should pay taxes only if we felt like it, and pick and choose those laws that we wish to obey. Such an attitude leaves him completely unfitted to govern.

As the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) said, to his credit, all responsible politicans have rejected the case for a mass campaign of non-payment. There is no doubt that by taking up their posture of non-payment hon. Members seek to sponge off their communities and constituents. It is a disgrace to their offices as Scottish Members of Parliament.

Several Hon. Members: How much is the Minister saving on poll tax?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I need to hear the Minister.

Mr. Canavan: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the Minister to make false accusations when he is lining his pocket out of the poll tax?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I pay a personal and a standard community charge. For the hon. Gentleman to say that he is standing shoulder to shoulder with non-payers is highly irresponsible. It is convenient for him to do so, but it will not pay for social services, street lighting or schools, and he——

Mr. Wilson *rose*——

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No. I shall not give way. I have given way enough. The hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) conveniently forgets that more than 1 million people in Scotland receive substantial rebates.

Mr. Wilson *rose*——

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No. I shall not give way because I want to answer the points made.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing *rose in her place and claimed to move,*That the Question be now put, *but* MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *withheld her assent and declined then to put that Question.*

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I saw the hon. Gentleman on television last night——

Mr. Sillars: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it not out of order that the Minister has not declared his pecuniary interests in so far as he has saved vast sums of money paying the poll tax compared with what he used to pay in rates?

Madam Deputy Speaker: If the Minister had a pecuniary interest to declare, I am sure that he would have declared it before now.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Obviously the hon. Gentleman has the merest possible interest in the Bill since he is seeking to evade paying his taxes, and that is grossly irresponsible, I agree with the point made——

Mrs. Fyfe: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it not also outrageous that the Minister seeks to defend landlords in Scotland——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. This has nothing whatsoever to do with the Chair.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: On this particular point——

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 16 February.

Private Members' Bill

BRITISH RACING COMMISSION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Not moved.

INTEREST ON DEBTS BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [2 February].

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. On the British Racing Commission Bill——

Madam Deputy Speaker: What is the hon. Gentleman raising?

Mr. Cohen: I wish to move the Bill on behalf of the hon. Member——

Madam Deputy Speaker: We are now on item No. 4, the Interest on Debts Bill.

The Question is, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Debate to be resumed what day? No day named.

HORSES (PROTECTIVE HEADGEAR FOR YOUNG RIDERS) BILL

Read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

FOOTBALL SPECTATORS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 16 February.

Mr. Cohen: May I ask that the British Racing Commission Bill be read on Friday next as it is on behalf of the same hon. Member——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

REGISTRATION OF COMMERCIAL LOBBYING INTERESTS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 16 February.

Cassel Hospital

Motion made and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Fallon.]*

2.32 pm

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): I am grateful for the opportunity to set before the House the circumstances which led to the proposed closure of a uniquely important hospital of world repute. I am particularly grateful that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health is giving of his busy time to be here. He is a man who combines the qualities of compassion and a keenly analytical mind. I hope that I shall be able to convince him, as a fellow chartered accountant, that my plea for the continuation of the Cassel hospital is based as much on good financial sense as its medical achievements and the emotions that proposed hospital closures often cause.

The hospital was founded in 1919 by Sir Ernest Cassel, the father of Edwina Mountbatten, to care for those suffering from extreme psychological trauma as a result of service in the first world war. In the next 30 years the hospital built up a reputation second to none in the way in which it treated severe mental disturbance, not only in those who were seemingly destroyed by their experience of the carnage of war but thereafter in those who could be regarded as suffering from the civilian equivalent of shell shock, causing their minds to desert from some current horror and all too frequently affecting not only themselves but their family and their community.

The hospital's reputation grew and it became rich in endowments in addition to the generosity of Sir Ernest Cassel. Then, in 1948, on the creation of the National Health Service, all its assets, its present building and land, its staff accommodation and endowments were given to the nation on the understanding that it would continue to function as a national hospital in the same pioneering experimental way relative to mental and emotional disturbance as it had done before.

The hospital is situated on the south side of Ham common in my constituency of Richmond and Barnes and is a local landmark in one of the most beautiful corners of what has become London. Its value lies not only in its real estate but in the way in which it forms a traditional part of the Ham community. Although its patients may come from far afield, and although it is controlled by a health authority outside my constituency boundaries, many of the helpers and friends of the hospital are my constituents and they regard the hospital and its existence as a noble, harmonious and civilising part of our community.

In the more than 40 years during which the hospital has continued to develop from the principles of the famous partnership of the medical director, Dr. Main, and the doughty matron, Miss Weddell, its reputation and that of the team which works therein have spread world wide. The hospital trains doctors and nurses employed in general medical and psychiatric hospitals and also those in general practice in community work who come from far afield. The hospital's creation of the concept of a "therapeutic community" has been adopted in countless countries where it is recognised that in many cases it is not just the patient alone who needs to be treated but the whole family, particularly in child abuse cases or in cases where families have to come to terms with a cataclysmic episode in the life of a family member.

On one visit to the hospital I saw a nurse from Stoke Mandeville being trained to explain to a mother or wife that a loved one might never walk again, or worse. On other occasions I have seen doctors and nurses and on my last visit I saw people from Sweden taking away with them skills unique to this institution and thus to the United Kingdom.

I have received letters from all over the world from professors, doctors and past patients who are utterly amazed that anyone should be considering closing the Cassel hospital and breaking up its remarkable team. A typical response is contained in a letter that I received yesterday from a doctor in Germany. He says:

"the Cassel Hospital has an international reputation as a special institution for the psychiatricpsychotherapeutic treatment of particularly difficult patients. For decades it attracts specialists from all over the world who wish to be informed about or trained in therapeutic methods. This fact is acknowledged in the international scientific literature for years. It would be a great loss for Great Britain and the whole of Europe if this hospital were to be closed down at a time when new prospectives and certainly new prospects as regards funding can be expected in the course of European unification. Furthermore I take the liberty to point out that a cost saving in this clientele can certainly not be achieved in this manner, on the contrary, when missing specialised treatment other medical services of the district will be claimed to a higher degree. German investigation shows that the demands for such services reduce drastically after psychotherapy".

What is the threat of closure and how has it come about? For one reason or another, despite being a national institution, the Cassel hospital has found itself being funded by a district health authority, Riverside, one of the districts of the North West Thames regional health authority. The hospital and all its patients are thus funded by a mere district even though nearly half its patients are referred from outside its region. In years gone by, many more of its patients came from further afield but there has been a national retrenchment as economies proved essential.

It may not be generally understood outside the National Health Service—it was certainly not understood by me until I studied the problem—that if a patient is referred on medical grounds from, say, Birmingham to a London hospital, no payment is made by the health authority in the patient's home town. The full cost of treatment is borne by the district which funds the hospital and there is no mechanism for that funding to be transferred. It is natural that Riverside health authority should want to make the most of its revenue and its assets, especially when it is building a major new hospital in Chelsea.

In an Adjournment debate two nights ago to which my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health replied, it was said that the estimated cost of the whole Chelsea hospital scheme had risen from £78 million to a staggering £173 million. Those are last year's figures. My hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans), who opened that Adjournment debate, said that in 1989-90 only three of the 14 regional health authorities in England were in deficit. One of those, North West Thames, had a deficit of approximately £13 million—more than twice the size of the other two deficits put together. One can see why Riverside is eyeing the prospect of closing the Cassel hospital to save £1,250,000 of revenue expenditure which, it is sometimes claimed, currently treats only 80 in-patients per year. I shall expand on those figures later in my speech.

[Mr. Jeremy Hanley]

The sum of £1,250,000 could treat hundreds more patients resident in the immediate Riverside district, and the really great prize, it is said, is the hospital itself. It was once a hotel and might possibly revert to that use. It has been valued, with the extremely attractive land which forms part of its beautiful site just 10 miles from Westminster, at £10 million. That would make quite a contribution to the new hospital at Chelsea.

The hospital offers accommodation for 55 patients at any one time, but—and it is a very big "but"—it handles more than 4,000 out-patient consultations every year, of which 2,500 form part of ongoing treatment. There are 750 new referrals each year, and there is a small day unit for school age children in which the teacher co-ordinates academic work with the work of psychotherapists. Further specialised nursing derives from in-patient nursing methods.

Not just 80 patients per year but thousands receive treatment at Cassel. There has also been careful costing by its administration as to how the hospital can continue under a charging-out regime. The hospital could pay for itself and become no burden on Riverside. When I asked the district health authority what would happen if the hospital closed—where patients would go and where the staff would take their skills—the answer was that no one knows because Cassel is unique.

Even if the unit were transferred to a site in the country, so that the glittering prize of £10 million in real estate could be realeased, it would take years to build up confidence in the new establishment and to impart the same confidence in those further afield who knew the Cassel of old.

It is tragic that at a time when so much emphasis is being placed on the importance of the family unit, consideration is being given to the closure of the one institution that really works with, and cares for, the family. In the past four years, Cassel's family work has been concerned mainly with cases where child abuse has occurred. Parents and children separated by local authorities or by the courts have been brought together in the hope of rebuilding the family unit. The High Court, Great Ormond Street hospital, the Tavistock clinic, many local authorities, and countless general practitioners and psychiatrists have become accustomed to using Cassel as a last resort in an effort to help families of the kind all too frequently featured in our newspapers and on TV news.

A considerable number of the single adults treated at Cassel were abused as children. If only their families could have been given the help granted to some of those at the hospital now. Many patients are socially dependent; they have poor relationships, make no contribution to society, and are often unable to work at all. Often they have made endless and expensive demands on psychiatric and social services and are depressed, dejected and at times even self-destructive.

A five-year follow-up study of a group of 28 patients published at the 15th European conference on psychosomatic research proved the cost-effectiveness of psychotherapy. York university's health services unit calculated that £500,000 had been saved by treating that small group of 28 patients alone. That was attributed to the patients having a greatly reduced need for in-patient treatment and having moved from being 98 per cent. unemployed to more than 90 per cent. employed. The group had become brighter, more sociable and more constructive.

Several studies of similar patients have been made in West Germany and Scandinavia. Even Germany's health insurance industry now willingly finances the training of psychotherapists and their clinical work. Cassel can prove that its former patients require a much reduced level of hospitalisation in any year than if they had not undergone treatment there. That accords with research showing that out of 1,004 patients, 845 required a hospital stay for any reason of only 0·78 days in any one year instead of the expected 2·4 days—representing a great saving in Health Service costs.

The unit is cost-effective even now. I mentioned that its total budget is £1·25 million. When training, out-patients and consultations for other institutions are taken into account, the daily bed cost is only £34·25—compared with the recently established Charter Clinic in Chelsea where bed costs are reported to be £200 per day. The hospital is thus an efficient and economical organisation, and inexpensive—priceless, indeed—for what it does. Considerable economies result because patients and their families often work in the treatment programmes. Nurses and patients eat and live together. The hospital becomes a home to those who probably have no home, or certainly not one that we might recognise.

The costings carried out by the hospital administrators show that the total revenue that could be earned by 1991 would be between £2·25 million and £2·5 million. If they could charge, as they have never been able to do, district and regional health authorities and overseas visitors for the services that they provide—this is an expanding market—they could more than pay their way. They would have the capacity to raise private money from businesses and charities, and therefore would be no burden on the state or the district health authority.

To do that, however, they need the security of long-term residence at their existing premises. I blame no one for the present position. The Cassel hospital wants to survive, and its existence has been justified time and again. The staff possess unique skills, and they serve both the nation and the wider world.

The district health authority needs to use money as efficiently and effectively as possible so as to treat the maximum number of patients with the funds at its disposal. I do not blame the authority. I believe that it has a greater demand for general medicine and surgery and could treat many more of its own residents if funds were diverted elsewhere. I can see the authority's argument. It is merely studying its assets and seeking to manage them efficiently, and so it should. Perhaps, however, the measurement of such assets lies not in balance sheet values alone, and the authority should perhaps realise that the institution developed at the Cassel hospital is quite literally priceless.

The Government cannot be blamed—except for the fact that what is clearly a national service finds itself funded by a mere district health authority. After all, the Government are giving to the National Health Service more money than ever before in our history and, next year, for the first time, even more than is spent on defence.

The Government have said that self-governing hospital trusts within the NHS could be a successful way to maximise funding of special bodies—the Cassel hospital

could be one of them—but an even better suggestion, which I know that the Minister would warmly welcome, would be the contracting route, as from April 1991.

The hospital needs to stay alive until April 1991, however, and its death is imminent. The district health authority meets again at the end of this month with plans to close the hospital. The community health council may be able to stave off closure until the summer, and then there will be appeals to the Department of Health, but we are still talking about a death sentence and the hospital might not reach April 1991.

I ask the Minister to appreciate that the Cassel hospital is a unique resource, and to give Riverside health authority the breathing space that it needs to come up with a permanent solution for funding the Cassel. It would be an act of material vandalism for the unit to be broken up simply to pay for some 5 per cent. of a new general hospital, however great the need for that might be.

Sometimes people who do not understand the Cassel say that it is a Rolls-Royce service that we can ill afford in the National Health Service. If to be a Rolls-Royce service is to be the very best that exists—an example and a target for all and the best service that can be offered—the Cassel is indeed a Rolls-Royce, and its existence shows what is possible within the NHS and sets standards to which others should aspire. It is a unit which provides answers to questions repeatedly raised over the years in official child abuse inquiries so that the tragic mistakes made in many places, from Greenwich to Cleveland, need not reoccur. If we cannot afford a unit which offers such hope and has proved so much, I despair not only for the future of the National Health Service but for those children and families whose suffering will continue, and for the nation and its Social Service and Health Departments which will have to bear the cost—and not just the financial costs—of continuing illness and abuse.

2.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Roger Freeman): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) on a powerful presentation of the problems of, and prospects for, the Cassel hospital. I am in a slightly difficult position because if the community health council appealed against a decision about the future of the hospital, I should ultimately have to adjudicate. My hon. Friend will understand, therefore, that I shall have to be circumspect in what I say. Nevertheless, as a Minister who is responsible in part for mental health, I have a particular interest, in the work not only of this hospital, but of all our psychiatric hospitals. My hon. Friend was right to describe the unique nature of the hospital's work.

My hon. Friend and I are both chartered accountants and I agree with him that in the Health Service, value is not just a balance sheet or financial value. Many other aspects of service must be taken into account. There is no question but that the hospital provides a unique range of services. My hon. Friend rightly touched on its work in child abuse cases. It is also unique in that its patients are drawn from a wide range of districts. I gather that about 50 per cent. of the patients are drawn from outside the region that is responsible for the hospital. One quarter of all the training places for consultant psychotherapists in the United Kingdom are at the Cassel. I also understand that it is the only place where psycho-social nurses are trained, and that, too, is an important point.

My hon. Friend drew attention to the fact that whereas the hospital deals with 4,000 to 6,000 out-patients a year, it may care for only 80 in-patients a year. He rightly suggested that, with a revenue budget of £1 million to £1·25 million, the cost per in-patient place must be about £10,000 per annum. I am neither surprised nor put off by that figure. St. Andrew's, a hospital in Northamptonshire just outside the southern end of my constituency, provides places for people with severe behavioural problems at a cost of about £50,000 a year. That is the order of magnitude with which we are dealing. It is important that the House should appreciate that treatment costs for the disturbed and those needing psychotherapy are high. We must face that fact in the National Health Service.

When Ministers are asked to adjudicate on closure, major rationalisation or change of service proposals, they have to assess the consequences for patient services. These proposals appear not to be in the classic mould of proposals by a district or region wishing to treat patients in hospital A or hospital B—a rationalisation or centralisation move. As my hon. Friend rightly asked, if the hospital closes, where will the patients be treated? He is right that that question has not been answered. That is clearly a material fact which must be addressed in any proposal and a satisfactory answer must be given. No one doubts that the hospital provides a unique range of services.

My hon. Friend put his finger on the problem when he said that Riverside district health authority, part of North West Thames regional health authority is responsible for financing an institution that has a client base broader than the district, which, although geographically small, is nevertheless important to the citizens of London. The argument runs that it is inappropriate for Riverside to be asked to bear the full burden of the cost of the hospital.

My hon. Friend drew attention to the Adjournment debate earlier this week when my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) argued in an impassioned debate that faster progress should be made by the North West Thames regional health authority towards transferring relatively—not absolutely—resources from the inner and outer London district health authorities to the shire district health authorities, as that is where the population is moving to and where it is growing.

It is important to appreciate the reasons for the pressures. There are pressures on Cassel because of Riverside's revenue deficit, which is forecast to be about £5 million for 1989-90. The regional health authority has placed an obligation on Riverside to balance its books within the next two financial years.

The North West Thames regional health authority also faces a problem over shifting resources relatively from the London districts to the shire districts, a point which my hon. Friend was right to acknowledge. There is also the problem that Cassel's patients are drawn from the whole country, not just from the district or the region.

My hon. Friend referred to the Chelsea and Westminster hospital. I am aware of revenue pressures there, but I am not aware of capital pressures: that as the cost of the Chelsea and Westminster hospital has undoubtedly increased because of the rise in construction costs, we must therefore look around for capital assets to sell. That may be a consequential benefit of any proposal

[Mr. Roger Freeman]

that may or may not be advanced, but that is not the driving force; it is clearly and understandably revenue based.

My hon. Friend said that the death of the hospital is imminent. The district health authority is to meet on 22 February to decide whether to proceed with the closure of Cassel. If it decides to close the hospital, it must consult. Statutory obligations are laid on the district health authority to do so. If the community health council, which it must consult, objects, the matter must go to the regional health authority. If the CHC is able to sustain its objection, the proposal will come to Ministers. That allows time for proper evaluation of the consequences of closure and of the strong feelings held by patients, residents and consultants. I shall want to be kept closely informed.

I do not intend to comment on Cassel's future. My hon. Friend will understand the difficult position in which I am placed; I may or may not be asked to adjudicate on its future. In general terms, however, I believe that my hon. Friend is right when he says that if a hospital is faced with the prospect of closure for whatever reason—whether on account of rationalisation or for financial reasons—it is appropriate to look forward to 1991-92, when contracts will allow money to follow the patient. My hon. Friend must be right when he says that hospitals in this position should begin to look forward and ask themselves, whatever their circumstances, "Which districts are our patients coming from? Can we persuade the clinicians in those districts financially to support the flow of patients, even though it may cost £10,000 per patient? Can we persuade the district health authorities to support financially a particular hospital?" That is a perfectly appropriate exercise. I suggest that all hospitals, whether or not they are faced with this predicament, ought to look forward to 1991-92, try to understand their patient flows, begin to explain to fellow clinicians the value of the work that has been done and seek appropriate financial support.

Furthermore, one must not necessarily assume that a hospital needs to stay within the National Health Service even if it wants to provide services to NHS patients.

Ministers have no philosophical objections to the provision of revenue from the National Health Service to pay for the essential treatment of patients in hospitals that may not be within the NHS—whether they be independent or voluntary.

Because of my responsibilities for mental health, I am deeply interested in the future of Cassel hospital and the care of the patients and their families. I assure my hon. Friend that if the closure decision comes to Ministers for adjudication, I will visit my hon. Friend, his constituency and the hospital and talk to the clinicians, administrators and patients.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 29 January 1990

NATIONAL FINANCE

Government Data Network

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will bring the January 1987 service requirement for a Government data network that is currently in the Library up to date with current development.

Mr. Ryder: The service requirement for the Government data network was produced for procurement purposes and it would not be appropriate to update it as a record of development. I have placed a copy of the annual report of the GDN central support staff for 1988-89 in the Library. Since that report was prepared, 10 more Government users, Her Majesty's Treasury, Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, Department of Energy, General Register Office (Scotland), the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce, Department of Trade and Industry, Welsh Office, Department of Transport and Ordnance Survey, have signed access agreements to use the network.

Non-smokers

Mr. Amos: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what provisions are being made in all the offices and other places under his Department's control for the convenience and comfort of non-smokers; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy for non-smokers.

Mr. Ryder: Her Majesty's Treasury is a member of the "Look After Your Heart" scheme, and, in that context, is reviewing its workplace policies, including that on smoking, which will contribute to the prevention of heart disease. I will write to my hon. Friend when that review has been completed.

Inflation

Mr. Simon Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the year on year rate of inflation at April of each year for 1979 and 1989.

Mr. Ryder: In the 12 months to April 1979, the all-items retail prices index rose by 10·1 per cent., and the corresponding rate for April 1989 was 8·0 per cent. For the RPI excluding mortgage interest payments, the equivalent inflation rates were 9·1 per cent. and 5·9 per cent. in April 1979 and April 1989 respectively.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made with respect to the European Commission's 1992 value added tax approximation proposals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 26 January 1990]:* In May 1989, the Commission put forward revised VAT proposals, the main changes being the suggestion of an (unspecified) minimum standard rate of VAT and an acknowledgement that some existing zero-rating could be continued. Subsequent discussions in successive Economic and Finance Ministers Councils agreed that the Council should decide on the tax approximation issue by the end of 1991. For further details of discussion at December ECOFIN, I would refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman) on 20 December at column 244.

The United Kingdom view remains that centrally fixed approximation of VAT rates is neither necessary nor appropriate to achieve the single market. While the Government have welcomed the Commission's acceptance of the need to continue zero-rating, they have continued to make clear that they could not accept any proposals which would restrict their ability to apply zero rates.

Useful progress has, however, been made on technical arrangements for removing fiscal frontiers. The decisions taken largely reflected the United Kingdom approach and should ensure reduced compliance costs for businesses, while maintaining adequate controls against fraud.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received in relation to amelioration in the value added tax treatment of charities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 26 January 1990]:* My right hon. Friend has received various representations from charitable bodies and individuals. The concerns expressed are being carefully considered, but any changes in taxation would be a matter for my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

CIVIL SERVICE

Creches

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will list by location, where creche facilities are provided for working mothers employed in his Department; and if they have to make any payment for this service.

Mr. Luce: The Civil Service college at Sunningdale is planning to open a workplace nursery later this year for which users will make payment, and staff have access to a holiday playscheme financed by both parental and departmental contributions. My Department is considering the need for and feasibility of providing creche facilities.

Cash Limits

Mr. Knapman: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if there are any proposals to change the 1988-89 cash limit for the Office of the Minister for the Civil Service.

Mr. Luce: No, but subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit for the Office of the Minister for the Civil Service (class XX, vote 1) will be increased by £728,000 from £35,189,000 to £35,917,000 for 1989-90. The increase will be charged to the reserve.

The increase is required to cover the additional cost of making physical security improvements; increased expenditure on fees, etc; additional administrative support

for the Government Whips; promoting and implementing the "next steps" initiative; administering a revised discretionary pay system for the Civil Service senior open structure; and increased recruitment advertising by the Civil Service Commission.

The foregoing increases in provision are partially offset by decreases resulting from a reassessment of capital provision, the grant in aid to the European Institute of Public Administration, and from savings in staff costs.

Some of the foregoing changes in provision have a consequent effect on the Department's running costs limit, which will be increased by £791,000 from £31,248,000 to £32,039,000.

In addition, the following amounts will be transferred to the Departments and agencies shown to meet part of the cost of increased management development training under the challenge funding scheme initiated by my Department. This will be met from existing but unallocated public expenditure provision.

	£'000
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	34
Central Statistical Office	5
Her Majesty's Customs and Excise	98
Ministry of Defence	34
Department of Education and Science	19
Department of Employment	365
Department of Health	26
Home Office	9
Inland Revenue	200
Her Majesty's Land Registry	1
Northern Ireland Civil Service	31
Ordnance Survey	2
Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys	1
Property Services Agency	1
Department of Social Security	25
Vehicle Inspectorate	13
Welsh Office	8
Office of Arts and Libraries	1
Total	873

THE ARTS

Cash Limits

Mr. Knapman: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will give details of any proposed changes to the cash limits of his Department's votes in 1989-90.

Mr. Luce: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates as appropriate, the cash limits of the following votes will be changed as indicated:

Class and Vote	*Current Cash Limit* £	*Change* £	*Revised Cash Limit* £
XIII, 1	157,599,000	−61,000	157,538,000
XIII, 2	178,466,000	+2,800,000	181,266,000
XIII, 4	1,561,000	+61,000	1,622,000

Additional provision of £2,800,000 is being sought in a spring Supplementary Estimate on class XIII, vote 2, to augment the main estimate provision for assets accepted in lieu of tax. The increase of £2,800,000 will be charged to the reserve and will therefore not add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Additional provision of £61,000 is being sought on class XIII, vote 4. The Office of Arts and Libraries running costs provision is to be increased by £75,000 to meet additional staff costs. That increase is partially offset by economies on capital expenditures of £10,000 and an increase in appropriations in aid of £4,000. The net increase of £61,000 will be offset by savings on research, surveys and other services on class XIII, vote 1, so there will be no addition to the planned total of public expenditure.

PRIME MINISTER

Eastern Europe

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a further statement on the implications for United Kingdom defence policy of recent political changes in eastern Europe.

The Prime Minister: We welcome the recent political changes in eastern Europe. NATO's policy of pursuing dialogue with the East whilst maintaining sufficient defences to preserve security has played a major part in promoting these changes. The Alliance is a force for stability in Europe at a time of great uncertainty, and our commitment to it is undiminished.

Tourism

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Prime Minister what recent representations she has received on the promotion of tourism.

The Prime Minister: I have received a number of representations on the promotion of tourism, both from members of the public and from the industry itself.

Terrorism

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a further statement on the United Kingdom's contribution to international co-operation against terrorism.

The Prime Minister: We contribute actively to international co-operation against terrorism in every way we can. Our starting point is to seek the widest possible agreement to our own policy, based on no substantive concessions to terrorists' demands. We also exchange effective, practical measures to prevent and counter terrorism.

We are prominent in the Trevi Group in Europe, where we are currently strengthening procedures for communicating information about terrorist activities, and examining the scope for action against the funds that sustain terrorism. Elsewhere, we are contributing to the International Civil Aviation Organisation's work on devising an international regime for marking explosives for detection.

We provide advice, assistance and training in counter-terrorism to many overseas Governments and agencies; and our police forces are in daily contact with their counterparts in the common effort to prevent terrorist acts and to bring terrorists to justice.

Health Promotion

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Prime Minister how she co-ordinates the work of Government Departments in health promotion.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health, together with my right

hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Northern Ireland ensure that these matters are effectively co-ordinated within Government.

Creches

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Prime Minister whether creche facilities are provided for working mothers employed in her Department; and if they have to make any payment for this service.

The Prime Minister: No.

Warwick University

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Prime Minister when she last visited the advanced technology centre at Warwick university; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I officially opened the advanced technology centre at Warwick university during my visit on 8 January. I was much impressed by the excellent facilities and the commitment of the staff. The centre is an outstanding example of what can be achieved through co-operation between higher education and industry.

EC (Responsibilities)

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment she has made of the level of transfer of direct responsibility to the European Community since the passage of the Single European Act; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The Single European Act's main objectives, in particular the programme to complete the single market, are being fulfilled, but the SEA did not fundamentally affect the institutional balance in the Community. The final word remains with member states in the Council of Ministers, who remain accountable to their national Parliaments.

British Intelligence (History)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the current position in relation to Professor Sir Michael Howard's commissioned history of British Intelligence.

The Prime Minister: "Strategic Deception" by Professor Sir Michael Howard is being prepared for publication as volume V of the series entitled "British Intelligence in the Second World War". The current position is that the text has now been returned to Her Majesty's Stationery Office for printing and binding. Publication is expected to take place in the summer.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Inspectors

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, further to his reply of 13 December 1989, *Official Report*, column *702*, relating to the appointment of an inspector, what was *(a)* the name of the inspector and his firm, *(b)* the company he investigated, *(c)* the investigations being simultaneously undertaken and *(d)* the date on which his Department became aware that one of its inspectors was being investigated.

Mr. Redwood: As indicated in my reply of 13 December, inspectors are appointed to investigate the affairs or membership of companies, not individuals.

The answers to the hon. Member's questions are:

(a) Mr. P. L. Ainger FCA of Messrs. Price Waterhouse.
(b) Gilgate Holdings Limited.
Raybourne Group Limited.
Calomefern Limited.
Desadean Properties Limited.
(c) Those at *(b)* and Ramor Investments Limited.
(d) I cannot say.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his policy on appointing inspectors from accountancy firms found wanting by his Department.

Mr. Redwood: It is usual to appoint inspectors from firms of accountants who have not been the subject of recent criticism.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether any individual from Thornton Baker, now Grant Thornton, has been appointed a Department of Trade and Industry inspector since September 1981.

Mr. Redwood: Three individuals from Grant Thornton have been appointed inspectors since September 1981.

Children's Bicycles

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received on the brake systems of children's bicycles with a saddle height of less than 25 in.; what representations he is making to the EEC Commissioner on this matter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Representations have been made by the cycle industry about the level of safety and appropriateness of the European harmonised standard EN71 in respect of the braking performance tests specifically in relation to cycles with saddle heights between 435 mm and 635 mm. I am concerned by the suggestions that the tests may not provide the level of safety required by the essential requirements of the European directive on the safety of toys. The United Kingdom delegation to the European Committee for Standardisation sought to have the braking test specified in the International Standard Organisation standard 8098 incorporated into the harmonised standards, but there was insufficient support for this from other CEN delegates.

The matter is being urgently considered. If the Department concludes that any harmonised standard does not meet the essential requirements the procedure is for the Government to refer the matter to the standing committee set up under the directive for re-consideration. If appropriate, we will proceed accordingly. In the meantime, my officials have told the manufacturers that, when toys do not conform in whole or in part to harmonised standards, type approval may be obtained from an approved body. The approved body is concerned to establish that the model submitted for approval meets the essential requirements, and in so doing may, if the harmonised standard is inappropriate, have regard to other appropriate tests.

Supervisory Bodies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give full publicity to the arrangements offered by supervisory bodies seeking recognition under the Companies Act 1989; and if he will give the public an opportunity to comment on the acceptability of such arrangements.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend can give no undertakings to publicise the details of any application he receives, since this would rule out the possibility of a body including information supplied in confidence in its application. He will, however, carry out such consultation as he thinks necessary to enable him to reach a view on an application. He will take into account any comments he receives.

Rechem International

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will take steps to instigate an inquiry under the Companies Acts of alleged insider dealing in the shares of Rechem International.

Mr. Redwood: The power to appoint inspectors to investigate possible insider dealing offences is in section 177 of the Financial Services Act 1986.

The surveillance division of the stock exchange looks at cases of price movements before price-sensitive announcements, and where appropriate it passes information to my Department for consideration of whether further investigation, in particular by the appointment of inspectors, is desirable. Such appointments are not normally announced.

Newspaper Acquisitions

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many applications have been made for newspaper acquisitions under the terms of the Fair Trading Act 1973 since 19 December 1980; and how many of these were refused.

Mr. Redwood: Since 19 December 1980, decisions have been taken on 66 applications. Sixty-two consents have been given, of which two were given conditionally.

A number of applications have also been received which have been withdrawn before any final decision has been taken.

Carbon Technology

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the Government's policy on the export to eastern European countries of carbon technology with regard to filtration systems for emissions from industrial processes.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 24 January 1990]:* The Government's policy is to encourage export of goods and technology which do not give rise to strategic or other concerns. Applications for export licences are considered case by case on their merits.

BOM Holdings plc

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will make a statement about BOM Holdings plc and the extent to which his Department is monitoring the company under the Companies Acts;

(2) what representations he has received about proposed land sale transactions and other activities by BOM Holdings plc in the past three months; and if he intends any action in respect of this company.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 25 January 1990]:* BOM Holdings plc has not filed its first accounts by the due date, 31 August 1989, nor has it filed an annual return due on 1 November 1989. The Registrar of Companies is taking appropriate action.

My Department has received a number of representations about the company's recent activities including a contract for the sale of an area of land which is a major asset. We are considering urgently whether action is appropriate, but I cannot indicate whether any action will be taken.

Somalia

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what commodities the British Government trade with Somalia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 26 January 1990]:* The British Government do not trade with Somalia. Trade by United Kingdom companies with Somalia is published in the "Overseas Trade Statistics" book held in the House of Commons Library.

WALES

Special Educational Needs

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the most recent figure for the number of pupils and students with statements of special educational needs in Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: At January 1989, there were 11,742 pupils in Wales with statements of special educational needs under the Education Act 1981.

Felinheli Bypass

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales following his recent announcement of his intentions to upgrade land communications in north Wales, what is the latest estimate for the commencement date for work on the Felinheli bypass; and what is the target date for this road to be open.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The A487 Felinheli bypass is programmed to start early in the period April 1991-March 1994. Construction is expected to take about two years.

Non-smokers

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what provisions are being made in all the offices and other places under his Department's control for the convenience and comfort of non-smokers; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy for non-smokers.

Mr. Grist: The Department operates a "no smoking" policy which aims to provide a smoke-free environment for the health and comfort of all staff. Smoking is mainly restricted to special designated areas where those who wish to smoke are free to do so. The policy is working well.

Wintech

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next expects to meet the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency; and if he will raise the future status, staffing and funding of Wintech.

Mr. Peter Walker: I meet regularly with the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency to discuss matters concerning the whole range of its activities, including the work of its technology development arm, which is now known as Welsh Development Technology.

Cash Limits

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to make any changes to his Department's cash limits in the current year.

Mr. Peter Walker: Yes, the cash limit for class XVII, vote 2, regional and industrial development Wales, is being reduced by £3 million from £89,448,000 to £86,448,000 in order to take account of lower than expected demand in the current financial year for regional enterprise grant. At the same time gross expenditure by the Welsh Development Agency is being increased by a similar amount to allow it to retain an additional £3 million of grant in aid receipts.

The cash limit for class XVII, vote 8, hospital and community health services, etc., Wales, is being reduced by £600,000 from £835,510,00 to £834,910,000. This will meet the Welsh share of the additional assistance to be paid from class XIV, vote 3, to haemophiliacs infected with HIV, as announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health on 23 November 1989 at columns 11-12.

Finally, a token Supplementary Estimate will shortly be presented for class XVII, vote 13. A parliamentary answer giving full details of the cost of water privatisation will be given soon.

NHS

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total cost of staging the one-day conference, "Strategic Intent and Direction for the National Health Service in Wales", held on 17 November 1989 at the Angel hotel, Cardiff.

Mr. Grist *[holding answer 25 January 1990]:* The total cost of preparing for and staging this major conference of 260 delegates was £21,000, with a further £4,600 spent on the production of materials which are continuing to be used. Of the total cost, £3,000 was met from the Department's NHS budget, and the balance from the Department's publicity budget.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Archaeological Site, Ballycarry

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the significance of the archaeological site at Bridgend road, Ballycarry, Co. Antrim.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The site is regarded as of great archaeological importance. It is a circular enclosure, recognised from aerial photography and interpreted as an ecclesiastical settlement of the early Christian period (5th to 12th centuries AD). Such enclosures are not common in Northern Ireland.

Early 19th century records of human remains and stone-lined graves confirm the presence of an early graveyard within the enclosure.

A medieval parish church was recorded on the site in 1306 AD. The ruins of a later church, built in 1622 AD, still stand within the enclosure and have been scheduled for protection under the Historic Monuments Act (Northern Ireland) 1971.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans there are to excavate the archaeological site at Templecorran, Bridgend road, Ballycarry, Co. Antrim.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There are no such plans.

Archaeological Excavations

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the Department of the Environment (historic buildings and ancient monuments branch) receives as an annual budget for archaeological excavations.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: In the 1989-1990 financial year, the Department of the Environment's historic monuments and buildings branch budget for archaeological excavations and related work was £103,400.

Cash Limits

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on cash and running cost limits for the Northern Ireland departmental services and the Northern Ireland Office in 1989-90.

Mr. Cope: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary associated Supplementary Estimates, it is proposed that the cash limit for the Northern Ireland Office (NIO1) will be increased by £12,660,000 from £625,649,000 to £638,309,000. This increase reflects a transfer of £12,240,000 from the cash limit for Northern Ireland Departments (NID1) and an increase of £420,000 for capital carryover from 1988-89 under end-year flexibility arrrangements.

The cash limit for NI departmental services (NID1) for 1989-90 will be decreased by £0·8 million from £2707·1 million to £2706·3 million. This change reflects the transfer to NIO1, and a reduction of £0·2 million to cover NI's contribution to the Macfarlane Trust in respect of haemophiliacs who have become infected with HIV, as announced on 23 November 1989 at column 11-12, offset by increases of £7·7 million for Health Service pay, £2·1 million for capital carryover from 1988-89 under the

end-year flexibility arrangements, £2·1 million for the beef special premium scheme (offset by a reduction in the cash limit for the Intervention Board of Agricultural Produce —class IV, vote 2—as announced on 23 May 1989 at column 473) and £0·7 million transferred from the Department of Social Security for administration costs relating to social security operations undertaken on an agency basis in NI (offset by a reduction of the same amount in the cash limit for DSS class XV vote 7).

The net increase resulting from these changes will be charged to the reserve.

The running cost limit for NIO and NI Departments will be decreased by £3,730,000 from £543,030,000 to £539,300,000 reflecting efficiency savings emerging, notably in the prisons sector, and other easements resulting from variations in estimated demand.

Primary Schools, Londonderry

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* to show for each primary school in the Londonderry council area for the latest available year *(a)* the number of children, *(b)* whether the school is controlled, or maintained or voluntary, indicating what the figures were for each school in 1980, 1975 and 1970; which schools have closed and the date of closure since 1970; and which schools were first opened with the date of opening since 1970.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* Information on enrolments in 1970 is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The other information requested is as follows:

Primary School	*Enrolment (January)* 1989	1980	1975	*Date of Opening/Closure (where applicable)*	
1. Controlled					
Londonderry Model	336	266	310	—	—
Ebrington	553	525	520	—	—
Groarty	41	63	70	—	—
Culmore	52	63	47	—	—
Ballougry	39	22	32	—	—
Kilaloo-Cumber	97	94	74	—	—
Drumahoe	230	260	297	—	—
Maydown	96	97	128	—	—
Eglinton	225	181	211	—	—
Newbuildings	319	345	378	—	—
Straidarran	67	67	74	—	—
Strathfoyle	70	205	277	—	—
Greenlaw	240	213	192	Opened	4 October 1971
Fort James	226	233	210	Opened	4 September 1973
Lisnagelvin	563	510	—	Opened	4 January 1978
Lisdillon	—	—	—	Closed	31 August 1973
Killymallaght	—	—	—	Closed	31 August 1973
2. Maintained					
St. Eugene's Convent Senior	332	285	308	—	—
St. Eugene's Convent Infants	226	226	291	—	—
The Cathedral	25	40	54	—	—
Carlisle Road	62	62	62	—	—
Rosemount	441	466	750	—	—
First Derry	52	57	48	—	—
Nazareth House Convent	413	402	369	—	—
Holy Child	476	506	596	—	—
Hollybush	184	143	158	—	—
Glendermott	167	200	201	—	—
Cumber Upper	28	44	42	—	—
St. Patrick's Boys	319	368	506	—	—
St. Patrick's Girls	307	337	473	—	—
St. Patrick's Infants	416	426	585	—	—
Craigbrack	83	69	59	—	—
Broadbridge	171	144	139	—	—
St. Mary's	120	124	169	—	—
Listress	38	42	49	—	—
Mullabuoy	164	248	264	—	—
St. John's	675	657	902	Opened	1 September 1971
St. Anne's	743	686	497	Opened	1 May 1972
Central Claudy	326	371	417	Opened	1 September 1972
Steelstown	706	921	1,060	Opened	10 April 1972
Carnhill	537	812	309	Opened	2 September 1974
St. Oliver Plunkett	206	252	295	Opened	7 January 1975
Slievemore	722	696	—	Opened	1 September 1977
St. Columba's	102	164	—	Opened	1 September 1977
Trench Road	405	493	—	Opened	1 April 1979
Dungiven Road	423	—	—	Opened	18 March 1980
Lenamore	478	—	—	Opened	1 September 1983
Chapel Road	187	—	—	Opened	18 March 1980
Holy Family	656	—	—	Opened	1 September 1987
Longtower	559	—	—	Opened	1 September 1988
Waterside Girls	—	n/a	568	Closed	31 March 1980
Christchurch	—	—	88	Closed	31 August 1975

Primary School	Enrolment (January) 1989	1980	1975	Date of Opening/Closure (where applicable)
Rossdowney	—	—	226	Closed 31 December 1977
Clooney	—	—	300	Closed 21 December 1977
Brow-of-the-Hill	—	—	201	Closed 31 August 1976
Waterside boys	—	n/a	655	Closed 31 August 1980
Aghakillymaude	—	—	25	Closed 31 August 1976
Rossnagallagh	—	—	121	Closed 31 August 1977
Enagh	—	—	—	Closed 31 August 1974
3. Voluntary[1]				
St. Joseph's Convent	—	—	129	Closed 31 August 1975
St. Columb's Convent Infants	—	58	130	Closed 31 August 1985

[1] There are no voluntary primary schools in the area at present.
n/a = Not available.

Brandywell Stadium

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what sums of public money have been spent on the Brandywell stadium in Londonderry; and for what purposes in each of the last 10 years.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* In the 1988-89 and 1989-90 financial years, grant of £50,000 and £100,000 respectively was paid to Derry city council by the Department of Education towards costs incurred on construction works associated with terracing and stand facilities for spectators, floodlighting and related health and safety works.

Football Membership Scheme

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has any plans to impose card membership of football supporters in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* I have no such plans.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Soviet Foreign Minister

92. **Dr. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Soviet Foreign Minister; and what was discussed.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs met Mr. Shevardnadze on 19 December and they discussed bilateral relations, human rights and the full range of East-West issues.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his latest assessment of the potential of exploiting hydrocarbons around the Falkland Islands.

Mr. Sainsbury: Seismic surveys were carried out in the waters around the Falkland Islands in the 1970s. The results were commercially confidential and thus do not allow us to make any assessment of the potential for the exploitation of hydrocarbons.

Nepal

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions in 1989 the Government approached the King of Nepal concerning violations of human rights in that land.

Mr. Sainsbury: We have several times raised British concerns with Nepalese Ministers and officials. These matters are not however, normally discussed at the level of Heads of State.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Nepal concerning conditions in Nepalese prisons and detention centres and the continued use of torture and ill-treatment of Christians.

Mr. Sainsbury: None. The Nepalese Government are well aware of our concern about cases involving Christians, about which we have approached them many times.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Nepalese authorities concerning the detainees held without trial in Nepal for up to three years under the Public Security Act.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Nepalese Government are well aware of our concerns about human rights issues. We note that recent legislation has reduced the maximum period for detention without trial to 18 months.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government have done to bring to the attention of the United Nations the continued violation of human rights in Nepal.

Mr. Sainsbury: We express British concerns as and when necessary to the Nepalese Government.

Postage Stamps (Cyprus)

Mr. Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he will take, including representations to the Turkish Government, with respect to the issuing by the authorities in Turkish-occupied Cyprus of postage stamps which depict the royal family.

Mr. Maude: We are drawing the attention of the Turkish Cypriot authorities to the unauthorised use of the royal image on a recent stamp issue.

Non-smokers

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what provisions are being made in all the offices and other places under his Department's control for the convenience and comfort of non-smokers; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy for non-smokers.

Mr. Sainsbury: Since early 1989 a smoking policy has been in force in all FCO and ODA premises which prohibits smoking at meetings, in shared offices (except with the consent of all occupants) and in most common areas. The aim of the policy is to provide smoke-free working conditions for all staff who want them.

Arms Control and Disarmament

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to invite a representative from *(a)* the Verification Technology Information Centre, *(b)* the British-American Security Information Council, *(c)* the Defence Fax Organisation and *(d)* the European Proliferation Information Centre to participate in the next meeting of his ad hoc Advisory Panel on Arms Control and Disarmament.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Verification Technology Information Centre and the European Proliferation Information Centre receive invitations to attend the Minister of State's bi-annual meetings with non-governmental organisations interested in arms control and disarmament issues. These meetings have superseded for NGOs the Advisory Panel on Arms Control and Disarmament, which has been in abeyance since 1987. There has been no recent contact with the British-American Security Information Council and none with the Defence Fax Organisation.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when his ad hoc Advisory Panel on Arms Control and Disarmament last met; what subjects were discussed; and which individuals and organisations participated.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Minister of State's Advisory Panel on Arms Control and Disarmament last met on 30 April 1987. The subjects discussed were as follows: the public presentation of the Government's arms control and defence policies, the prospects for an INF agreement, United Kingdom arms sales, the East-West balance in conventional and chemical forces, nuclear deterrence and arms control, prospects for a chemical weapons convention, and public perceptions of the various areas of arms control. Those participating included academics, religious leaders, journalists, and members of NGOs involved with arms control and disarmament issues.

Since then, a series of briefing and discussion meetings for non-governmental organisations interested in arms control has been held at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which I have chaired.

Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to include discussion of policy developments in regard to the forthcoming fourth review conference of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty during meetings with his counterparts from foreign ministries abroad in the period leading up to the review conference in August.

Mr. Waldegrave: It is already our policy to take every appropriate opportunity to discuss this issue at suitable levels in our contacts with other foreign ministries.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to place the forthcoming fourth review conference of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and the development of United Kingdom policies for this conference on the agenda for the next meeting of his ad hoc Advisory Panel on Arms Control and Disarmament.

Mr. Waldegrave: The question of United Kingdom policy at the forthcoming review conference of the non-proliferation treaty is one that is discussed at the regular bi-annual meetings between the Minister of State and a wide range of non-governmental organisations interested in arms control and disarmament. These meetings superseded for the NGOs the Advisory Panel on Arms Control and Disarmament, which has been in abeyance since 1987.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the present total of states that are recognised by the United Kingdom which have both signed and ratified the 1968 Nuclear non-proliferation treaty; and how many additional states not recognised by the United Kingdom have *(a)* signed and *(b)* ratified the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Waldegrave: There are 139 states recognised by Her Majesty's Government which have signed and ratified the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT), or which have acceded to the Treaty since it came into force. In addition, Taiwan and North Korea, which are not recognised as states by Her Majesty's Government, are parties to the treaty. There are no states which have signed but not ratified the treaty.

Cash Limits

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he proposes to make any changes in his Department's diplomatic wing cash limits and running cost limits for 1989-90.

Mr. Sainsbury: The cash limit for class II, vote 1 (overseas representation) will be increased by £24,327,000 from £453,770,000 to £478,097,000. In addition, the running costs limit on vote 1 will be increased by £14,146,000 from £434,521,000 to £448,667,000. These changes reflect increased costs due to the introduction of new visa regimes in Turkey and the Mahgreb, and the adverse effect of overseas price movements.

The cash limit for class I, vote 2 (other external relations) will increase by £3,573,000 from £171,499,000 to £175,072,000. This takes account of increased costs on ONUCA, Mozambique military training and higher than forecast expenditure on our contributions to international organisations due to the adverse effect of overseas price movements.

The cash limit for class II, vote 4 (the British Council) will increase by £285,000 from £64,111,000 to £64,396,000 to take account of the adverse effect of overseas price movements.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department has compiled a list of all known sea and land-based disposal sites for surplus and redundant chemical weapon stocks; and what proportions, by total volume of chemical agents, have been disposed of at current or former Ministry of Defence sites.

Mr. Alan Clark: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the former Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement on 25 January 1989 at column *653*.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Betting Offices

Dr. Woodcock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to allow amusement with prizes machines in licensed betting offices.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have no such plans at present.

Dr. Woodcock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to amend the law to allow evening opening of licensed betting offices.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply on 17 January to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) at column *272*.

Drugs

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the estimated value of illegally imported drugs into the United Kingdom in 1989.

Mr. Mellor: The clandestine nature of the illicit traffic in controlled drugs has made it impossible to obtain a reliable estimate of the amount imported into the United Kingdom.

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his assessment of the progress being made in the United Kingdom to combat drug abuse and dealing.

Mr. Mellor: The Government give the highest priority to tackling both the demand for and the supply of drugs. The ministerial group on the misuse of drugs, which I chair, co-ordinates and monitors regularly progress in implementing our strategy for combating the misuse of and traffic in drugs.

Recent developments have included: introducing provisions in the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Bill to enable the United Kingdom to ratify the new United Nations convention against illicit drug trafficking; organising, in association with the United Nations, a world ministerial summit to reduce the demand for drugs and to combat the cocaine threat, to be held in London next April; increasing, from £2 million a year to £3 million in 1990-91, the Home Office programme of overseas drug-related law enforcement assistance to producer and transit countries and providing an emergency package of drug-related assistance to Colombia; providing £1 million for a central fund to meet some of the additional costs of overseas drugs investigations by the police and rewards to major informants; tightening domestic controls with the addition of buprenorphine and pemoline to the list of drugs controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971; deterring drug traffickers by the confiscation of assets—so far, some £16 million has been ordered to be confiscated from convicted drug traffickers; requiring, under the science part of the national curriculum, all primary and secondary schools to provide education about the harmful effects of drugs, and in addition making available continued grant support for local education authority drugs education co-ordinators and in-service teacher training on drugs; increasing to over £18 million earmarked funding for drug treatment and rehabilitation services.

Data Protection Act

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make a statement on the progress made by the team reviewing the Data Protection Act.

Mr. Mellor: The committee has made substantial progress since last summer when the Data Protection Registrar reported on the outcome of his consultations about the operation of the Act. I expect it to report to my right hon. and learned Friend in the next few months.

Oil Trading Frauds

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many oil trading frauds are being investigated by the fraud divisions of *(a)* the Metropolitan police and *(b)* the City of London police; and whether any other police forces are involved.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis and the Commissioner of Police for the City of London that the figures are *(a)* nine and *(b)* none. No other police forces are known to be involved in any of the cases under investigation.

Prison Sanitation

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prison cells will be without sanitation on completion of the current integral sanitation programme;

(2) what effect the provision of integral sanitation in prisons has had on the number of cells available;

(3) what effect the provision of integral sanitation will have on future prison cell accommodation;

(4) whether he has any plans to provide integral sanitation for those prison cells not included in the current integral sanitation programme.

Mr. Waddington: It is not possible to answer these questions with precision. All new prisons built or planned since 1979 have integral sanitation. Major refurbishments under way or planned for existing establishments will reduce the number of cells without access to sanitation by over 7,000. The effect of this on the number of cells ultimately available will depend on whether the refurbishment involves the addition of sanitary annexes or the installation of toilets and hand basins in individual cells; this has not yet been decided in many cases.

In addition, there is an on-going programme to instal toilets and hand basins in individual cells where major

refurbishment is not planned. When this on-going programme was announced in February 1989, 6,500 cells had been identified as suitable for this type of conversion. This programme is kept under continuous review, and the number of cells identified has now risen to over 8,000. The effect on availability of cells will be very temporary and will involve small numbers at any one time, because the conversions are fitted into each establishment's normal works programme.

Completion of the programme described will reduce the number of cells without access to sanitation to fewer than 7,000 by the end of the century. This number may be further reduced by closure of some establishments if the prison population remains stable.

Green Goddess Fleet

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many qualified mechanics are employed in servicing the green goddess fire appliance fleet based at Bruntingthorpe aerodrome;

(2) what inspection system his Department has introduced to check the quality of maintenance of work carried out on the green goddess fire appliance fleet by private contractors;

(3) what steps are taken to ensure that the green goddess fire appliance fleet, based at Bruntingthorpe aerodrome, is being properly serviced.

Mr. John Patten: Under interim arrangements, five qualified mechanics, supported by two labourers, are employed in servicing the appliances currently based at Bruntingthorpe, and the work is overseen by a Home Office official on site. It is planned to support inspection procedures by the appointment of permanent quality assurance officers.

Bruntingthorpe Aerodrome

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to improve arrangements for emergency procedures in the event of a fire at Bruntingthorpe aerodrome in respect of departmental equipment.

Mr. John Patten: Due consideration has been given to arrangements for fire safety in the temporary accommodation at Bruntingthorpe, and relevant advice has been sought from the Leicestershire fire brigade.

Crack

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state *(a)* the street value, *(b)* the amount and *(c)* the city or town of seizure of crack seized in Britain for each month in 1989.

Mr. Mellor: Information is not available in the form requested by the hon. Member. In 1989, a provisional total of 139 seizures of crack, amounting to approximately 243g and with an estimated street value of £24,380, were reported to the national drugs intelligence unit.

Provisional forensic science service figures for the number and weight of seizures, by police region and month of analysis, are set out below. This breakdown is not available for earlier months than August 1989.

Number of seizures (and weight in grams) of "crack" in 1989 by police region in which seized and month of analysis

Police region	August		September		October		November		December	
	Seizures	Weight	Seizures	Weight	Seizures	Weight	Seizures	Weight	Seizures	Weight
1. Greater Manchester Merseyside Lancashire North Wales	3	(3·21)	1	(0·79)	4	(1·64)	4	(1·41)	—	—
2. North East	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
3. Nottinghamshire South Yorkshire West Yorkshire	3	(25·21)	—	—	1	(trace)	4	(5·45)	2	(0·65)
4. West Midlands	4	(3·39)	2	(0·07)	—	—	1	(2·03)	—	—
5. Essex	2	(0·11)	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	(0·35)
6. Surrey	—	—	1	(trace)	1	(trace)	—	—	—	—
7. Avon and Somerset Dorset	6	(1·07)	4	(8·71)	1	(0·33)	—	—	—	—
8. South Wales	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
9. Metropolitan Police	16	(11·84)	—	—	15	(9·57)	14	(12·69)	[1]10	(1·40)
10. Scotland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
11. Northern Ireland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

[1] Includes one seizure of 0·2 gram by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise analysed by the Laboratory of the Government Chemist. Crack is not generally imported but produced in the United Kingdom from cocaine.

Forensic Pathology

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to implement the recommendation in paragraph 3.32 of the Gordon Wasserman report on forensic pathology that he should fund a number of lectureships in forensic pathology and forensic medicine; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Home Office has only recently received the last of the replies from organisations which were invited to comment on the report of the working party on forensic pathology. We shall be considering all the working party's recommendations, including that contained in paragraph 3.32, shortly.

Non-smokers

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provisions are being made in all the offices and other places under his Department's control for the convenience and comfort of non-smokers; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy for non-smokers.

Mr. Waddington: The Department's policy is to discourage smoking in its premises and wherever possible to establish a non-smoking environment; in particular, smoking is prohibited in conference rooms, lifts and toilets. Consideration is being given to what further measures might be taken to reinforce this policy.

Prisoners (Education)

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average number of prisoner-hours of education per week in each young offender institution in 1986-87, 1987-88, 1988-89 and to date in 1989-90.

Mr. Waddington: The figures requested are shown in the following table for 1987-88 onwards. Statistics for the period 1986-87 are not readily available in the same form as those quoted for later years.

Young Offender Institutions

Establishments	*1987-88 Total student hours*	*Average weekly student hours 1987-88*	*1988-89 Total student hours*	*Average weekly student hours 1988-89*	*1989-90 Total student hours*	*Average weekly student hours 1989-90*[1]
Midland Region						
Aylesbury	27,914	536·8	44,164	849·3	27,729	924·3
Glen Parva	107,582	2,068·8	127,606	2,453·9	76,098	2,536·6
Onley	54,214	1,042·5	54,582	1,049·6	29,919	997·3
Swinfen Hall	34,371	660·9	32,169	618·6	21,772	725·7
Wellingborough	49,907	959·7	55,949	1,075·9	32,776	1,092·5
Whatton	—	—	74,460	1,431·9	28,824	960·8
Hewell Grange	34,131	656·3	31,409	604·0	21,977	732·5
Lowdham Grange	69,031	1,327·5	69,178	1,330·3	30,111	1,003·7
South East Region						
Bullwood Hall	18,902	363·5	19,890	382·5	12,375	412·5
Dover	44,263	851·2	29,799	573·0	14,648	488·2
Feltham	54,381	1,045·7	56,854	1,093·0	26,439	881·3
Hollesley Bay	67,856	1,304·9	57,141	1,098·8	29,860	995·3
Huntercomber/Fin Wood	61,723	1,186·9	84,703	1,628·9	47,950	1,598·3
Mount	—	—	50,023	961·9	34,184	1,139·4
Rochester	25,584	492·0	—	—	—	—
South West Region						
Campsfield House	5,773	111·0	14,675	282·2	13,900	463·3
Erlestoke	20,750	399·0	35,373	680·0	28,256	941·8
Portland	52,496	1,009·5	66,949	1,287·4	42,458	1,415·2
Eastwood Park	—	—	42,214	811·8	20,238	674·6
Haslar	—	—	19,551	375·9	11,088	369·6
Usk	—	—	49,915	959·9	26,487	882·9
Guys Marsh	26,626	512·0	21,927	421·6	9,800	326·6
North Region						
Castington	58,251	1,120·2	48,060	924·2	36,450	1,215·0
Deerbolt	97,726	1,879·3	83,983	1,615·0	53,889	1,796·3
Everthorpe	106,636	2,050·6	88,661	1,705·0	54,104	1,803·4
Northallerton	54,046	1,039·3	45,558	876·1	38,241	1,274·7
Stoke Heath	90,033	1,731·4	75,070	1,443·6	44,133	1,471·1
Werrington	40,207	773·2	34,760	668·4	19,904	663·4
Wetherby	53,690	1,032·5	41,591	799·8	29,516	983·8
Buckley Hall	58,550	1,125·9	48,365	930·0	30,419	1,013·9
Kirklevington	42,884	824·6	32,618	652·3	11,468	382·2
Hatfield	47,414	911·8	40,594	780·6	25,695	856·5
Thorn Cross	75,007	1,442·4	66,058	1,270·3	38,590	1,286·3

[1] To date.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average number of prisoner-hours of education per week in each remand centre in 1986-87, 1987-88, 1988-89 and to date in 1989-90.

Mr. Waddington: The figures requested are shown on the schedule for 1987-88 onwards. Statistics for the period 1986-87 are not readily available in the same form as those quoted for later years.

Remand Centres

Establishments	*1987-88 total student hours*	*Average weekly student hours 1987-88*	*1988-89 total student hours*	*Average weekly student hours 1988-89*	*1989-90 total student hours*	*Average weekly student hours 1989-90*[1]
South West Region						
Pucklechurch	36,845	708·5	30,646	589·3	14,862	495·4
North Region						
Low Newton	104,656	2,012·6	84,509	1,625·1	66,269	2,208·9
Hindley	72,187	1,388·2	57,692	1,109·4	51,423	1,714·1
Risley	34,804	669·3	27,960	537·6	19,973	665·7
Midland Region						
Brockhill	24,923	479·2	29,423	565·8	20,320	677·3
South East Region						
Ashford	11,752	225·4	9,340	179·6	34,185	1,139·5
Brixton	15,616	300·3	35,892	690·2	32,164	1,072·1
Latchmere House	36,496	701·8	40,452	777·9	18,868	628·9

[1] To date.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total expenditure on prison education in the most recent available year and the three years previously; how much of the increase is attributable to inflation; and to what extent the increase is accounted for by educational provision at new prisons.

Mr. Waddington: Total expenditure on education in prison establishments for the most recent year available and the previous three years was as follows:

	£ million
1988-89	25·2
1987-88	21·4
1986-87	18·9
1985-86	21·4

Between 1985-86 and 1988-89, the effect of inflation was £3·5 million: during the same period, £1·1 million was spent on providing education facilities at new prisons.

Horses (Tethering)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will introduce legislation to make the tethering of horses a criminal offence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Horses are already protected against cruelty generally by the Protection of Animals Act 1911 and against cruel tethering, in particular, by the Protection Against Cruel Tethering Act 1988. We have no plans to introduce legislation to make all tethering unlawful.

Police Manpower

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance is given to police forces on mutual aid rates charged between neighbouring forces for seconded manpower; and what is the average mutual aid rate in England.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Home Office circular 38/89 entitled "Financial arrangements for mutual aid" was issued to all clerks to police authorities and chief officers of police in England and Wales on 28 April 1989. I have arranged for a copy of the circular to be placed in the Library.

Information on mutual aid payments between police authorities is not held centrally, and it is not possible to say what the average mutual aid rate is for England. This would vary according to the type of aid given and whether the police authorities concerned followed the circular or agreed other arrangements.

Game Licences

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the estimated cost to public funds of administering the sale of game licences in each of the years from 1981-82 to 1988-89, inclusive.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 26 January 1990]:* Until 1988, the cost of administering the sale of both game licences and dog licences fell as a single item to the Department of the Environment, so no separate figure for game licences is available. For the years 1988-89 and 1989-90, during which the Home Office has been responsible for administering the sale of game licences, the costs were £162,809 and £172,406.

Illegal Drugs

Mr. Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has on exports from the United Kingdom of chemicals used in the production of *(a)* cocaine and *(b)* other illegal drugs; and what licences are required for the export of such chemicals.

Mr. Mellor: I have been asked to reply.

Since 1971, trade in selected chemicals has been monitored under arrangements made between the Home Office, the law enforcement authorities and industry. Exports, imports and transhipments of chemicals destined for illicit processing of drugs in the amphetamine group have been detected; but more recently a number of consignments for possible use in the illicit production of cocaine have been identified.

Although licences are not required for the export of such chemicals, which have wide, legitimate industrial use, the Government's plans for placing the monitoring arrangements on a statutory footing, contained in the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Bill published on 30 November 1989, will strengthen the attack on the illicit manufacture of drugs.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Director of Public Prosecutions

62. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Attorney-General when he last met the Director of Public Prosecutions; and what matters were discussed.

The Attorney-General: I meet frequently with the Director of Public Prosecutions to discuss matters of departmental interest.

Lenient Sentences

63. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Attorney-General how many cases he has referred to the Court of Appeal for review of overlenient sentences; how many of these have resulted in increases in the sentence; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave today to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall).

County Courts

64. **Mr. French:** To ask the Attorney-General if he has any plans to improve the administration of cases in the county court.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor has embarked upon a wide-ranging series of reforms which will improve the administration of cases in the county court. He has already announced his intention to increase the number of staff in the court service by around 350 during the next financial year, and subsequently by up to around a further 100 during the transitional period while the new initiatives are being introduced. In addition, a computerised summons production centre, which will improve service to plaintiffs, began operations last week. By the end of 1990, the centre expects to have issued 800,000 summonses. This initiative, when fully operational, together with the curtailment of the county court banking function which takes place in about eight weeks' time, will release staff time savings equivalent to around 350 posts. This injection of resources and release of staff time will take place during 1990-91 and will put the courts in a strong position to implement, from 1991 onwards, the proposals flowing from the civil justice review, which include greater openness between parties and speedier case progression, and the provisions of the Children Act 1989.

Legal Aid

65. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Attorney-General how many people received legal aid *(a)* in 1979 and *(b)* in 1989; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The information at present available is as follows: 190,677 civil legal aid certificates (including those relating to summary jurisdiction) were issued in 1979-80. A total of 247,117 civil legal aid certificates were issued in 1988-89.

In 1980-81 assistance by way of representation substantially replaced summary jurisdiction certificates. In 1988-89, 69,503 ABWOR applications were granted.

In 1979 387,581 applications for criminal legal aid were granted (excluding the House of Lords). In 1988, the comparable figure was 616,366.

66. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Attorney-General what is *(a)* the highest and *(b)* the lowest sum paid to an individual receiving legal aid in the past year; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: Legal aid is paid to lawyers rather than their clients. The highest sums paid in respect of a single defendant in a criminal case in the Crown court during the last 12 months were £82,897·72 for a solicitor and £47,788·25 for counsel. Similar figures for civil legal aid and magistrates courts proceedings are not kept in the form requested.

House of Fraser

67. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the progress of consideration by the Director of Public Prosecutions and the director of the Serious Fraud Office on the inspectors' report on the takeover of the House of Fraser.

The Attorney-General: The investigation has been concluded save for certain inquiries outside our own jurisdiction. I hope that a conclusion will be reached shortly.

City Fraud

68. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Attorney-General when he next expects to meet the Director of Public Prosecutions regarding City fraud; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: Matters relating to City fraud are usually dealt with by the director of the Serious Fraud Office. I meet him frequently to discuss issues of departmental interest, and expect to do so shortly.

Stuart William Ross

69. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will reconsider his decision not to seek a longer sentence of imprisonment upon Stuart William Ross who was convicted of killing unlawfully and with premeditation Miss Emma Worthington at Woolacombe in June 1989.

The Attorney-General: I have considered the case again, but I am satisfied that my decision is correct.

Tribunals and Inquiries (Costs)

70. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will give favourable consideration to the proposal that the legal costs of determining issues of general public importance in tribunals and public inquiries should be paid for out of public funds.

The Attorney-General: Tribunals and public inquiries can be set up in a variety of ways. So far as ad hoc tribunals and inquiries are concerned (for example, into major accidents) the Government already pay the administrative costs. So far as the costs of legal representation of parties to any inquiry are concerned, where the Government have a discretion they always take careful account of the recommendations on costs of the tribunal or inquiry concerned. In general, the Government accept the need to pay out of public funds the reasonable costs of any necessary party to the inquiry who would be prejudiced in seeking representation were he in any doubt about funds becoming available. The Government do not accept that the costs of substantial bodies should be met from public funds unless there are special circumstances.

Non-smokers

Mr. Amos: To ask the Attorney-General what provisions are being made in all the offices and other places under his Department's control for the convenience and comfort of non-smokers; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy for non-smokers.

The Attorney-General: No specific provision is made, in the offices and other places of the Departments for which I am responsible, for the convenience and comfort of non-smokers. However, arrangements are made to ensure that, as far as is practicable, a smoking member of any of the Departments concerned (legal secretariat to the Law Officers, Treasury Solicitor's Department, Crown prosecution service and Serious Fraud Office) does not share office accommodation with a non-smoker, and so that those who smoke may do so without harm or irritation to others. Smoking in common areas is generally discouraged.

Children's Ombudsman

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement about Government plans to appoint a children's ombudsman to deal with cases of parental custody and kidnapping.

The Attorney-General: The Government have no such plans.

Conciliation Services

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the future of the conciliation services.

The Attorney-General: It is premature to reach a view on the future of the conciliation services until it is clear what appropriate role conciliation might play in any possible new divorce process. The Law Commission is presently reviewing the law on divorce and is expected to present its report later this year. Meanwhile, the Law Commission's discussion paper "Facing the Future", and the report published by Newcastle university in April 1989 on the cost and effectiveness of conciliation, are under detailed consideration.

Paul Malone

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Attorney-General if, pursuant to the reply in the *Official Report*, column *431*, on 19 January, document DHH/1 is included in the five reports already processed by the Director of Public Prosecutions; and if this document can be released to Paul Malone's legal representative so that further forensic tests can be done on this original document.

The Attorney-General: As I indicated to the hon. Member in my answer of 19 January at column *431*, the DPP is still considering all six reports. It would therefore not be appropriate to release the document DHH/1 to Paul Malone's legal representative.

Public Record Office

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Attorney-General whether any changes have been made to the class XX, vote 11, cash limit and running costs limit for the Public Record Office.

The Attorney-General: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit for class XX, vote 11 will be increased by £238,000 from £16,332,000 to £16,570,000. This increase will be charged to the reserve. The increase arises as a result of additional costs incurred in respect of retirement and dismissal compensation, audit costs and a VAT surcharge.

The running costs limit for the Public Record Office will as a result also be increased by £238,000 from £14,610,000 to £14,848,000.

Lord Chancellor's Department

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Attorney-General whether any changes will be made to the Lord Chancellor's Department's cash limit and running costs for 1989-90.

The Attorney-General: Yes. Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for the Lord Chancellor's Department, class XI, vote 5, will be increased by £11,798,000 from £248,480,000 to £260,278,000. This reflects mainly an increase of £11,000,000 to maintain progress on the court building programme and £1,500,000 to meet previously unexpected VAT on rents. The overall increase is partly offset by an increase in net recoveries from fees of £1,500,000. This net increase will be charged to the reserve.

The Supplementary Estimate also gives effect to the transfer of £50,000 from the Home Office (class XI, vote 3) for the purchase of recording equipment to be used in the Crown court; a reorganisation of expenditure within the sub-heads; a grant in aid of £163,000 to the Council for Licensed Conveyancers; and the recovery of £50,000 from the Public Record Office (class XX vote 11) in respect of audit costs.

The running costs limit for the Department will be increased by £165,000 from £238,334,000 to £238,499,000. This reflects the increase of £1,500,000 in respect of increased VAT on rents, partly offset by a reduction of £1,335,000 to compensate for an overspend in 1988-89.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Education Standards, EC

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if his Department has commissioned any research studies into education standards in the EEC; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The Department has not commissioned any such studies and has no present plans to do so.

Private Educational Establishments

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list by name the private educational establishments in England and Wales, stating the amount of public assistance, financial or otherwise, which each one receives.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Information about assistance from local education authorities to individual independent educational institutions is not collated centrally. Grants paid by the Department to independent educational institutions in England in the financial year 1988-89 were as set out below. In addition to these sums, fee remission and incidental expenses totalling £50·9 million were paid by the Department in support of 27,083 pupils holding

assisted places at 226 independent schools in England; and fee remission and incidental expenses totalling £3·7 million were paid in support of 509 pupils holding aided places under the music and ballet scheme at five independent specialist schools in England.

Expenditure in Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

DES Financial Assistance to Independent Educational Institutions, Financial Year 1988-89

	Expenditure £
1. *Capital Grants to Independent Colleges of Further Education Catering for Handicapped Students*	
Queen Alexandra College, Birmingham Royal Institute for the Blind	30,000
2. *Direct Grant Establishments*	
Royal Hospital School, Holbrook	6,104
Edith Cadbury Nursery School	5,488
Selly Oak Nursery School	3,193
3. *Capital Grant paid under the Education (Grants) (Royal Ballet School) Regulations 1988*	
Royal Ballet School	250,000
4. *Capital Grants to Non-maintained Special Schools*	
Birkdale	787
Burton Hill House	9,969
David Lewis	3,141
Dawn House	60,739
Lingfield Hospital	28,310
Mary Hare	10,006
Muntham House	7,506
St. Elizabeths	72,550
St. Francis	48,682
West of England	7,820

Student Maintenance

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of student maintenance costs are borne by parental contributions currently; and what was the comparable proportion for 1979-80.

Mr. Jackson: The information is not available in the precise form requested.

In 1987-88, the latest year for which figures are available, assessed contributions from parents, spouses and students themselves accounted for 40·4 per cent. of students' total assessed requirements under the mandatory awards arrangements. In 1979-80 the comparable figure was 20·5 per cent.

How much in practice is contributed by parents and spouses is not known.

Governing Bodies

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will identify by name and by size of governing body in each case only those colleges and polytechnics in the PCFC sector for which he has agreed revised instruments of government under the Education Reform Act 1988 where the size of the governing body is in excess of 21 persons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: For those institutions in the PCFC sector re-established as higher education corporations (HECs) under sections 121 and 122 of the Education Reform Act 1988, the size of the governing body is governed by the provisions of schedule 7 to the ERA within which the size of each governing body is decided by the institution itself. Those HECs with governing bodies in excess of 21 persons are as follows:

	Number
Buckinghamshire College of Higher Education	25
Polytechnic of East London	25
Humberside College of Higher Education	25
Lancashire Polytechnic	25
The London Institute	25
Luton College of Higher Education	23
Newcastle Polytechnic	25
Salford College of Technology	25
Sheffield Polytechnic	25
Teesside Polytechnic	24
Thames Valley College of Higher Education	23

Assisted institutions which were designated under section 129(2) of the ERA were asked to bring their intruments in line with those of the HECs, and these were subsequently agreed by my right hon. Friend. Those with governing bodies in excess of 21 persons are as follows:

	Number
City of London Polytechnic	25
Polytechnic of North London	25
Thames Polytechnic	25
Central School of Speech and Drama	25
Derbyshire College of Higher Education	25

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will identify by name and by size of governing body in each case only those further education and higher education colleges in the maintained sector for which he has agreed revised instruments of government under the ERA 1988 where the size of the governing body is in excess of 21 persons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: To date my right hon. Friend has approved for the following institutions instruments of government which provide in each case for a governing body in excess of 21 members:

	Members
Blackburn College	22
Bradford and Ilkley Community College	22
Croydon College	23
Newcastle College	22
Preston College	22
Sandwell College of Further and Higher Education	22
Solihull College of Technology	22
South Tyneside College	22
Suffolk College of Higher and Further Education	22

In addition, my right hon. Friend has indicated that he would be prepared to approve an instrument of government for Central Manchester college of technology providing for a governing body of 22 members.

School Buses

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will seek powers to require a no smoking sign to be displayed in all school buses.

Mr. Alan Howarth: It is for local education authorities to decide whether such signs should be displayed. My right

hon. Friend does, however, fully support the campaign launched recently by the Health Education Authority to encourage schools to eliminate smoking from educational establishments and out-of-school activities involving pupils in the four to 19 age range.

Education Regulations

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about the Education (School Curriculum and Related Information) Regulations 1989.

Mr. MacGregor: In the light of representations I have decided to bring forward amendments to those provisions of the Education (School Curriculum and Related Information) Regulations 1989 which cover the submission of statistical information (the annual curriculum return). I gave details of my intentions in my speech to the Society of Education Officers on 25 January, copies of which have been placed in the Library. My proposals will represent a substantial reduction in the burden on primary schools, from which the main anxieties about the annual curriculum return have come.

I intend to bring forward these amendments in time for them to come into effect for completion of the first returns by schools this summer term. I shall be consulting shortly about the details of what I propose, as required by section 22 of the Education Reform Act 1988.

Non-smokers

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what provisions are being made in all the offices and other places under his Department's control for the convenience and comfort of non-smokers; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy for non-smokers.

Mrs. Rumbold: Smoking is prohibited in lifts and toilets but the Department's policy generally is to encourage staff who wish to smoke to have regard to the convenience and comfort of non-smokers. It is customary not to smoke in conference rooms or in shared offices unless a majority of the staff sharing the office agree to allow it.

GCSE

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received concerning reforms of the operation of the GCSE examination system.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend and I have received a substantial amount of correspondence from parents, teachers and other interested parties. The vast majority have been supportive of the principles behind the new examination.

Geography Working Group

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received in respect of the interim curriculum report from the geography working group.

Mrs. Rumbold: The national curriculum geography working group has received just over 700 letters from schools, organisations and individuals commenting on its interim report, which was published on 20 November last.

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to receive the working group's final report on the geography curricula.

Mrs. Rumbold: The terms of reference given to the geography working group on its establishment in May last year require it to submit a final report by 30 April 1990.

Head Teachers

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many letters he has received from head teachers expressing concern about conditions and morale in their school, for each education authority.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information is not readily available in the form requested. My right hon. Friend frequently receives correspondence from head teachers about various aspects of education provision.

Gaelic and Welsh

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has received any recent representations concerning the position of the Gaelic and Welsh languages in the European Community's Mercator programme of information and documentation networks on minority languages; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The Department has received no representations. Schools are free to provide any language they wish after they have met the requirement of the national curriculum.

Playing Fields, Bexley

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he intends to grant his consent to the request from the Inner London education authority for the disposal of the playing fields at Camdale road, Welling in the borough of Bexley; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend is considering the Inner London education authority's application for consent and will inform the authority of his decision as soon as possible.

Universities Funding Council

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has on the criteria used by the Universities Funding Council for determining guide prices for the public funding of university students.

Mr. Jackson: Details of these matters, which are for the Universities Funding Council, were given in the council's circular letter 39/89, "Funding and Planning: 1991-92 to 1994-95", in particular the recently issued annex D, a copy of which is being placed in the Library.

Vocational Training

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what statistics he collects relating to the allocation of discretionary grants made by local authorities for full-time vocational training; and what information he has on the effect of such grants on full-time vocational training;

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he collects statistics relating to the allocation of discretionary grants made by local education authorities for full-time vocational training; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: I have been asked to reply to the first question.

Departmental statistics do not routinely distinguish vocational training. However, in 1987-88 about 138,000 awards were made by local education authorities in England and Wales under section 2 of the Education Act 1962 to students undertaking full-time and sandwich further education (FE) courses of all types. These awards cover maintenance grants, and fees where applicable. Overall, there were 354,000 full-time and sandwich students on FE courses of all types at colleges in England in 1987-88 and 367,000 in 1988-89.

Portage Schemes

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to continue funding support for portage schemes; what assessment he has made of current schemes; and what assessment he has made of the consequences of ending Government financial support for the schemes.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I have been asked to reply.

The Department will continue to fund those portage schemes to which it has committed expenditure up to 1990-91 through the education support grant (ESG). The ESG funds provided from 1986-87, and amounting to more than £8 million, were made available for pump-priming purposes. LEAs are free to continue funding portage schemes after the Department's three-year commitment ends, and to develop others from within their own resources, if they wish to do so. Many are doing just that. An HMI survey on portage projects funded by ESGs will be published on 9 February. I shall be placing a copy in the Library in the normal way.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Student Loans

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much money he anticipates will be saved in housing benefit in Scotland by the introduction of student loans in 1990-91.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Estimates of housing benefit expenditure are made on a Great Britain basis, and no disaggregation for individual countries is possible. I regret that it is therefore not possible to provide information in the form requested.

Equal Treatment Directive

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the laws, regulations and administrative provisions, whose texts have been communicated to the European Commission under article 8 of the Equal Treatment Directive.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer the hon. Member to the report on the application of directive 79/7/EEC of 19 December 1978 on the progressive implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women in matters of social security (COM(88)769) presented by the European Commission, a copy of which is in the Library. The report specifies the changes made by each member state to implement the requirements of the directive and notified to the Commission in accordance with article 8 of the directive.

Industrial Disease Benefits

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security at what date he will commence recovering the full amount of any benefits paid to victims of industrial disease who have been awarded compensation either by a court or agreed by an out-of-court settlement; and how long this procedure will take in individual cases.

Mr. Scott: The scheme under which amounts equivalent to benefit are recovered from compensation payments starts on 3 September 1990. Any compensation payment over £2,500 made on or after that date will be subject to recovery. It will apply to industrial diseases if the first claim for benefit naming the disease for which compensation is sought was on or after 1 January 1989.

Before a court award is made or a settlement offered, the compensator will seek a certificate showing how much is to be deducted and paid to the Department. On receipt of a properly completed application, legislation requires the Department to supply the information to the compensator within four weeks.

Non-smokers

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what provisions are being made in all the offices and other places under his Department's control for the convenience and comfort of non-smokers; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy for non-smokers.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: A smoking policy has been introduced which prohibits smoking in areas where there is a statutory ban, where there is a fire risk and in public reception and interview areas. The policy also directs that all offices should move as quickly as possible to provide additional extensive smoke-free working areas. Local discussions on those areas are now taking place between management and unions.

Social Fund

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications for travelling expenses were granted from the social fund for claimants to visit relatives in hospital; and how many refused during the months of May 1989 and November 1989.

Mr. Scott: I regret that the information requested is not collected.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether demand on the social fund has led to some community care grants being only partially met by grants and partially by loans.

Mr. Scott: I regret that the information requested is not available. However, in the period April to December 1989, 25,000 loan applications which were refused resulted in a community care grant being awarded instead.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, what plans he has for the social fund loans budget to become self-financing; and by what date.

Mr. Scott: None.

Loans

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants on income support each month since January 1989 were repaying a budgeting or crisis loan and how many were *(a)* one-parent families, *(b)* sick and disabled claimants, *(c)* pensioners and *(d)* unemployed claimants.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on 22 January 1990 at col. *575-78*.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what were the total amount of budgeting or crisis loans out on loan to claimants on income support for each month since January 1989.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Caernarfon on 22 January 1990 at column *577*.

Concessionary Coal

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the extent to which a local housing authority may disregard cash in lieu of concessionary coal paid by British Coal in the calculation of housing benefit claims and taking into account any recent decision on this subject taken by a local Department of Health and Social Security tribunal.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: In the income-related benefits, the normal rule is for all forms of income to be taken into account. Regulations provide for certain types of income to be disregarded, in part or fully. Cash in lieu of concessionary coal paid to a retired mineworker or to a mineworker's widow is not specified as disregardable income, and therefore has to be taken fully into account in the calculation of housing benefit and the other income-related benefits. Local authorities do not have any discretion in this matter.

Appeals (Listing)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations have been received following the letter issued by the chairman of the north-eastern region of the social security appeal tribunals changing the arrangements for listing cases; and if he will arrange for this letter to be withdrawn and for the previous arrangements for listing cases to continue.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The administration of social security appeal tribunals is the responsibility of the president of social security and medical appeal tribunals, His Honour Judge Holden, and the hon. Member may care to contact him direct.

Remote Benefit Assessment

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information he has and what research he is conducting on the numbers of staff or the percentage of their time released by remote benefit assessment.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Up to now, estimates of staff time released by computerisation of social security benefits have been based on a comparison between existing clerical processes and the theoretical timings of the computerised systems. These currently indicate savings of 12,250 by 1995. The timings will be confirmed through the normal review programme which assesses staff resources and which will include particular reference to the impact of remote benefit assessment in all work areas.

Research can be undertaken only when the systems are fully operational in sufficient offices to ensure a statistically acceptable sample.

Local Offices (Area)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the minimum, the average and the maximum geographical area serviced by his Department's local offices.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I regret that this information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Communications (Study)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the status and purpose of the study in communications commissioned within his Department; and when it will be published.

Mr. Scott: The communications and the operational strategy study is a pilot exercise being conducted in the London south region over the next three months. Its purpose is to help local office management draw up local communications plans; collect views on the adequacy of the centrally produced material on training, manuals and briefings; and to test new ideas on guidance for users of information technology. A communication focus group has been set up in the region to monitor the exercise. Good ideas that emerge will be spread to other regions. It is too early to say when the results will be made available and in what form.

"Service in the 90s" Initiative

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the authority for the expenditure of approximately £400,000 before April 1990 under the "service in the 90s" initiative; when the decision was made; how the money will be allocated between the offices; what is the purpose of the expenditure; who will oversee the expenditure and to whom they are accountable; whether any new expenditure is involved; and to which section of his Department's budget the cost will be charged.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The eight local offices involved in the "service in the 90s" initiative were allocated provision of up to £50,000 each, to be spent by the end of the 1989-90 financial year, to meet costs incurred in experimenting with improvements to current working practices. This decision was taken in December 1989. The expenditure will be met from within the Department's resources, and normal financial control procedures will apply.

National Insurance

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of claimants paying the share fishermen's rates of national insurance contributions claiming *(a)* income support and *(b)* family support in the latest available year.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have been asked to reply.

I regret that this information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Retirement Income

Sir Anthony Meyer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the average income of all retired married couples.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have been asked to reply.

The average net weekly income of all married couples over state pension age in 1986 was £123·77. (*Source:* Family Expenditure survey.)

Young Persons

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to reply to the question from the hon. Member for Oldham, West on benefit changes affecting young people following his holding answer of 15 December 1989.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I shall let the hon. Member have the details shortly.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the latest estimate of the cost to local authorities of operating the poll tax rebate system for 1989-90.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have been asked to reply.

The latest estimate of the cost of administering community charge rebates is £10·7 million.

HEALTH

Expenditure (Trent)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the total spending allocated to Doncaster health authority for each year for the last 10 years to date, adjusted for inflation; and if he will also show in his answer, by year, the percentage increase;

(2) if he will list the total spending in the Trent regional health authority for each year for the last 10 years to date, adjusted for inflation; and if he will also show in his answer, by year, the percentage increase.

Mr. Freeman: Information derived from annual accounts submitted to the Department is shown in the table:

Total expenditure on hospital and community health services (HCHS) at 1988-89 prices

	Revenue expenditure £000	*Percentage increase/ (decrease) on prior year*	*Capital expenditure* £000	*Percentage increase/ (decrease) on prior year*	*Total expenditure* £000	*Percentage increase/ (decrease) on prior year*
Trent region[1]						
1978-79	811,883	—	110,994	—	922,877	—
1979-80	846,014	4·2	84,826	(23·6)	930,840	0·9
1980-81	931,369	10·0	85,888	1·3	1,017,257	9·3
1981-82	937,494	0·7	100,303	16·8	1,037,797	2·0
1982-83	941,674	0·5	89,015	(11·3)	1,030,689	(0·7)
1983-84	958,657	1·8	89,614	0·7	1,048,271	1·7
1984-85	978,272	2·0	89,379	(0·3)	1,067,651	1·9
1985-86	984,300	0·6	90,697	1·5	1,074,997	0·7
1986-87	1,032,768	4·9	87,499	(3·5)	1,120,267	4·2
1987-88	1,082,574	4·8	81,290	(7·1)	1,163,864	3·9
1988-89	1,121,344	3·6	93,186	14·6	1,214,530	4·4
Doncaster health authority[2]						
1978-79	40,486	—	2,656	—	43,142	—
1979-80	42,072	3·9	1,256	(52·7)	43,328	0·4
1980-81	46,265	10·0	1,698	35·2	47,963	10·7
1981-82	47,117	1·8	2,246	32·2	49,363	2·9
1982-83	51,850	10·0	2,958	31·8	54,808	11·0
1983-84	52,798	1·8	1,960	(33·7)	54,758	(0·1)
1984-85	53,040	0·5	2,052	4·7	55,092	0·6
1985-86	52,957	(0·2)	4,062	98·0	57,019	3·5
1986-87	56,812	7·3	3,630	(10·6)	60,442	6·0
1987-88	59,348	4·5	5,213	43·6	64,561	6·8
1988-89	62,620	5·5	6,050	16·1	68,670	6·4

[1] Annual accounts of the Trent Regional Health Authority (RHA) and the district (formerly area) health authorities comprising the Trent region—including Doncaster.

[2] Annual accounts of the Doncaster district (formerly area) health authority.

Notes:

1. The figures for the earlier years have been expressed at 1988-89 prices by the use of the gross domestic product deflator. The figures for the financial year 1988-89 are provisional in that they are as yet subject to audit.
2. Hospital and community health services (HCHS) includes hospital, community health, patient transport (ie ambulance), blood transfusion and other services.
3. Expenditure on family practitioner services (FPS) is excluded. Such expenditure is accounted for by family practitioner committees (FPCs)

and cannot strictly be attributed to particular regions or districts. However, prior to 1 April 1985 the Doncaster and other authorities within the Trent region each had an associated FPC and their expenditure figures included small elements in respect of the administrative expenses of FPCs which are not separately identifiable.

4. Capital expenditure in particular regions and districts tends to fluctuate year on year mainly reflecting changes in the pattern of capital investment throughout the country.

5. The expenditure figures for the Doncaster authority include sums in respect of capital schemes within the district recorded as capital expenditure in the annual accounts of the Trent RHA but exclude revenue and capital expenditure incurred by the RHA for the region as a whole.

6. Prior to 1 April 1982 the Doncaster health authority's predecessor health district operated as a single-district area health authority and was broadly comparable to the present district health authority.

Regional Health Authorities

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met the chairmen of regional health authorities; and what matters were discussed.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State last met the chairmen of regional health authorities on 17 January, when the main topics discussed were implementation of "Working for Patients" and "Caring for People", and the ambulance dispute.

Cryptosporidium

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list outbreaks of cryptosporidium in the United Kingdom since 1980.

Mr. Freeman: Laboratory notification of cryptosporidium outbreaks to the communicable disease surveillance centre did not commence until 1983. Full-year data are available only from 1984 onwards, and are as follows:

Laboratory reports to CDSC England, Wales and Ireland 1984-88 Outbreaks formally reported to CDSC

Year	*Outbreaks*				*Suspected source*			
	Total	*Family*	*Nursery*	*Other*	*Contact with farm animals*	*Raw milk (+/−) contact with farm animals*	*Abroad*	*Not known*
1984	6	4	2	—	1	1	—	4
1985	7	7	—	—	—	—	1	6
1986	6	4	2	—	—	—	1	5
1987	9	5	3	[1]1	—	—	—	9
1988	2	2	—	—	—	1	—	1
[3]1989	11	7	2	[2]2	1	0	2	8

[1] Campsite.
[2] School party hotel abroad.
[3] Provisional.

There are no data on the number of outbreaks in Scotland.

Dental Health

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the decayed, missing and filled levels for each district health authority; what is the national average; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is not collected centrally by the Department.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what Government action is being taken to deal with dental health promotion and dental health education *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in north Staffordshire; what are the costs of such programmes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The Department has commissioned two dental health education projects which are currently being piloted. The first, in the north-western region, is being run by the Health Education Authority, which has received financial support of £450,000 for the project in the last two years. The other, organised by the community dental health unit of Birmingham university and centred on the Dudley family practitioner committee area, has received £500,000 over the same period. Decisions on how to follow up these projects will depend on their evaluation.

Abortions

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the methods used to terminate an unborn baby during selective reduction of pregnancy; and if he will give the gestational age at which such procedures are normally performed.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The method and gestational age at which a legal abortion is performed are matters for the clinical judgment of the doctor concerned, having regard to all the circumstances of the particular case.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if his Department requires doctors performing selective reduction of pregnancies to require a certificate stating the grounds for termination of unborn babies under the Abortion Act 1967; and if he will make a statement.

(2) if terminations of unborn babies by performing selective reductions of pregnancies are included in the abortion statistics issued by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Abortion Regulations 1968 SI No. 390, as amended, require a certificate of opinion and notice of termination to be given in respect of every abortion performed. The published statistics are derived from the notifications received.

The regulations do not require a certifying doctor specifically to mention cases of selective reduction of pregnancy.

Community Care

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give priority to his reassessment of the part played by joint finance under his community care proposals.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The part played by joint finance is being reassessed in the light of the policies contained in the White Paper "Caring for People". However, there are no immediate plans for changes to existing arrangements.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he considered the training needs of service providers under his community care proposals; whether voluntary organisations with experience in this area were involved in his discussions on the issue; and whether he will issue guidance on this to local authorities.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The training needs of service providers, whether in the statutory or independent sector were considered in formulating our proposals announced in the White Paper "Caring for People". The Department is in regular consultation with the National Council for Voluntary Organisations and individual voluntary organisations. Training is an integral part of implementing our proposals. There are no immediate plans to issue formal guidance to local authorities specifically on training.

Adoption and Fostering

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he intends to issue further guidance in connection with the adoption and fostering of children from minority ethnic groups.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The chief inspector of the social services inspectorate has written to all directors of social services, setting out within a legal and professional framework the principles which should inform family placement work in relation to issues of race and culture. His letter also goes to voluntary child agencies and approved adoption societies so that they too may benefit from it. Copies have been placed in the Library.

The letter emphasises and reinforces existing guidance on the importance of providing a fostering and adoption service which can meet the needs of children from all ethnic groups. Racial origin, cultural background and religion are important factors in choosing new families for children who can no longer remain with their own families. These matters are the subject of a document shortly to be issued by the Council for Racial Equality, entitled "Adoption and Fostering of Ethnic Minority Children: The Race Dimension."

In the great majority of cases, placement with a family of similar ethnic origin and religion is most likely to meet a child's needs as fully as possible and best safeguard his or her welfare. Authorities and other agencies need to persuade people from all ethnic groups in the community to come forward as foster parents and adopters. In some circumstances placement with a family of different ethnic origin may be the best choice for a particular child. Full consideration of a child's welfare requires that all relevant factors be properly identified and weighed.

I am confident that the chief inspector's letter will remove any grounds for the misunderstandings which may have existed about the requirements of legislation, guidance and good professional practice in this area.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has completed his consideration of issues highlighted by an Appeal Court decision on the placement for adoption of a child of mixed ethnic origin; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department's social services inspectorate has made a thorough investigation of the case in question, with the full co-operation of the director of social services and his staff.

I am satisfied from the inspectorate's inquiries that, in reaching its decision to remove the child from his foster mother and place him with another family for adoption, the authority gave first consideration to his welfare, as it was required by law to do. The child's ethnic origins were, rightly, a factor in its considerations, but this was considered alongside other factors and was neither the only nor even the principal reason for the decision.

However, the inspectorate did find, and the authority agrees, that the child and his foster mother received no visits or any other support from social services for 10 weeks after he was placed with her. The authority was thus in breach of the Boarding-Out of Children Regulations 1955 which were then in force and specified minimum visiting requirements. The authority also allowed the wardship to lapse. However, the inspectorate did find that, after the first 10 weeks, the authority handled the case carefully and professionally.

Clearly the failures identified were serious. I am glad that the authority has already taken steps to ensure that there is no repetition in future. The inspectorate has made a number of important recommendations for further improvement, and I am confident that the authority will respond to these positively.

Cash Limits

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether any changes will be made in the cash limits and running costs limit of his Department for 1989-90.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The cash limit for class XIV, vote 1, hospital and community health and other services, England, will be reduced by £2,357,000 (from £11,909,826,000 to £11,907,469,000) to offset £1,600,000 of the cash limit increase on class XIV, vote 3 and to take account of an agreed control adjustment of £757,000 in respect of the use of conventional finance.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates, the cash limit for class XIV, vote 3, Department of Health, administration, miscellaneous health services and personal social services, England, will be increased by £20,246,000 (from £677,061,000 to £697,307,000) reflecting the following changes: an additional £24,000,000 for the cost of a grant to a voluntary organisation in respect of financial support to certain haemophiliacs who have become infected with HIV, partly offset by savings elsewhere in the vote; an extra £1,600,000 to meet the cost of updating family practitioner service computer data, fully offset by savings on class XIV, vote 1; £26,000 transferred from the Cabinet Office: Office of the Minister for the Civil Service, for expenditure on departmental administration in connection with senior management development training; and £20,000 transferred from class VII, vote 2, Department of Employment: employment programmes and central services, for expenditure on the Alcohol Concern

workplace advisory service. As a result of the changes on this vote, the Department's running costs limit is reduced by £1,897,000 from £246,156,000 to £244,259,000.

The net effect of these changes will be charged to the reserve.

AIDS

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will approve the AIDS Care Education and Training application for a grant under section 64 for the current financial year.

Mr. Freeman: The Department has already awarded AIDS Care Education and Training a section 64 grant of £50,000 for the current financial year. Its application for section 64 funding for 1990-91 is under consideration.

Alternative Medicines

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Government's policy about the impact of European Community laws on the availability of alternative medicines.

Mr. Freeman: The European Community is committed to directives on homoeopathic medicines and conditions of supply of medicines to the public, but specific proposals have yet to be submitted to the Council of Ministers. When European Community proposals are published, we shall consider them carefully for compatibility with United Kingdom traditions and communicate with interested parties as to the United Kingdom input to negotiations.

Viable Births

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the latest medical evidence available to him as to *(a)* the earliest gestational age at which a child is capable of being born alive, *(b)* the earliest gestational age at which a child is capable of being born alive and surviving and *(c)* the earliest gestational age at which a child is capable of being born alive and surviving without disabilities and what statistics are available to him about numbers and rates in the above categories; and whether he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The 22nd gestational week is considered by doctors to be the earliest time that there is the slightest possibility of a foetus being born alive since before then the lungs are not mature enough to function even if ventilated. Between the 22nd and 24th weeks of gestation, the chance of being born alive and the chance of surviving afterwards increase, but up to 24 weeks, both are rare. Whether or not any particular foetus is capable of being born alive must therefore be a matter for the clinical judgment of the doctor concerned, in the full knowledge of the circumstances of the particular case.

Babies who are born premature are at high risk of disability. The statistics requested about numbers and rates are not available, as information on gestation is not collected for live birth registrations.

Abortions

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will place in the Library a copy of the information contained in his reply to the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) referred to in his answer of 16 November 1989, *Official Report*, columns *424-25*, on the number of abortions in 1988 on girls aged 15 and under, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20 years, by grounds and category of premises and by grounds and marital status.

Mr. Freeman: The information has been placed in the Library.

Non-smokers

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provisions are being made in all the offices and other places under his Department's control for the convenience and comfort of non-smokers; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy for non-smokers.

Mr. Freeman: It is the Department's policy to move as quickly as possible, after local discussion and agreement, to provide a smoke-free environment for those staff who wish it at all workplaces and other areas within its offices not covered by a mandatory ban on smoking. The mandatory ban covers places such as stationery stores, computer rooms, first aid rooms, food preparation areas and confined spaces with limited ventilation. Many individual offices are already smoke-free by the agreement of the occupants.

Capital Trusts (Yorkshire)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will set out the costs in consultancy fees in *(a)* the Yorkshire regional health authority, *(b)* Leeds Western health authority and *(c)* Leeds Eastern health authority in relation to the establishment of capital trusts.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to approach the chairmen of the health authorities concerned.

Botulism

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what work is being carried out involving botulism toxins; for what purpose; and whether such work has commercial applications or export potential.

Mr. Freeman: A number of establishments are known to be involved in research on botulinum toxins including the PHLS Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research at Porton Down. In the first instance, fundamental research is in progress on the structure and function of the several botulinum toxin molecules. The knowledge generated from this work is being applied in a number of areas: in the development of botulinum toxin for human therapeutic use; the CAMR is developing bolutinum toxoid vaccines for human use and is developing sensitive rapid in vitro assays for the detection of botulinum toxins. These areas could have commercial and export potential.

The Agricultural and Food Research Council's Institute of Food Research also has a programme of research in relation to clostridium botulinum and food safety, and is carrying out work with this organism under a number of different conditions relevant to food preservation. This work is part of a programme funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on modelling microbiological growth. The institute will shortly begin work on the genetic relationships of the different botulinum toxins. This is part of a non-commercial major food safety programme.

Perinatal Aid

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many perinatal and neo-natal deaths were recorded for each health authority in England and Wales for 1987 and 1988.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

FPCs (Expenditure)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give for England and Wales for each year since 1979 the total family practitioner committee expenditure *(a)* under the ancillary staff scheme and *(b)* for the cost of providing premises under the rent and rate scheme; and if he will give an indication of the costs adjusted for general price inflation.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested for England is given in the following table. Information in relation to family practitioner services in Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Expenditure (England)
Total of direct reimbursements to GPs for ancillary staff costs

	Cash[1] *£ thousands*	*Real terms at 1988-89 prices*[2] *£ thousands*
1979-80	50,927	95,886
1980-81	66,307	105,495
1981-82	78,769	114,145
1982-83	89,480	120,933
1983-84	102,721	132,633
1984-85	114,632	141,008
1985-86	134,028	156,464
1986-87	143,838	162,436
1987-88	166,798	178,891
1988-89	200,508	200,508

[1] Based on FPC annual accounts prepared on an income and expenditure basis.
[2] Real terms prices have been calculated using the gross domestic product deflator.

Total of direct reimbursements to GPs for rents and rates costs[1]

	Cash[2] *£ thousands*	*Real terms at 1988-89 prices*[3] *£ thousands*
1979-80	19,555	36,818
1980-81	25,385	40,388
1981-82	30,717	44,511
1982-83	37,327	50,447
1983-84	45,267	58,449
1984-85	51,309	63,115
1985-86	63,093	73,655
1986-87	71,203	80,409
1987-88	79,855	85,645
1988-89	92,570	92,570

[1] Comprises reimbursements for rents, rates, notional rent, cost rents and local authority economic rents.
[2] Based on FPC annual accounts prepared on an income and expenditure basis.
[3] Real terms prices have been calculated using the gross domestic product deflator.

General Practice Cost Rent Scheme

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give for each of the last five years and for England and Wales the total amount outstanding under the general practice cost rent scheme.

Mr. Freeman: The cost rent scheme gives a general medical practitioner an enhanced annual rental reimbursement which reflects the value of the capital investment he or she has made in acquiring or developing purpose-built surgery premises or their equivalent. The cost rent remains in payment until it is more advantageous for a GP to opt for rent reimbursement based on an assessment of the current market rental value of his or her surgery premises. As this can vary with local circumstances, it is not possible to identify the long-term total expenditure commitment represented by cost rents in payment at any one time.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Southern Africa

74. **Mr. Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the United Kingdom will contribute to the forthcoming southern African development co-ordination conference; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: I shall represent Her Majesty's Government. I shall announce a new pledge of £10 million to add to the £60 million we have committed over the last 10 years.

83. **Mr. Hayward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government will participate in the southern African development co-ordination conference with a view to co-ordinating aid from different sources.

Mrs. Chalker: Membership of the southern African development co-ordination conference is limited to countries in the region. I shall attend their annual consultation meeting with donors in Lusaka on 1 and 2 February.

85. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which Minister of his Department will represent Her Majesty's Government at the southern African development co-ordination conference.

Mrs. Chalker: I shall represent Her Majesty's Government.

Kenya

75. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last visited Kenya.

Mrs. Chalker: I last visited Kenya in my previous capacity in January 1989 and am planning a further visit early in the spring.

My predecessor as Minister for Overseas Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), visited Kenya in March 1987 and the then Secretary of State, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), visited in September 1988.

Rain Forests

77. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will give details of the projects to be assisted in Brazil to preserve the tropical rain forest, announced following the

visit there by the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten); and whether similar assistance is being planned for Colombia.

Mrs. Chalker: We are developing possible projects in Brazil related to sustainable forest management and the effects of deforestation on climate, as well as research into the genetic resources of the rain forest. Similar assistance to Colombia may be considered in the future, but for the time being we are using our resources to establish the Brazilian programme.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking as a result of the mission to Brazil of Mr. Tim Synott of his Department, in relation both to rain forest and savannah grassland problems.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Member to the two replies I gave him on 22 January at columns 506 and 507. Savannah grassland problems were not included by the Brazilian Government among the initial priority areas for United Kingdom assistance. However, we would consider assistance in this field if, in our continuing contacts with the Brazilians, it emerged as a priority concern.

Eastern Europe (Free Markets)

78. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement on Government assistance towards creating free markets in the emerging eastern European democracies.

Mrs. Chalker: I have little to add to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay by the Prime Minister on 9 January in response to her question on assistance to Poland and Hungary. We will extend the know-how funds to the other countries in eastern Europe once they are fully committed to reform.

Vietnam

84. **Mr. Boyes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Government now have any plans to make overseas aid available to Vietnam.

81. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to provide aid for Vietnam.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Gentlemen to the answer I gave on 16 January to my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson).

Namibia

82. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has for increasing aid to Namibia.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told the House last year that we would provide aid to an independent Namibia. We are planning several exploratory missions to Namibia to identify areas in which we may be able to assist. A team arrived at Namibia yesterday to assess the need for police training.

Developing Countries (Debt)

86. **Mr. Geraint Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what new proposals the Government have to reduce the debt burden of developing nations.

Mrs. Chalker: The United Kingdom has played a prominent part in the measures agreed over the last few years to assist heavily indebted countries pursuing economic reforms. The priority for these countries now is to continue with the implementation of reforms to lay the basis for long-term growth. The United Kingdom will continue to play a constructive part in discussions of the debt strategy in the relevant international forums.

Know-how Funds

87. **Sir David Steel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what sums have been paid to date from the know-how funds to political movements in Poland and Hungary.

Mrs. Chalker: No sums from the know-how funds have been paid directly to political movements in Poland and Hungary, but funds are being used to finance political projects, broadly defined. We are supporting seminars for Polish Members of Parliament training in media techniques, and training directly relevant to the local government elections to be held in Poland this year.

By the end of the financial year, we expect to have spent a total of £150,000 on such projects.

El Salvador

88. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government will be reviewing their policy on aid to El Salvador in the light of recent developments in that country.

Mrs. Chalker: I have no plans to do so. We have a very small programme, the principal focus of which is the provision of training in Britain. We are also ready to provide emergency or humanitarian assistance in the appropriate circumstances.

Sri Lanka

89. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the British Government's aid and trade relations with Sri Lanka in the light of increasing political violence and disregard for human rights.

Mrs. Chalker: We have made our concern about human rights abuses clearly known to the Sri Lankan Government, although we recognise the main threat to the democratic process and human rights remains terrorism and intimidation by extremist groups.

We have as yet made no link between human rights and our aid programme on trade relations. Much of our bilateral aid in Sri Lanka is directed towards helping the poorest people and reconstructing facilities damaged in the course of the conflict, including in the northern and eastern parts of the country.

Somalia

90. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the development aid needed by Somalia and the contribution that can be made by the United Kingdom towards meeting those requirements; and what conditions regarding human rights, democratic processes and the rule of law he attaches to aid to Somalia.

Mrs. Chalker: Somalia has in general a need for a significant volume of development assistance. Britain participated with others in the provision of such help until October 1988 when concern about human rights violations led to the suspension of new British aid. More recently, deteriorating security conditions have caused a reduction in the scale of existing activity. We remain ready to consider requests from international and British voluntary agencies for humanitarian assistance for victims of the civil conflict in the north, but current conditions make it very difficult for such agencies to operate.

Aid Budgets

91. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether any changes have been made in the last six months to the Government's projected aid budgets to eastern Europe, Africa and Asia.

Mrs. Chalker: In the Autumn Statement, the Government announced increases in the overseas aid programme of £75 million in 1990-91 and £105 million in 1991-92. Even allowing for new multilateral commitments, these increases mean that our aid to Asia and Africa over the period 1990-91 to 1991-92 will be higher than previously planned.

Within the last six months, the Government have also increased their assistance for eastern Europe. They have doubled their know-how fund for Poland from £25 million to £50 million, contributed $100 million to the Polish stabilisation fund, are identifying a Polish agricultural project worth up to £15 million and have introduced a £25 million know-how fund for Hungary to start from 1 April this year. This substantial package of assistance for eastern Europe is additional to and separate from the overseas aid programme for developing countries.

Furthermore, as I informed the House on 22 January at column 601, the know-how fund will be extended to cover other countries of eastern Europe once they are firmly committed to reform, and substantial additional resources will be made available to the fund for this purpose.

Cash Limits

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes have been made in 1989-90 cash limits for expenditure by the Overseas Development Administration.

Mrs. Chalker: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit on the overseas aid vote (class II, vote 5) will be increased by £62,710,000 from £1,365,579,000 to £1,428,289,000. The increase includes a contribution to the currency stabilisation fund for Poland (20 December 1989, column 266), and a contribution to the UNHCR for refugees from Vietnam. Pending approval of the Supplementary Estimate, the payment to the stabilisation fund has been financed by a repayable advance of £61,710,000 from the contingencies fund. This amount is additional to and separate from the resources for overseas aid. The net effect of these changes will be charged to the reserve.

SCOTLAND

Poisoned Birds

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Caerphilly, 13 December 1989, *Official Report*, column *671*, on which estates or properties in the Tayside region the illegally poisoned birds were found; and whether any prosecutions resulted.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The properties or locations where illegally poisoned birds were found in Tayside region are as follows. No prosecutions have resulted.

	Where found
1987	
Crows	Eradynate estate
Rook	Monzie estate
Gulls	Monzie estate
Buzzard	Ballyorkan, near Pitlochry
1988	
Rooks	Dron wood, Longforgan parish, near Dundee
Buzzard	Poloskie Scraloch, near Blairgowrie
Buzzard	Monzie estate
Gulls	Strathallan castle estate
Eagle	Caenlochan national nature reserve
1989	
Crow	Scone estate
Crow	Glen Isla estate
Crow	Strathmore estate
Buzzard	Monzie estate

Electoral Registration

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps his Department is taking to increase electoral registration in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The preparation of electoral registers is the statutory duty of electoral registration officers. The Scottish Home and Health Department supports them each year with publicity campaigns.

Remand Prisons

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many remand prisoners there were in Scottish prisons at a convenient date in each of the past 10 years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The available information is set out in the table:

Average daily remand population in Scottish penal establishments 1980-89

	Numbers
1980	705
1981	746
1982	844
1983	863

	Numbers
1984	942
1985	1,092
1986	1,017
1987	938
1988	844
[1]1989	768

[1] Provisional.

Student Allowances

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether extra allowances under the SED student allowances scheme to students with dependants will continue to be paid and uprated annually should a student loans scheme be introduced.

Mr. Lang: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 23 January to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) at column *626*.

Scottish Heart Health Study

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will place in the Library a copy of his reply to the letter of Professor Hugh Tunstall Pedoe, director of the cardiovascular epidemiology unit in the university of Dundee, of 15 December 1989, on the Scottish heart health study; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A copy of the reply to Professor Hugh Tunstall Pedoe's letter of 15 December has been placed in the Library. I expect to announce shortly the Government's conclusions on the review of health education in Scotland undertaken by Touche Ross management consultants and on a report by the Scottish health service advisory council's working group on the prevention of coronary heart disease. The latter report and the results of the Scottish heart health study will inform the Government's strategy on coronary heart disease prevention in Scotland.

Non-smokers

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what provisions are being made in all the offices and other places under his Department's control for the convenience and comfort of non-smokers; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy for non-smokers.

Mr. Rifkind: After a full survey of staff views and extensive consultations, and with the support of staff interests my Department will in April this year introduce a policy restricting smoking in offices and other working areas. For a period of about six months thereafter, smoking will be permitted only in specially designated areas in staff restaurants and during specified periods in working rooms. Thereafter, restrictions will be further extended and smoking will be permitted only in areas specially designated for smoking. The need to allow smokers time to adjust to this policy has been recognised, and special counselling services will be arranged if there is sufficient demand for them.

Sea Fish Conservation Act 1967 (Charges)

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has considered the judgment delivered by Sheriff Risk at Aberdeen sheriff court on 19 January dismissing charges under the Sea Fish Conservation Act 1967 against Mr. Ian Sutherland and 11 others; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) on 25 January.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will place in the Library a copy of Sheriff Risk's judgment in the case of the procurator fiscal at Aberdeen against Mr. Ian Sutherland and 11 other skippers.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Yes, arrangements are being made to place a copy in the Library.

TRANSPORT

East London River Crossing

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport why, and under what provisions, over 3,000 objections to the east London river crossing proposal have been invalidated; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the reason for the requirement that objections already registered to the redesigned bridge and other related changes to the east London river crossing must be repeated in writing by 22 February if they are to be considered.

Mr. Atkins: Draft orders to authorise a revised design for the east London crossing bridge and to modify the arrangements for cyclists and pedestrians were published on 17 August 1989. These attracted over 3,000 objections. Further changes to the junctions on either side of the bridge were subsequently proposed. The draft orders already published were withdrawn and new draft orders giving effect to all the changes were published on 11 January.

The Department wrote to all the objectors to the original draft orders inviting them to say if they wanted their previous objection amended or supplemented as necessary to stand in relation to the new orders.

Transport Supplementary Grant

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will list those projects in the Darlington borough council area awarded transport supplementary grants since 1983; and whether he will estimate the proportion this represents of transport supplementary grants awarded to Durham county council area as a whole.

Mr. Atkins: No major road scheme (costing over £1 million) in Darlington borough council's area has been accepted for transport supplementary grant since the present system was introduced in 1985-86. Transport supplementary grant for minor works is not given for specified schemes but in a single block. We do not know how much Durham county council has spent on minor works in Darlington borough council's area. Before 1985-86 transport supplementary grant was paid as a single block for capital and current expenditure on roads and public transport.

Road Surfacing (Whitehall)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions took place between his Department and Westminister city council before the road surfacing work now taking place in Whitehall was commenced: and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: No discussions took place. Westminster city council, which is the hignway authority for Whitehall, was under no obligation to notify my right hon. Friend before the resurfacing work started.

Sound of Seil (Fire)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has concerning the fire on board the ferry Sound of Seil in January; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Marine Accident Investigation Branch is conducting an investigation into this incident to establish the cause of the fire. The investigation is not yet completed.

Non-smokers

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what provisions are being made in all the offices and other places under his Department's control for the convenience and comfort of non-smokers; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy for non-smokers.

Mr. Atkins: My Department's policy for its offices is to create a non-smoking environment, with facilities for those who wish to smoke. We will arrange for non-smokers and smokers to occupy separate offices where other management considerations permit. Where all the occupants of any office agree, staff may display "no smoking" signs in that office. It is open to local management and staff to agree further measures to apply locally, on a voluntary basis.

In addition, since November 1989, a general "no smoking" policy has been applied in the waiting rooms of driving test centres throughout the country.

Driving Licence Holders (Names)

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to what bodies, persons, groups, companies or other organisations the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Centre in Swansea has given names and addresses of licence holders; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Centre is required under regulation 15 of the Road Vehicles (Registration and Licensing) Regulations 1971 to release the names and addresses of vehicle keepers, who will in most cases be motor vehicle licence holders, free of charge to the police. Local authorities are given these details free for any purpose connected with the investigation of an offence. This regulation also requires the same information to be released to any person who can show reasonable cause for having it, and on payment of the prescribed fee —currently £3·50. "Reasonable cause" is not defined in law but is generally taken to mean an inquiry related to an incident involving the use of a vehicle.

Scrapped Vehicles

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has regarding the number of vehicles in the United Kingdom scrapped during the last full year for which figures are available; and what was the number reported to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Centre in Swansea.

Mr. Atkins: The only information available is that reported to DVLC. In 1989 there were 310,439 vehicles in Great Britain reported as being either scrapped or exported. To extract from this total the number of vehicles scrapped could be done only at disproportionate cost.

River Craft (Culverts)

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy that any road works for which he is responsible which pass over a navigable waterway will include a culvert to allow river craft to pass without obstruction; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: It is my right hon. Friend's general policy to design and construct bridges over navigable waterways so as to enable river craft to pass without obstruction so far as is reasonable. When designing new bridges, our practice is to consult the navigation authority. It is sometimes reasonable not to provide for the unfettered continuation of use, for example where a navigation is little used by craft of larger sizes. Restrictions to navigation may then be imposed, either permanently or during the course of the construction. Such restrictions may range from minor restrictions on draught up to more major interference. Powers relating to the construction of bridges over navigable waters and powers relating to diversions of navigable and non-navigable water courses are contained in part VI of the Highways Act 1980.

Heathrow Airport

Mr. Franks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, at his next meeting with the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority, he will discuss the proposals put forward by British Midland Airways for increasing the efficiency of London's Heathrow airport.

Mr. Parkinson: My Department has frequent contacts with the CAA, and is already in touch with the authority about British Midland Airways' proposals. The chairman and I will discuss them as necessary.

East Anglia (Links with Europe)

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the steps he is taking to improve East Anglia's road, rail and air links with Europe after 1993.

Mr. Portillo: Our latest plans to improve the motorway and trunk road network in East Anglia are set out in our White Paper "Roads for Prosperity", which recognises the challenges presented by the single European market in 1992 and the opening of the Channel tunnel in 1993. In the East Anglian counties of Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire schemes worth over £500 million have been added to the existing programme which will result in comprehensive improvement of the A1, A11, A12 and A47 trunk roads.

It is for British Rail to plan the pattern of rail services in the United Kingdom including services through the Channel tunnel. BR's section 40 plan proposes a daily service through the Channel tunnel to Brussels and Paris on the newly electrified east coast main line. Connections to and from Ely and Norwich will be made at Peterborough. New rolling stock and locomotives capable of 140 mph speeds are currently being delivered to the line. Firm proposals in respect of freight movement by rail from East Anglia are still being developed. Journey times from stations between Cambridge and King's Lynn to London will be improved by electrification. We are negotiating hard to liberalise the provision of air services within the Community including those involving regional airports. Stansted, Cambridge, Ipswich and Norwich airports should benefit from these expanding opportunities. A new rail link to Stansted is under construction.

Escalators (St. John's Wood)

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will call for a report from the chairman of London Underground Ltd. as to the safety implications of the prolonged closure of one escalator and the intermittent closure of the other escalator at St. John's Wood station; what was the cost of the repairs undertaken on these escalators over the past year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: I understand that the escalator, which has been undergoing major repair, will be back in service this week. The cost of the repairs is a matter for London Underground Ltd.

London Underground Ltd.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to improve the level of management competence at London Underground Ltd.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend's direct responsibilities in this area are limited to the appointment of members of the board of London Regional Transport. Mr. Wilfred Newton and his senior management team enjoy the full support of the Government in the initiatives they are taking to tackle the many serious problems confronting London Underground Ltd. We also welcome the new emphasis being given by London Underground Ltd. to management training and career development.

Storm (25 January)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the cancellation of ferries to and from the Isle of Wight during the storm of 25 January.

Mr. Parkinson: I understand that all the operators decided to suspend services, at least during the middle of the day. In addition, the Queen's harbour master closed Portsmouth harbour from 11.30 am until 2.30 pm. I understand that Sealink restarted from Fishbourne just after 3 pm, and thereafter ran a two-hourly (rather than the normal one-hourly) service to Portsmouth. All other services to the Isle of Wight remained suspended for the rest of the day.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the effectiveness of maritime services, marine rescue radio services etc., during the storm of 25 January.

Mr. Parkinson: Despite the extreme conditions and a number of power supply interruptions, the maritime rescue services coped with all requests for assistance. The marine rescue radio services, Her Majesty's Coastguard and British Telecom international coast radio stations, maintained a distress watch throughout.

A3 Litter

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what authority is responsible for clearing litter from the verges of the A3 in Surrey; and what steps he takes to ensure that this is done on a regular basis.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 26 January 1990]:* Under the Control of Pollution Act 1974 the district councils are responsible for cleaning for purposes of public health and amenity. My Department is responsible for cleaning for maintenance and safety purposes only. Surrey county council acts as the Department's agents, operating under our code of practice. The code prescribes the frequency of litter clearance, which can be varied to meet local circumstances.

The Environmental Protection Bill proposes that district councils become wholly responsible for litter clearance on all roads other than motorways.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many new claimants signed on each week of 1989 at *(a)* Doncaster and *(b)* Mexborough unemployment benefit offices; what delays there were in interviewing them; what requests have been received for additional staff; and what has been his response.

Mr. Eggar: Information about the number of new claimants who registered as unemployed at these offices each week during 1989 is not available. Details of the number of people who made new claims during 1989 were collected on a monthly basis and these figures are given in the table:

Total number of new claims taken during 1989

	Doncaster 'A'	*Doncaster 'B'*	*Doncaster 'C'*	*Mexborough*
January	832	532	712	384
February	501	413	516	452
March	404	349	409	290
April	488	376	449	342
May	517	477	561	303
June	499	527	494	311
July	775	708	770	403

	Doncaster 'A'	Doncaster 'B'	Doncaster 'C'	Mexborough
August	563	688	553	382
September	568	509	587	418
October	639	546	611	392
November	520	419	480	317
December	346	334	388	358

Notes.—Figures represent local count of total number of new claims taken during the month shown.

Creches

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list by location, where creche facilities are provided for working mothers employed in his Department; and if they have to make any payment for this service.

Mr. Nicholls: At the present time the Employment Department group does not provide any day nursery facilities (creches) for its staff. However, we are actively considering or planning for nurseries in a number of locations, often in conjunction with other Government Departments or other employers. It is expected that staff who wish to take advantage of these facilities will be required to contribute towards the running costs.

Non-smokers

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what provisions are being made in all the offices and other places under his Department's control for the convenience and comfort of non-smokers; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy for non-smokers.

Mr. Nicholls: The policy of the Employment Department group is to discourage non-smokers from taking up smoking, positively to encourage smokers to give it up or to cut down and to create a no-smoking environment, with facilities for those who wish to smoke, rather than the other way round.

The implementation of smoking policies rests with line management who are encouraged to review the practices in their offices and to consider setting up no-smoking schemes either in individual offices or in larger areas, such as regions. Significant progress is being made and no-smoking schemes already exist, or are in preparation, in a number of locations across the group.

European Social Fund

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list in the *Official Report* the total amount of European social fund moneys which have been allocated in each of the past five years to training projects run by voluntary organisations; and if he will show these moneys as a percentage of the total of European social fund moneys granted to Britain.

Mr. Eggar: The table shows European social fund allocations to projects run by voluntary organisations in Great Britain for years 1987 to 1989 inclusive, and these amounts expressed as a percentage of the total allocation to Great Britain.

	£ million	Percentage
1987	15·5	4·11
1988	20·4	5·76
1989	22·8	6·11

The figures for earlier years can be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what level of funding he anticipates his Department granting from the European social fund to voluntary organisations for training projects in the next financial year.

Mr. Eggar: The Commission's allocation of European social fund money to the United Kingdom for 1990 is likely to be lower than in 1989. Against that background and the priorities of the Community support frameworks approved recently by the European Commission, I am considering all eligible applications for ESF support including those of voluntary bodies. I cannot yet say what the allocations to voluntary organisations for training will be.

Cash Limits

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether any changes will be made to his Department's cash limits or running costs limits for 1989-90.

Mr. Howard: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates, the following changes will be made.

The cash limit for class VII, vote 1 (training programmes) will be reduced by £19,694,000 from £2,619,336,000 to £2,599,642,000. This is the net effect of a token £1,000 estimate; a decrease of £18,886,000 to offset the increase sought on class VII, vote 2, to repay the European Commission for European social fund overpayments in respect of 1987 and 1988, and a decrease of £809,000 to fully offset the increase sought on class VII, vote 5 for the main sale expenses of the Skills Training Agency (STA).

There is also some switching of provision within the vote, the most notable being a transfer of £38,410,000 from employment training (section B1) to the Skills Training Agency (section G); £19,183,000 of this transfer is to cover excess expenditure on running costs and £19,227,000 is because income is expected to be lower than in the original estimate.

As a result of these changes, there will be an increase of £20,210,000 in the DE training programmes running costs limit from £211,627,000 to £231,837,000. This increase is net of the £2,267,000 reduction to compensate for a breach of the same amount in the 1988-89 Training Agency class VII, vote 2 running costs limit.

The cash limit on class VII, vote 2, will be increased by £16,719,000 from £641,009,000 to £657,728,000. The increase is more than offset by a £19,694,000 reduction in the cash limit on class VII, vote 1. The increase is the net result of an increase of £20,089,000 to repay the European Commission for European social fund overpayments in respect of 1987-88 offset by a reduction in provision in

class VII vote 1; the transfer of £365,000 from the Cabinet Office: Office of the Minister for the Civil Service (class XX, vote 1) in respect of the challenge funding scheme for senior management development training; the transfer to class VII, vote 1 of £2,000,000 to cover increased cost of the introduction of training and enterprise councils; the net transfer of £1,471,000 to class VII, vote 1, as final adjustment of the provisional split of provision between the Department of Employment and the Training Agency following the transfer of some small firms and enterprise functions to the Training Agency with effect from 1 July 1989; increased appropriations in aid of £244,000 from the Department of Social Security (class XV, vote 7) as a result of provision transferred to the employment service in the revised estimate; and the transfer of £20,000 to the Department of Health (class XIV, vote 3) to fund the Alcohol Concern workplace advisory service.

There is also some switching of provision within the vote, the most notable of which is the transfer of provision between the employment service and other Department of Employment administration of £14,796,000 in preparation for the employment service becoming an agency.

As a result of these changes, there will be a decrease of £2,863,000 in the running costs limit for employment programmes and central services from £645,129,000 to £642,266,000.

The cash limit on class VII, vote 5, (sale of Skills Training Agency) will be increased by £809,000 from a token £1,000 to £810,000. This is required to fund the main sale expenses of the Skills Training Agency, which are mainly advisers' fees and is more than offset by the reduction on class VII, vote 1.

DEFENCE

Warheads

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy, *Official Report*, 12 January, column *779*, if he will make it his policy to arrange for a study to be conducted of the arrangements for the safeguarding of fissile material from warheads dismantled as part of arms reduction agreements.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No, since to date British nuclear weapons have not been the subject of any arms control agreement.

Boxer System

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what priority was given to the need to provide a secure communication link following the privatisation of British Telecommunications in the decision to proceed with the Boxer system and the application to build a 300 ft mast at Brizlee Wood, near Alnwick.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The proposed radio mast at Brizlee Wood will establish the east coast Boxer 2 route to defence units in the northern United Kingdom, and will thus be an essential link in the national and NATO communications network. Brizlee Wood was selected as the preferred location for this mast because it is already an important defence installation. The need for the Boxer 2 communications bearer system is based on the requirement to provide a nationwide secure and survivable communications system. The system will be introduced into service progressively during the early 1990s. The need for such a system was recognised many years before the privatisation of the British Telecom national network.

Tornado Jets

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, further to the answer to the hon. Member for Leeds, West on 14 December, *Official Report*, column *818*, if he will estimate the amount and type of toxic emissions *(a)* per mile and *(b)* per minute of a Tornado jet (i) with use of afterburner, (ii) without use of afterburner, and (iii) at various power settings of the engine.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The amount and mixture of emissions from the Tornado's jet engines without use of afterburner are broadly similar to those of modern civil jet aircraft. When the afterburner is in operation the exhaust may contain a rather higher proportion of unburnt fuel, but the main constituents of the emissions remain the same.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what verification research is being conducted by his Department and consultants on the assessment of canisters which do not need intrusive assay to evaluate the chemical contents of chemical weapons.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As part of the United Kingdom's active and practical support for the negotiations in Geneva for a comprehensive, global and verification chemical weapons convention, the Ministry of Defence, together with other Departments concerned, is undertaking work on various aspects of the verification technology which will be needed to underpin the convention. This includes the evaluation of non-intrusive techniques such as X-ray, ultrasonics or neutron activation analysis.

Service School Teachers

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the last review of the pay and conditions of service of locally employed teachers in service schools was completed; what review is taking place at the present time; and when that review will be completed.

Mr. Neubert: The pay and conditions of service of teachers who are employed on a locally entered basis by the MOD overseas are dealt with in the context of the arrangements applicable to locally entered civilian (LEC) staff generally. The most recent LEC pay reviews carried out by the commands in Germany, Gibraltar and Hong Kong were implemented from 1 April 1989. The last general pay review date for staff in Cyprus was 1 October 1987, but there is a separate system of interim cost of living allowances. The arrangements for LECs who are dependants of service and United Kingdom-based personnel serving overseas are normally reviewed in the wake of general LEC awards. Account is taken, however, of any differences in their position in relation to taxation and access to other facilities. Such other factors as recruitment and retention and affordability may also have to be taken into consideration. A special review of the terms and conditions applied to dependant LECs is being carried out in Germany. It is too early to say what the implications might be for any particular group.

Non-smokers

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what provisions are being made in all the offices and other places under his Department's control for the convenience and comfort of non-smokers; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy for non-smokers.

Mr. Neubert: Smoking is discouraged throughout the Department and is prohibited in lifts and other enclosed spaces. A number of no-smoking areas have been established in offices, recreational areas, staff restaurants and other communal rest areas. No-smoking areas will be developed and extended in response to the wishes of staff.

"Ways Out of the Arms Race"

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will obtain a copy of the book "Ways Out of the Arms Race", edited by J. Hassard, T. Kibble and P. Lewis, published by World Scientific, December 1989, for his departmental library.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A copy has been ordered by the Ministry of Defence library.

ECR-90 Radar

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, during the recent discussions with the Minister of Defence for West Germany about the ECR-90 radar, there was any discussion of collateral arrangements for the United Kingdom to acquire German-produced armoured vehicles.

Mr. Alan Clark: No.

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether, in the contract for the ECR-90 radar with Ferranti, there is a provision for recourse to Ferranti for any cost overruns on sales to West Germany.

Mr. Alan Clark: I have nothing to add to my reply to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) on 23 January 1990 at columns 869-72.

Military Detention

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average term of military detention imposed on service men found guilty of being absent without leave over the last five years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: This information could not be produced without disproportionate effort. Each case is considered individually. The length of detention varies from a few days to two years, depends on a number of factors, including the length of absence, whether or not the absentee surrendered or was arrested, and whether or not he had a record of any previous convictions.

Consideration is also given to any mitigating circumstances of a compassionate nature and to the length of time the accused may have spent in custody awaiting trial.

Radiation Leakages

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what radiation leakages there have been aboard nuclear submarines in or near Scottish docks in this year.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: During the past 12 months there have been no radiological incidents aboard Royal Navy nuclear-powered submarines in or near Scottish ports which have resulted in a hazard to naval personnel or members of the public, or any measurable contamination of the environment.

Ferranti

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he was informed of GEC's intention to bid for Ferranti Defence Systems Ltd.; whether he or any of his Ministers or officials met the boards of either or both companies before the talks with the West German Defence Minister on 22 January; whether he was consulted by either of the companies involved in the takeover before the announcement of 23 January and in what respects he assessed the bid by GEC for Ferranti differently from those made by the same company for Plessey in 1986 and 1989.

Mr. Alan Clark: My right hon. Friend and I, and Ministry of Defence officials, maintain contact with the management of all major defence contractors, including Ferranti and GEC; the details of our discussions are always confidential. However, I can say that the two companies informed the Ministry of Defence that discussions were taking place between them. The proposed acquisition will be assessed in the normal way by the Director General of Fair Trading under the provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973.

Community Charge

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any information as to the numbers of RAF apprentices and officer trainee pilots who are on full pay and have been classified as students for community charge purposes.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I understand that 411 RAF apprentices and technicians have been classified as students for community charge purposes. I am not aware that any RAF officer trainees have been so classified.

HMS Conqueror

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 15 January, *Official Report*, column *120*, to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, if he will declassify the captain's narrative of HMS Conqueror's Falklands deployment.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

ENVIRONMENT

Parliament (Stonework Cleaning)

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his current detailed timetable for the cleaning and restoration of the stonework of the inner courtyards of the Palace of Westminster.

Mr. Chope: The repair, restoration and cleaning of the stonework of the Palace of Westminster is being carried out in a number of phases. The next phase will cover the Victoria Tower and south elevation, overlooking the Victoria Tower gardens. This is due to start in April 1990 and will take about four years to complete.

The final stage of the programme covering the inner courtyards will be tackled after that, but it is too early to say yet precisely when the work will start, or how long it will take.

Fire Services (Cumbria)

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much extra money would be needed by Cumbria county council above its standard spending assessment for fire services to comply with the standards recommended by the Home Office inspectorate of fire services.

Mr. David Hunt: The standard spending assessment for fire and civil defence services is the Government's estimate of an appropriate level of expenditure consistent with the efficient provision of a standard level of service. It takes into account the characteristics of Cumbria as specified in the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England) and is consistent with the figure for total standard spending by all local authorities announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 19 July 1989. However, budgetary decisions for these services remain the responsibility of Cumbria county council. The Home Office inspectorate of fire services closely monitors the performance of brigades against the nationally recommended standards of fire cover.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any proposals for legislation to prohibit public footpaths crossing waste landfill sites.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The consideration of the diversion of any footpath would be a matter for the planning authority at the time of consideration of the planning application.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has had any meetings with the chairman or officers of the National Association of Waste Disposal Contractors since 22 November 1989; and whether he has made any assessment of the effects on Her Majesty's pollution inspectorate of the code of self-regulation.

Mr. Trippier: My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) met the chairman and representatives of the National Association of Waste Disposal Contractors on 17 January. During the course of wide-ranging discussions the association's code of self-regulation was not specifically discussed. But the Department is aware of the code which we see as a positive step in promoting the necessary high standards that should prevail throughout waste management. Adoption of the code will not affect the work of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution in regard to its responsibilities for waste as these rest primarily in monitoring the performance of the waste disposal authorities and in setting a framework of national standards for waste management practice.

Water Privatisation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the fees paid to each of the accountancy firms connected with the water privatisation; and how much money has been paid to firms criticised by the Department of Trade and Industry or the disciplinary committees of the accountancy profession.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It is not our policy to comment on individual contracts. The full costs of privatisation will be reported to Parliament in due course in the normal way.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the figures for Exeter city council and Devon county council authorities *(a)* expenditure, *(b)* Government grant support, *(c)* percentage increase on previous years and *(d)* inflation percentage for the following years: 1987-88, 1988-89 and 1989-90 together with the target figures for 1990-91.

Mr. Chope: The figures requested are as follows:

	Total expenditure £ million	*Increase Per cent.*	*Rate support grant £*	*Increase Per cent.*	*GDP Deflator Per cent.*
Exeter					
1987-88	7·036	60·7	4,621,206	−16·4	5·3
1988-89	6·139	−12·7	4,902,078	6·1	7·25
1989-90	6·840	11·4	5,169,351	5·5	7·00
Devon					
1987-88	390·072	8·3	162,988,858	7·5	5·3
1988-89	396·869	1·7	166,253,251	2·0	7·25
1989-90	456·617	15·1	162,550,732	−2·2	7·00

Notes:
1. For the years 1987-88 to 1989-90 the rate support grant for Devon consists of block grant only whereas Exeter received both block grant and domestic rate relief grant.
2. Under the new local government finance system, which comes into force on 1 April, there are no target figures.
3. In 1990-91 Exeter will receive £12·4 million of revenue support grant.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give *(a)* the figures of business rate contribution to Exeter city council for the following years: 1987-88, 1988-89 and 1989-90, *(b)* the expected business rate contribution to the uniform business rate in 1990-91 and *(c)* the allocation of uniform business rate to Exeter city council in 1990-91.

Mr. Chope: The available information is as follows:

Non-domestic rate yield in Exeter net of rebates:

	£ million
1987-88	16·1
1988-89	19·3
1989-90	21·1
Allocation of uniform business rate:	
1990-91	21·5

The business rate contribution to the uniform business rate in 1990-91 is not yet known.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will show in the *Official Report* the numbers and grades of his staff engaged on GRE or SSA development in *(a)* 1988, *(b)* 1989 and *(c)* planned for 1990.

Mr. David Hunt *[holding answer 25 January 1990]:* The number of staff in my Department engaged on GRE or SSA development and calculation are shown in the table for 1988 and 1989. Future figures are not yet known.

The figures include professional economists and statisticians plus support staff who have been engaged on GRE or SSA development and calculation in the period. Not all of these staff have been engaged wholly on GRE or SSA development.

	1988	*1989*
Grade 5	1	1
Grade 6	1	1
Grade 7	3	3
SEO	1	1
HEO and professional equivalent	1	1
EO and professional equivalent	2	2
AO	1	1

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether people living in communities run by *(a)* the Moonies, *(b)* Hare Krishna, *(c)* the Children of God, *(d)* the Scientologists and *(e)* other religious cults will be exempt from the poll tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Individuals who are members of religious communities, the principal occupation of which is prayer, contemplation, the relief of suffering or education; who have no income or capital of their own; and who are dependent upon the community concerned for their material needs, are exempt from the community charge. It is for community charges registration officers to decide in each case whether a person falls within the terms of the exemption.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what relief from the community charge will be available to those who currently receive relief on their rates because they are disabled; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: Disabled persons' rate relief ensures that disabled people do not have to pay higher rate bills where an adaptation of their home made necessary by their disability would raise its rateable value. There is no question of a disabled person having to pay more community charge because of his disability, so equivalent provision is not necessary. Rebates of up to 80 per cent. of the community charge are available to people, including disabled people, with little or no income who qualify for community charge benefit. Income support, for those receiving it, contains an amount to help pay the remaining 20 per cent. Disabled people may qualify for rebates at higher levels of income than other claimants because of the disability premium.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) by what percentage the rate imposed by Chelmsford borough council increased in each year from 1979 to date;

(2) by what percentage the rate imposed by Essex county council increased in each year from 1979 to date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The percentage changes over the previous years are as follows:

	Chelmsford borough council borough rate per cent.	*Essex county council precept per cent.*
1979-80	−36·8	+25·3
1980-81	+4·4	+18·7
1981-82	+59·6	+10·8
1982-83	−39·2	+14·9
1983-84	+9·6	+4·7
1984-85	+38·8	+7·0
1985-86	+26·1	+7·4
1986-87	+7·1	+18·8
1987-88	−13·3	+10·8
1988-89	+38·5	+17·8
1989-90	+19·4	+5·1

Borough rate is the rate charged by the borough; precept is the rate levied by the county council.

Mr. Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether university students sponsored by firms are eligible for the full community charge rebate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The eligibility criteria defining full-time courses for the purposes of student relief make no reference to the source of a student's funds. Every person whose course fulfils these criteria will be liable to pay only 20 per cent. of the personal community charge.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the maximum level of community charge for Northampton at which no couple will be required to pay £3 per week extra as protected by the transitional relief; and how this divides between Northampton and Northamptonshire.

Mr. Chope: For the purposes of the transitional relief scheme, the assumed community charge for the area of Northampton borough council will be £294·13. The way in which this figure is derived does not permit a meaningful apportionment to be made between district and county; but the community charge bills which people receive will show separately how much of the actual community charge is due to county and district spending, and will show, for comparison, the cost of providing a standard level of service.

Cleaning Contractors, House of Commons

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what supervision is given and by whom as to the standard of work by the cleaning contractors now employed in the House of Commons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The Parliamentary Works Office and the Department of the Serjeant at Arms staff work together on the inspection of cleaning work undertaken by the contractor.

Ancient Monuments

Mr. Cormack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he intends to update and expand his schedule of ancient monuments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: Before my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment includes a monument in the schedule that he maintains under section 1 of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979, he consults English Heritage. English Heritage's major programme of re-survey work, known as the monuments protection programme, is now under way. It is expected to run for some 10 years or so and could lead to an increase in the number of scheduled monuments in England from 13,000 to approximately 60,000. The object of the programme is to identify further or redefine monuments of national importance which should be protected by statutory controls; and to collect up-to-date information to assist in their future use and management.

My right hon. Friend is now considering the first batch of 200 monuments recommended for scheduling by English Heritage. These cover monuments in the Salisbury Plain training area. To qualify for scheduling, monuments must be of national importance. Each case is considered on its merits. Because the characteristics which make a monument of national importance and worthy of scheduling are not always readily visible, its identification, and the subsequent decision whether or not to include it in the schedule, are matters for informed judgment in the light of professional advice given by English Heritage. The criteria on which the judgment is formed were first announced on 22 November 1983 and I now restate them:

(i) Period: all types of monuments that characterise a category or period should be considered for preservation.

(ii) Rarity: there are some monument categories which in certain periods are so scarce that all surviving examples which still retain some archaelogical potential, should be preserved. In general, however, a selection must be made which portrays the typical and commonplace as well as the rare. This process should take account of all aspects of the distribution of a particular class of monument, both in a national and a regional context.

(iii) Documentation: the significance of a monument may be enhanced by the existence of records of previous investigation or, in the case of more recent monuments, by the supporting evidence of contemporary written records.

(iv) Group Value: the value of a single monument (such as a field system) may be greatly enhanced by its association with related contemporary monuments (such as a settlement and cemetery) or with monuments of different periods. In some cases, it is preferable to protect the complete group of monuments, including associated and adjacent land, rather than to protect isolated monuments within the group.

(v) Survival/Condition: the survival of a monument's archaeological potential both above and below ground is a particularly important consideration and should be reassessed in relation to its present condition and surviving features.

(vi) Fragility/Vulnerability: highly important archaeological evidence from some field monuments can be destroyed by a single ploughing or unsympathetic treatment; vulnerable monuments of this nature would particularly benefit from the statutory protection which scheduling confers. There are also standing structures of particular form or complexity whose value can again be severely reduced by neglect or careless treatment and which are similarly well suited to protection by scheduled monument legislation, even if these structures are already listed historic buildings.

(vii) Diversity: some monuments may be selected for scheduling because they possess a combination of high quality features, others because of a single important attribute.

(viii) Potential: on occasion, the nature of the evidence cannot be specified precisely, but it may still be possible to document reasons anticipating its existence and importance and so to demonstrate the justification for scheduling. This is usually confined to sites rather than upstanding monuments.

CITES Conference

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he is giving to a habitat tax, as suggested at the CITES conference at Lucerne.

Mr. Trippier: None. This matter was not formally discussed at the CITES conference. I shall, however, be interested in the outcome of any discussions on this issue between the International Council for Bird Preservation, which proposed it, and the pet trade.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy on the check list scheme contained in the resolution on the shipment of live animals passed at the seventh CITES conference; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: We support in principle efforts to improve transport conditions for live animals, and in the light of CITES conference resolution 7.13, are considering what further steps may be necessary to supplement the existing substantial safeguards which already operate in the United Kingdom.

Commons Registration Act

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the working of the Commons Registration Act 1965; and when he expects to bring forward proposals to amend it.

Mr. Trippier: We recognise, as did the Common Land Forum, that there are deficiencies in the Commons Registration Act 1965. For our legislative intentions, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 27 November 1989 to my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr), (*Official Report*, Vol. 162, column *89*).

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Gow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the resident population of the borough of Eastbourne for the purpose of calculating its standard spending assessment; how he arrived at the size of the resident population; to what extent and at what date the figure for the size of the resident population is accurate; whether he and the Eastbourne borough council

agree on the size of the resident population; and what representations he has received on this subject from the borough council.

Mr. Chope: The resident population of the borough of Eastbourne used for the purpose of calculating its standard spending assessment is 80,353. This figure is arrived at in accordance with the provisions of the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England) and is the estimate of the registrar general for England and Wales of the resident population at 30 June 1988. I believe that this is the best information available for this purpose, being compiled on a consistent and impartial basis and providing the necessary breakdown between age groups. The community charges registration officer for Eastbourne has reported a figure of 67,903 as being the number of persons registered as subject to pay the personal community charge, with an adjustment for students, and estimated to pay collective community charge contributions at 1 December 1989. Eastbourne borough council has made representations that the figures from its community charges register should be used for the purpose of calculating its standard spending assessment in place of the registrar general's estimate. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State considered these representations before he made the distribution report but decided not to make the change suggested.

Mr. Gow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what procedures exist for altering the standard spending assessment of a borough council for the year ending 31 March 1991 where it is discovered that the figure taken as the size of the resident population turns out to be misleading.

Mr. Chope: The standard spending assessment for each borough council, as for other councils, has been calculated in accordance with the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England). The use of resident population figures calculated on a different basis from that specified in that report would require the making of an amendment report. If representations were made to that effect, my right hon. Friend would take them into account in considering whether to make an amendment report.

Cash Limits

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he proposes to make any changes to the cash limit on the Property Services Agency civil vote in 1989-90.

Mr. Chope: Yes, subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit for class XX vote 18 will be increased by £11,725,000 from token provision of £1,000 to £11,726,000. A reduction of £3,960,000 was made in the main Estimate from provision of £791,436,000 to compensate for the cash limit breach on this vote in 1988-89, which resulted in an excess vote of £9,200,000. Against this, increases are needed to finance the acquisition of freehold and long leasehold office accommodation and increased rents payments, to offset a shortfall in capital receipts, and to finance additional expenditure on the parliamentary and the royal parks and palaces works programmes. The increase will be charged to the reserve.

Storm Damage

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those county authorities which have requested assistance from his Department following the storm of 25 January; and if he will list the SSA for each authority.

Mr. David Hunt: No local authority has yet made a formal request for assistance, but in view of the obviously serious nature of the storm, the Government announced on 25 January that special financial assistance would be made available.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the isolation of a county from its neighbours in extreme weather conditions is a factor which was considered in calculating SSAs.

Mr. David Hunt: This was not a factor considered. Although the Isle of Wight councils provided a paper which argued their case for recognition of extra costs that they claimed by virtue of separation from the mainland, isolation in extreme weather conditions was not a factor which entered the case that they put forward.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement authorising those counties affected by the storm of 25 January to repair the damage under the Bellwin rules.

Mr. David Hunt: Special financial arrangements to help local authorities in emergencies—known as the Bellwin scheme—have been announced and will be available for the areas covered by the storm.

Construction Products Directive

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress is being made in giving accreditation to third party certification bodies dealing with product conformity under the construction products directive; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 24 January 1990]:* The British Board of Agrément was designated on 22 November 1989 to issue European technical approvals. It will also act as the spokesman for the United Kingdom in the European organisation of technical approval bodies to be set up under the construction products directive.

My Department is discussing with representatives of the construction industry, the European Commission and other member states, the appropriate arrangements for accreditation under the directive. We are also exploring with the National Measurement Accreditation Service and the National Accreditation Council for Certification Bodies how they might assist my Department in designating testing laboratories and certification bodies.

Revenue Support Grant

Mr. Gow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the relevant population of the borough of Eastbourne for the purpose of calculating entitlement to revenue support grant; and how he arrived at the figure for the relevant population

(2) what representations he has received from; the Eastbourne borough council about the size of the relevant population of the borough of Eastbourne for the purpose

of calculating revenue support grant for the year ending 31 March 1991; and whether he is satisfied that the figure for the size of the relevant population is as accurate as possible.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 26 January 1990]:* The relevant population for the borough of Eastbourne for 1990-91 is 67,903. This figure has been calculated in accordance with the provisions of the Population Report (England) approved by the House on 18 January. For Eastbourne, the calculation is based on data provided and certified by the community charges registration officer for the borough, and I have no reason to believe that the figure is not accurate. I have received no representations about the size of the relevant population. The treasurer did, however, make representations about the estimates of population used in calculating standard spending assessments, which are derived from a different source. These representations were considered before my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England).

Mr. Gow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what procedures exist for altering the distribution of revenue support grant for a district council for the year ending 31 March 1991 where it is discovered that an error has been made in assessing the size of the relevant population.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 26 January 1990]:* The relevant population for each district council for 1990-91 has been calculated in accordance with the Population Report (England). I am not aware of any errors having been made in this calculation. If any errors were discovered, my right hon. Friend would consider what action was necessary, depending on the circumstances of the case.

Local Government Finance, Eastbourne

Mr. Gow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what will be the level of the community charge in the borough of Eastbourne and in the district of Wealden on the basis of figures published by him on 11 January; and what is his estimate of overspending by Eastbourne and by Wealden for adults for the current year.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 26 January 1990]:* On the basis of the assumptions used for the revenue support grant settlement, the community charge for 1990-91 would be £298 in Eastbourne and £270 in Wealden. In 1989-90 Eastbourne's reported budgeted total expenditure is £919,000 more than its grant-related expenditure assessment, and Wealden's expenditure is £727,000 more than its GRE. Expressed as amounts per adult using the relevant population for 1990-91, these figures are £14 and £7 respectively.

English Heritage

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list all grant offers and section 3A repair grant offers made by English Heritage for each year from 1984-85 to 1989-90, broken down by recipient organisation;

(2) if he will list total grant offers made by English Heritage from 1984-85 to 1989-90, broken down by category of grant, further subdividing section 3A repair grants between church and secular grants and showing each category as a proportion of the annual total;

(3) what is English Heritage's salary bill for 1984-85 to 1990-91 in real terms and for each year, as a proportion of grant in aid;

(4) what is the total staff complement of English Heritage for 1984-85 to 1989-90 and the estimates to 1992-93;

(5) what proportion of grant in aid was *(a)* offered and *(b)* paid by English Heritage in grants from 1984-85 to 1990-91;

(6) what was the Government's grant in aid to English Heritage in real terms from 1984-85 to 1992-93;

(7) what were English Heritage's operating costs from 1984-85 to 1990-91, broken down by category and showing each category as a proportion of the annual total.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 26 January 1990]:* The detailed breakdown of expenditure on building repair grants, salaries and operating costs, and information on staff complement are matters for English Heritage. I have asked the chairman, Lord Montagu, to write to the hon. Member. Government grant in aid to English Heritage is as follows:

	Cash	*Real terms at 1990-91 prices*
1984-85	49·9	68·9
1985-86	52·2	68·5
1986-87	60·1	76·3
1987-88	65·3	78·7
1988-89	66·2	74·4
1989-90	72·4	76·0
1990-91	78·0	78·0

Grant in aid for 1991-92 and subsequent years is allocated provisionally and is subject to revision during the appropriate year's public expenditure survey.

Start-up Grant

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people in the past year have applied for a start-up grant, following advice from the Bradford enterprise centre; when applications were submitted to him; when he is going to take decisions on those applications; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Bradford enterprise centre provides a range of assistance and support for new and expanding businesses including start-up grants, which are available from a number of sources. No details are available on the numbers of people who may have applied for start-up assistance following advice from the centre, or of the outcome.

As part of Bradford metropolitan district council's inner area programme, the Government do, however, fund a business development scheme, which offers start-up grants of up to £2,000 to applicants who meet agreed criteria. For this particular start-up scheme, there have been 47 applications in the current financial year. Thirty applications were received on 10 July 1989 and decisions on 28 of these were issued by the Department on 21 July. One was subsequently withdrawn and the remaining

application was determined in September on receipt of further information. Following the satisfactory conclusion on 8 January of discussions about the detailed operation of the scheme, the Department is now able to consider the 17 further applications received in November. Decisions can be expected shortly.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Sheep Scab

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the incidence of sheep scab in each county of England and Wales for each of the last three years.

Mr. Maclean: The information is as follows:

	Number
1987	
England	
Cheshire	2
Cornwall	2
Gloucestershire	1
Greater Manchester	1
Lancashire	8
North Yorkshire	3
Shropshire	2
Somerset	1
West Yorkshire	3
Total	23
Wales	
Clywd	6
Gwent	1
Gwynedd	5
Powys	2
Total	14
1988	
England	
Cheshire	4
Cornwall	2
Derbyshire	2
Devon	3
Dorset	3
Gloucestershire	1
Hereford and Worcester	1
Lincolnshire	2
Shropshire	3
Somerset	4
Warwickshire	1
Total	26
Wales	
Clwyd	1
Gwent	1
Gwynedd	3
Mid Glamorgan	3
Powys	1
Total	9
1989	
England	
Cambridgeshire	1
Essex	1
Avon	1
Cornwall	15
Devon	15
Dorset	4
Somerset	10
Wiltshire	3
Cheshire	1
Derbyshire	1
Hereford and Worcester	3
Shropshire	2
Staffordshire	3
Total	60
Wales	
Clwyd	2
Dyfed	1
Gwynedd	1
Powys	1
Total	5

Organic Farming

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, 4Fisheries and Food when he received a document from the Soil Association entitled "20 per cent. of Britain Organic by the Year 2000"; what steps he has taken, or plans to take to assess the practicality of the proposals it contains; and what reply he has sent to the Soil Association.

Mr. Curry: I have not received from the Soil Association a copy of the document to which the hon. Member refers, although I am aware of it. In my reply on 16 January to a question from the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) I referred to the steps being taken by the Government to encourage organic farming (*Official Report* columns 215-16).

Mince

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he intends introducing regulations governing the lean to fat ratios in mince; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Not for the present. I need to await developments in the European Community concerning proposals for the quantitative declaration of characterising ingredients of foodstuffs and the possible extension of the existing directive on minced meat to domestic production, both of which issues are likely to be discussed in the next few months.

Food Colouring

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food under what circumstances the inclusion in food of colouring matter is deemed to be necessary.

Mr. Maclean: The Food Advisory Committee (FAC), in its review of the Colouring Matter in Food Regulations 1973, discussed the need for colours to be added to food. It concluded that the responsible use of colours continues to have a role in providing consumers with a choice of attractively presented foods. It also, however, recommended stricter controls on their use including an extension to the list of foods which currently must not contain added colours. I announced in the House on 29 November last year the Government's acceptance of the FAC's recommendations. I therefore refer the hon. Member to

the committee's final report on the review and its response to comments received on its final report, copies of which have already been placed in the Library of the House.

Sheep Offal

Mr. Parry: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if there is any evidence of danger to animals that are fed food containing sheep offal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Sheep offal is subject to the prohibition on the use of ruminant-derived protein in ruminant feedstuffs as these species may be susceptible to the scrapie agent. There is no evidence to suggest that it poses a risk to non-ruminant species such as pigs and poultry.

Captive Birds (Imports)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his reply of 20 December 1989, *Official Report*, column *300*, what further steps he has taken to ensure that the requirements relating to the import of captive birds are being fulfilled.

Mr. Maclean: The review of post-import quarantine arrangements is continuing. Visits by veterinary staff to major exporting countries and meetings with representatives of the bird trade and conservation organisations are being arranged. I have written to the airlines emphasising the need for proper care in transporting birds.

Non-smokers

Mr. Amos: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what provisions are being made in all the offices and other places under his Department's control for the convenience and comfort of non-smokers; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy for non-smokers.

Mr. Curry: Restrictions on smoking already apply at certain buildings. The Department's aim is to establish a non-smoking regime at each of its buildings but with facilities for smokers. We are progressively moving towards this position.

Animal Feed (Contamination)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* cattle and *(b)* sheep are restricted, as a result of lead-contaminated animal feed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies), *Official Report*, 24 January, columns *769-70*. Details of numbers of individual animals under restriction are not held centrally.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all the countries in which restrictions are still imposed as a result of lead-contaminated animal feed; and, in each country, how many farms are under restriction.

Mr. Maclean: There are 1,512 farms still under restriction in England and a further 156 in Wales. The only other country known to have been affected was the Netherlands where I understand that one farm is still subject to restrictions.

Hill Livestock Allowances

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to increase hill livestock compensatory allowances by at least £3 per head; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) on 23 January 1990, at column *641*.

Cattle Offal

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to ban the use of cattle offal from calves under six months old for human consumption.

Mr. Maclean: Offal from calves under six months of age do not present any risk. Such action would not, therefore, be justified.

Live Cattle Exports

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the economic impact of the European Economic Community restrictions on live cattle exports in the British beef and dairy industries.

Mr. Curry: The restrictions that the Commission is expected to adopt would, if in force in 1988, still have allowed the export of 249,000 (94 per cent.) of the 266,000 live cattle and calves exported in that year. The most important effect of the restrictions is likely to be on exports of breeding animals which were some 7,000 head and worth about £5 million in 1988.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the legal basis for the decision of the European Economic Community to ban the import of live cattle *(a)* born prior to June 1988 and *(b)* over six months of age.

Mr. Maclean: The Commission's proposal refers to the treaty of Rome and article 9D of directive 64/432.

Bovine Offal

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will provide details of restrictions imposed on the human consumption of bovine offal by the EEC member states other than the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: I am not aware that any other European Community member state has imposed restrictions on the consumption of offal.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what restrictions are imposed on the import of bovine offal currently banned from human consumption in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 25 January at column *821*.

Non-price Support Measures

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish details of the new non-price support measures proposed by the Commission which he questioned at the Council of Ministers' meetings on 22 and 23 January.

Mr. Curry: The principal non-price elements proposed by the Commission as part of its price proposals are:

An aid for small arable producers, defined as producers with not more than 20 hectares of land who derive the main part of their income from cereals, oilseeds and pulses;

An aid to encourage the production of millet, canary seed and buckwheat;

The extension of suckler cow premium to suckler cows owned by small milk producers, who are defined as producers with a quota of not more than 60,000 kg a year;

The introduction of a Community financed scheme for the purchase of milk quota from producers undertaking to cease milk production altogether. The quota obtained would be reallocated by the member state concerned to producers in less favoured and mountainous areas, to bring their quotas up to no more than 60,000 or 100,000 kg a year respectively;

An increase of 4 ecu in the rate of annual ewe premium in less-favoured areas.

Meat and Bone meal Exports

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what certificates are currently required by France, West Germany and Israel to accompany meat and bone meal exports from the United Kingdom; and if he will list those other countries which have made representations to him concerning the quality of such exports;

(2) what representations he has received from other countries regarding the quality of meat and bone meal being exported from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: The certification currently required is as follows:

France—that the meat and bone meal is destined for use other than as food for ruminants;

West Germany—application must be made to the appropriate Land authority for an import permit. This will state the particular certification which is required in each case. The Ministry is unaware that any application has been made and is not aware of any conditions which individual Laender may stipulate; and

Israel—that the meal is derived from poultry.

I have received no representations about the quality of United Kingdom exports.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Parry: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to assess the risk of transmission of bovine spongiform encephalopathy through pet food.

Mr. Maclean: Infectivity and other studies of tissues from BSE-affected cattle are currently being funded by MAFF at the neuropathogenesis unit and the central veterinary laboratory.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the estimate of the Southwood committee for the likely weekly maximum of new reported cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy; and at what weekly level new cases are currently being reported.

Mr. Maclean: The report of the Southwood working party estimated that 350 to 400 new cases of BSE might occur per month. In recent months around 800 cases have been confirmed. This is consistent with the single source epidemic described by Southwood.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has yet determined what processes are necessary to deactivate the bovine spongiform encephalopathy agent in meat and bone meal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Research is in hand to try and establish the processes which might inactivate the agent of BSE.

ENERGY

Fiddler's Ferry Power Station

11. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any plans to visit Fiddler's Ferry power station; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I have no present plans to do so.

Nottingham Coalfield

12. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairman of British Coal to discuss the future of the Nottingham coalfield.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend and I meet the chairman of British Coal regularly to discuss all aspects of the coal industry, including the Nottinghamshire coalfield.

Electricity Prices

13. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his most up-to-date estimate of the rate of increase in the price of electricity to domestic customers for the year from 1 April.

20. **Mr. John P. Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his most up-to-date estimate of the percentage increase in domestic electricity prices in April for the following 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: It is for the area boards to set their own domestic tariffs from 1 April this year following their contract negotiations with generators. Ministers have said that they will approve the initial contracts to ensure that the terms are reasonable.

37. **Mr. Gerald Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy by how much domestic electricity prices rose in the periods 1984 to 1989 and 1974 to 1979.

Mr. Baldry: In the period December 1984 to December 1989 domestic electricity prices decreased in real terms by 8 per cent.

In the period May 1974 to May 1979 (the last five years of the last Labour Government) domestic electricity prices increased in real terms by 9 per cent.

Offshore Oil and Gas

14. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many people are employed in the United Kingdom's offshore oil and gas installations.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Provisional figures indicate that 31,000 people were employed offshore on oil and gas installations in 1989, which is some 6 per cent. higher than in 1988.

British Coal

16. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairman of British Coal; and what matters were discussed.

48. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairman of British Coal; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Wakeham: I meet the chairman of British Coal regularly to discuss all aspects of the coal industry.

Nuclear Electric

18. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he can now announce the terms and conditions of employment of the staff of the nuclear corporation.

Mr. Baldry: This will be a matter for Nuclear Electric. The company will need to offer salaries and benefits sufficient to retain and recruit the skilled staff it needs to run its nuclear stations safely and efficiently.

Deep-mined Coal

19. **Dr. Moonie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if his Department has made any estimate of the likely production of deep-mined coal from Scottish pits in 1990 and 1991.

Mr. Baldry: No. Business projections are a matter for British Coal.

Energy Efficiency

21. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what has been the improvement in energy efficiency in the United Kingdom since 1979; and what information he has for the rest of the European Community.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Energy consumption is virtually unchanged, but GDP has risen by 20 per cent. Between 1982 and 1986, the latest period for which European Community figures are available, our rate of improvement was twice the Community average.

Pit Closures

22. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last discussed pit closures with the chairman of British Coal.

Mr. Wakeham: I meet the chairman of British Coal regularly to discuss all aspects of the coal industry.

Insulation

23. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what assessment he has made of the costs and benefits of the neighbourhood energy action community insulation programmes.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Community insulation projects have played a valuable role in combining implementation of basic insulation measures in low-income households with training for the unemployed. The Social Security Bill, which received its Second Reading on 22 January, will give my right hon. Friend powers to introduce a new scheme of grant not dependent on the availability of trainees. The costs and benefits of this scheme will be monitored and evaluated in the normal way.

43. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any further plans to encourage home insulation.

55. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what steps he is taking to encourage home insulation measures.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Existing programmes by the Energy Efficiency Office to encourage and promote energy efficiency in housing include publication of relevant information and advice under the best practice programme; support for community insulation projects; marketing and publicity initiatives, targeted on low-income households and on those moving house or undertaking improvements; and liaison arrangements with professional bodies in the building sector to encourage building professionals to give greater consideration to energy efficiency in the design of buildings.

The Social Security Bill, which received its Second Reading on 22 January, will enable my right hon. Friend to build on the arrangements to promote energy efficiency in low-income households through the introduction of a new scheme of grants.

25. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will restore the level of investment and employment in community insulation projects to that obtaining in 1988.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The principal purpose of community insulation projects is to help those on low incomes to be more efficient in their use of energy. The Social Security Bill, which received its Second Reading on 22 January, will give my right hon. Friend powers to introduce a new scheme of grants towards the costs of insulation measures in low-income households. I expect the new scheme to increase significantly the rate at which such measures are implemented.

Oil Production

24. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what are the prospects for oil production during 1990.

35. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what are the prospects for oil production during 1990.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Prospects for the oil production industry are extremely encouraging. I expect continued recovery of oil output in 1990. Output could be up to 10 million tonnes higher than the 1989 level of 91 million tonnes.

40. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what are his latest estimates of North sea oil production for each year in the 1990s.

41. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what are the latest estimates of North sea oil production for each year in the 1990s.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My Department is currently reviewing its forecast ranges for oil production for the next five years. This will be presented to Parliament when it is available.

Greenhouse Gases

26. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his most up-to-date estimate of the prospective increase in greenhouse gases emission from all energy sources in the United Kingdom by the year 2005.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Estimates of such emissions under a wide range of scenarios for economic growth and energy prices were included in a study, carried out last year by my Department, entitled, "An evaluation of Energy Related Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Measures to Ameliorate Them". This was part of the United Kingdom's input to the work of the energy and industry subgroup to the response strategies working group of the UNEP/WMO intergovernmental panel on climate change (IPCC). A copy of the study was placed in the Library of the House on 30 November 1989; and it is to be published this week as Energy Paper 58.

Independent Electricity Generators

27. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what are the prospects for the establishment of independent generators after the privatisation of the electricity supply industry.

32. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what assessment he has made of the prospects for the establishment of independent generators after the privatisation of the electricity supply industry.

Mr. Baldry: The encouragement of competition in generation has always been one of the fundamental aims of our privatisation proposals. My Department is aware of around 20 major private generation projects in prospect, totalling some 7GW of capacity. The first of the new independent generating companies to take advantage of the opportunities offered as a result of our proposals is Lakeland Power, which last October signed a contract with the North Western electricity board.

Fabrication Sector

28. **Mr. Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on current and projected levels of activity in the United Kingdom fabrication sector.

Mr. Peter Morrison: New capital expenditure in oil and gas development is estimated to reach £3·7 billion in 1990 —an increase of 75 per cent. compared with £2·1 billion in 1988—which clearly will improve the prospects for the United Kingdom offshore supplies industry, including the fabrication sector, in 1990 and beyond. Current level of fabrication activity is 229,000 tonnes.

Gas Prices

30. **Mr. Charles Wardle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy by how much domestic gas prices have increased since the privatisation of the gas industry.

52. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy by how much domestic gas prices have increased since the privatisation of the gas industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Domestic gas prices have increased by less than 5 per cent. in current terms since privatisation. This represents a decrease of 13 per cent. in real terms.

Energy Sources

31. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proportion of his Department's research budget was spent on alternative energy sources in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Morrison: In 1988-89 8·9 per cent. of my Department's research and development budget was spent on renewable energy sources.

54. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what progress has been made with the alternative energy projects currently funded or planned by his Department in Cornwall.

Mr. Peter Morrison: There are three major renewable energy research and development projects in Cornwall.

My Department contributed to the cost of the Cornwall energy project conducted by the Cornwall county council. Proposals for specific pieces of work arising from the first study are expected.

The geothermal hot dry rocks project operated by the Camborne School of Mines is progressing to schedule. A review of progress of the programme and future possibilities with the school is under way.

The Central Electricity Generating Board is progressing plans for an 8MW wind farm at Cold Northcott. My Department expects to contribute up to one third of the cost.

Non-fossil Fuel Obligation

33. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his latest estimate of the additional cost of the non-fossil fuel obligation subsequent to vesting day in the electricity supply industry.

Mr. Baldry: Customers currently pay for nuclear power in their electricity bills. The introduction of the non-fossil fuel obligation will not change this. The additional cost of meeting the obligation compared with the cost of generating the same electricity from fossil sources will be shown in the fossil fuel levy. It is too early to say what the initial size of the levy will be.

British Gas (Disconnections)

34. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many British Gas customers had their gas supply disconnected for debt in 1989; and what are the comparable figures for previous years.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart).

British Coal (Scottish Contracts)

36. **Mr. McLeish:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions he has had with British Coal about the future of the industry in Scotland and the recent Court of Session judgments over the validity of contracts between British Coal and the South of Scotland electricity board.

Mr. Baldry: I meet the chairman of British Coal regularly to discuss all aspects of the coal industry. The Court of Session judgments over the validity of contracts between British Coal and the SSEB are a matter for the parties concerned.

Combined Heat and Power

38. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a further statement on his policy on combined heat and power schemes.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave him on 18 December, *Official Report*, column 8. I have nothing further to add.

Sizewell B

39. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what has been the expenditure to date on Sizewell B nuclear power station.

Mr. Baldry: This is a matter for the CEGB.

Tidal Power

42. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what steps he is taking to encourage development of tidal power projects.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My Department is supporting a wide-ranging programme of studies on potential tidal energy sites in the United Kingdom. The aim of the current work is to reduce the uncertainty on costs, performance and regional and environmental issues to the point where it will be possible to take decisions on whether to plan for construction.

Coal Imports

44. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what are the most up-to-date figures or estimates available to him of the tonnage of coal imports into *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Great Britain as a whole for 1989, 1990, 1991.

Mr. Baldry: Information on coal imports is available for the period January to November 1989 as shown in the table. We do not produce estimates for future years.

	Million tonnes
Scotland	1·5
Great Britain	10·9

Source: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise (port of entry basis)

Mr. Buckley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what are his most up-to-date figures for coal imports into the United Kingdom for 1989 and his latest estimate for 1990.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that my right hon. Friend gave to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) earlier today.

51. **Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what percentage of the United Kingdom coal-burn in 1989 was imported.

Mr. Baldry: Twelve per cent. of coal burned in the United Kingdom during the period January to November 1989—the latest period for which information is available—was imported.

Pipelines (Shutdown Valves)

45. **Mr. Doran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many oil and gas pipelines on the United Kingdom continental shelf have had sub-sea emergency shutdown valves fitted.

Mr. Peter Morrison: A total of 26 oil and gas pipelines to fixed offshore installations are fitted with sub-sea isolation systems. In addition, all oil and gas pipeline risers to the six floating production platforms on the United Kingdom continental shelf are fitted with these systems.

Miners

46. **Mr. Cunliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his most up-to-date estimate of the number of miners on British Coal's books on 1 January 1989, 1 January 1990 and 1 January 1991.

50. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his most up-to-date estimate of the level of colliery manpower on the books of British Coal by 1 January 1991.

Mr. Baldry: For the week ended 31 December 1988 there were 85,883 men on British Coal's colliery books. The equivalent figure for the week ended 30 December 1989 was 66,059. The Government do not make estimates of future manning levels in British Coal. Such levels depend on a number of factors, including the corporation's continued ability to raise its competitiveness.

Coal Burning

47. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what steps his Department is taking to encourage the coal mining industry to develop new methods of burning coal.

Mr. Baldry: British Coal has an international reputation for research and development into new methods of burning coal and an impressive record of introducing new ideas commercially in association with plant manufacturers. Government support for pre-commercial research and development on new combustion technologies is made available from time to time as appropriate, such as at British Coal's Grimethorpe facility, where £17 million was provided for pressurised fluidised bed combustion over the period 1976 to 1984, and up to a further £8 million offered last year for a three-year programme on British Coal's topping cycle concept.

Energy Conservation

49. **Mr. Ray Powell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his most up-to-date estimate of the level of investment in energy conservation by the *(a)* domestic, *(b)* industrial and *(c)* public sectors over the next five years.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Investment in energy efficiency measures is a matter for individual consumers and the information requested is not available; where the Government are directly responsible, we have begun a campaign which is expected to lead to Government Departments increasing their investment in energy efficiency by up to 10 per cent. of their annual expenditure on energy.

Nuclear Electric

53. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he next proposes to meet the chairman of the national nuclear company; and what matters he proposes to discuss.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend and I intend to meet the chairman of Nuclear Electric whenever necessary to discuss matters of concern to Nuclear Electric.

Nuclear Power

56. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what future plans his Department has for the development of the nuclear power industry in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) on 18 December 1989, column 6.

Non-smokers

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what provisions are being made in all the offices and other places under his Department's control for the convenience and comfort of non-smokers; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy for non-smokers.

Mr. Wakeham: The only premises for which my Department has prime responsibility are its headquarters at 1 Palace street, SW1. The policy there is that staff are asked to refrain from smoking in offices where there is a non-smoker; and that smoking is not allowed in most common areas of the building. The operation of these arrangements will be kept under review in consultation with staff.

Sulphur Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he will make it his policy that the prospectuses for the sale of shares in National Power and PowerGen include the commitment to instal flue gas desulphurisation in 12,000 MW of generating capacity to achieve the EC target of 60 per cent. reduction in sulphur dioxide emissions;

(2) if he will make it his policy to ensure that Britain's electricity-generating industry pursues the EC programme of installing flue gas desulphurisation in 12,000 MW of generating capacity to achieve the 60 per cent. reduction in sulphur dioxide emissions by 2003;

(3) if he will make it his policy to ensure that National Power and PowerGen complete the EC programme of flue gas desulphurisation to cut sulphur dioxide emissions by 60 per cent. by the year 2003;

(4) what consultation he *(a)* has had and *(b)* expects to have regarding the British electricity-generating industry's programme to instal flue gas desulphurisation in 12,000 MW of capacity to achieve the EC target of 60 per cent. reduction in sulphur dioxide emissions by the year 2003.

Mr. Baldry: The Government are determined to implement in full the EC large combustion plants directive. This directive commits the United Kingdom to reduce its emissions of sulphur dioxide (and nitrogen oxides) from existing plants, such as fossil-fuelled power stations, but does not specify the means by which this should be done. Retrofitting flue gas desulphurisation equipment will play a major part in this, but the burning of low sulphur fuels, including gas, may also contribute. The prospectuses for the sale of National Power and PowerGen will explain how they plan to achieve the reductions required of them. The Government invited public comment last August on their plans to implement the directive. Further consultation will take place before a plan for reductions of emissions from existing plants is issued.

Imported Electricity (France)

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if supplies of French nuclear-generated electricity imported via the cross-Channel interconnector will be included within the non-fossil fuel quota of electricity supplied to the grid in the United Kingdom;

(2) what steps he will be taking to ensure that there is no subsidisation of nuclear-generated electricity purchased from Electricité de France under the arrangements for the non-fossil fuel quota.

Mr. Baldry: The cross-Channel link was built to be used for electricity trading in both directions and mutual assistance. Recent trading has been in both directions. Negotiations are taking place with Electricité de France for these arrangements to continue in future. Given the interruptible nature of these arrangements, imports through the link will not qualify for inclusion in the non-fossil fuel obligation. Electricity sales through the link will be on a fully commercial basis, without subsidy.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the total in *(a)* GWh, and *(b)* cost, of electricity imported from France via the cross-Channel interconnector in 1989.

Mr. Baldry: Figures for the whole year are not yet available. For the first 11 months of 1989, imports totalled 13,210 GWh with a value of £285·3 million[1].

I understand that figures for December will show the United Kingdom was a net exporter of electricity to France.

[1] *Source:* Customs and Excise Overseas Trade Statistics.

Director General of Electricity Supply

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the cost to the public purse for the office of the Director General of Electricity Supply.

Mr. Baldry: The costs of the Office of Electricity Regulation will be recovered through fees to be paid by the electricity industry.

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the total cost of establishing the office of the Director General of Electricity Supply.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) on 26 January 1990, at column *904*.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 30 January 1990

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Cash Limits

Mr. Irvine: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether there are any changes to his Department's cash limits or running cost limits for 1989-90.

Mr. Ridley: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates:

There will be a token increase of £1,000 on class V, vote 1 (regional and selective assistance, support for aerospace, shipbuilding, steel and vehicle manufacture) to introduce a new subhead to meet expenditure on a special payment of £31,790,000 to the International Tin Council. Extra provision of £23,123,000 is also being made for assistance to the shipbuilding industry. The special payment to the International Tin Council and the additional provision for assistance to the shipbuilding industry are offset by a higher than expected receipts and reduced demand for expenditure on regional development grants, regional selective assistance, selective assistance to industry, and support for the aerospace and steel industries.

The cash limit for class V, vote 3 (administration, regulation of domestic trade and industry and consumer protection) will be increased by £155,642,000 from £248,181,000 to £403,823,000. The increase covers provision of £156,000,000 for ex gratia payments to investors in Barlow Clowes Gilt Managers Ltd. and Barlow Clowes International Ltd., and associated expenses: the decision to make these payments was announced in the House on 19 December 1989.

Substantial recoveries are expected in future years and these will be credited to the Consolidated Fund. The increase is partially offset by transfers of £322,000 to the Central Statistical Office (class XIX, vote 18) in respect of staff and services recently transferred to the CSO; £24,000 to the Cabinet Office (class XX, vote 2) in respect of the transfer to that Department of the post of Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster; and £12,000 to the Department of the Environment (class X, vote 5) in respect of the transfer to that Department of responsibility for the Government's city action teams. Included in these transfers are provisions for running costs which result in the running cost limit for the Department being reduced by £221,000 from £305,098,000 to £304,877,000.

In addition to these changes, the cash limit for class V, vote 2 (support for industry) will be reduced by £72,500,000 from £570,837,000 to £498,337,000. This reflects reductions in requirements of £18·7 million for innovation, of £19·8 million for regional enterprise grants, and of £4 million for assistance for exceptional projects, in each case as a result of lower than expected demand, together with a reduction of £17 million for the consultancy initiatives as a result of lower costs per case and a slower than expected rate of completion of projects than originally anticipated, a reduction of £6 million for education and training as a result of lower than expected levels of activity, and a reduction of £7 million in grant in aid provision for the English Industrial Estates Corporation in the light of greater than expected receipts.

The net effect of these changes will be charged to the reserve.

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any proposals for requiring accountancy firms to split audit practices for tax advice and consultancy work.

Mr. Redwood: No.

Bicycles

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from the bicycle manufacturing industry concerning recent EEC directives; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Representation has been made by the cycle industry about European standard EN 71 (in the United Kingdom BS 5665) and the implications for certain children's cycles of the Toys (Safety) Regulations 1989 which implement the toy safety directive. There is concern that the tests specified in the standard may not meet the essential safety requirements of the regulations in respect of a range of children's cycles. We are considering this as a matter of urgency. If any harmonised standard does not meet the essential safety requirements the Government can refer the matter to the standing committee set up under directive 83/189 for reconsideration. However, the industry has been advised that when a harmonised standard is not appropriate to a particular product, it is open to the manufacturers to submit a model of the product to an approved body for an EC type examination. The test body is concerned to establish that the model submitted for approval meets the essential safety requirements and in so doing may, if the harmonised standard is inappropriate, have regard to other appropriate tests.

Unsolicited Mail

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what safeguards he will introduce to protect the general public against potential abuses deriving from the use of unsolicited mail shots of health care professions not subject to any forms of statutory registration.

Mr. Forth: I have no plans to introduce any new legislation in this area. As well as the general consumer protection law, there is the British code of advertising practice which applies to direct mail advertisements in the same way that it applies to advertisements published in newspapers and magazines. The Advertising Standards Authority will investigate any complaints about breaches of the code and will take any action it considers appropriate.

Non-smokers

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what provisions are being made in all the offices and other places under his Department's control for the

convenience and comfort of non-smokers; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy for non-smokers.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 29 January]:* At present, smoking is prohibited in most common areas including reception areas, waiting rooms, restaurants, libraries and conference rooms. Smoking is banned in any office where a majority of staff vote for such a ban.

Beds (Flammability)

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he proposes to publish BS 7177.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 29 January]:* The Department of Trade and Industry does not publish British standards.

The British Standards Institution published BS 7177:1989 "Resistance to ignition of mattresses, divans and bed-bases" on 29 September 1989.

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to enable manufacturers to continue production of goods which are to be subject to BS 7177, and will be for retail sale after the date for compliance with BS 7177.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 29 January]:* Agreement has now been reached on the British standard specification BS 7177, which I intend to approve for the purposes of the general safety requirement of the Consumer Protection Act 1987 in respect of the cigarette and match resistance of domestic mattresses with effect from 1 September 1990.

Eastbourne Water Company

Mr. Gow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has yet completed his inquiries into the Eastbourne Water Company; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 26 January]:* We are considering the matter, and I will write to the hon. Gentleman shortly.

Barlow Clowes

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on which date Barlow Clowes investors will begin to receive the detailed offer referred to in his statement of 19 December 1989.

Mr. Redwood: Messrs. Cork Gully and Ernst and Young, who are making the payments as the Department's agents, have informed me that all investors have now been sent a letter setting out their entitlement under the scheme of payments. Anyone who believes that he is entitled to claim but who has not yet received a letter should write to the Department's agents at Queensway house, London road, South Poynton, Cheshire SK12 1NJ. Investors have been asked to return their forms by 19 February, although claims made after that date may be accepted if good reason is shown for the delay. In the interests of prompt payment of claims investors should make sure that the deeds of assignment they have been asked to sign are properly completed and dated: some 30 per cent. of those returned so far have not been dated, and this will inevitably delay payment in these cases.

The payment to investors includes a sum representing interest up to 31 December 1989, as referred to in paragraph 8.19 of the Parliamentary Commissioner's report and in the letters sent to investors. I regret that due to a clerical error annex B to the Government's observations on the Parliamentary Commissioner's report contained the words "the date of payment" instead of "31 December 1989".

WALES

Free Milk

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many children are receiving free milk *(a)* under the age of five years, *(b)* at ages five to seven years and *(c)* at ages seven to 11 years.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: At September 1988 there were 10,444 children in maintained schools (including special) in Wales in receipt of free milk. Information is not available by age or for children who do not attend school.

Schools (Staff Budgets)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his most up-to-date estimate of the numbers and percentages of maintained primary and secondary schools in Wales whose school staff salary costs per teacher in post in 1993 will be *(a)* 15 per cent., *(b)* 10 per cent. and *(c)* 5 per cent. or more above average, *(d)* at or near the average and *(e)* 5 per cent., *(f)* 10 per cent. and *(g)* 15 per cent. below the average.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: No estimates have been made.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he proposes to undertake before setting the formula for calculating school staff budgets under local financial management for maintained schools.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: None. As I told the hon. Gentleman on 25 January at column 851, it is the responsibility of each LEA to determine the formula for allocating budgets to the schools covered by its LMS scheme.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his most up-to-date estimate of the numbers and percentages of maintained primary and secondary schools in Wales whose school staff salary costs, relative to average school staff salary costs per teacher in post are (i) 15 per cent., (ii) 10 per cent., (iii) 5 per cent. or more above average, (iv) at or near the average and (v) 5 per cent., (vi) 10 per cent., and (vii) 15 per cent. below average.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The information is not readily available.

Education Spending

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each county the standard spending assessments in the categories and sub-categories for *(a)* education as a whole, *(b)* under-fives, *(c)* primary schools, *(d)* secondary schools, *(e)* 16 to 19-year-olds, *(f)* further and higher and *(g)* adult and community.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Welsh revenue support grant formulae do not form a basis for calculating notional allocations of standard spending assessment for individual expenditure categories.

Hospital Spending

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report*, hospital expenditure per head for each of the regional health authorities in Wales for each of the last five years.

Mr. Grist: There are no regional health authorities, in Wales. Welsh district health authorities' revenue, capital and total expenditures per head for the last five years are shown in the following tables:

Revenue expenditure

£ per capita

	1984-85		*1985-86*		*1986-87*		*1987-88*		*1988-89*	
	Hospital services expenditure	*Total expenditure*	*Hospital services expenditure*	*Total expenditure*	*Hospital services expenditure*	*Total expenditure*	*Hospital services expenditure*	*Total expenditure*	*Hospital services expenditure*	*Total expenditure*
Clwyd	149·70	180·77	156·95	191·74	168·53	207·25	178·77	228·13	196·76	253·77
East Dyfed	165·65	203·60	170·96	211·42	184·33	230·48	187·49	247·91	207·31	271·74
Gwent	165·65	203·05	173·81	212·56	183·94	226·62	198·15	246·27	217·35	273·02
Gwynedd	146·56	189·96	158·94	203·40	170·07	219·05	183·20	238·93	199·16	262·45
Mid Glamorgan	162·61	194·84	173·37	206·92	186·29	223·41	202·57	247·22	220·38	268·44
Pembrokeshire	107·88	139·49	114·26	148·46	120·59	158·82	130·39	179·60	151·58	208·97
Powys	138·50	186·49	139·92	191·10	150·12	205·98	158·76	231·83	174·06	251·29
South Glamorgan	255·80	302·52	273·05	322·70	287·53	340·77	312·44	374·86	341·22	413·92
West Glamorgan	154·97	188·34	173·07	208·79	188·79	228·65	205·08	253·81	225·02	281·74
Wales	169·21	207·82	108·06	220·99	192·40	237·75	206·86	261·62	226·77	289·47

Note:
The population figures used are based on mid-year estimates of resident population of district health authorities. However, it should be noted that district health authorities are currently funded to serve catchment populations rather than resident population.
Sources: Health Authorities Annual Accounts, Welsh Office, OPCS.

Capital expenditure

£ per capita

	1984-85		*1985-86*		*1986-87*		*1987-88*		*1988-89*	
	Hospital services expenditure	*Total expenditure*	*Hospital services expenditure*	*Total expenditure*	*Hospital services expenditure*	*Total expenditure*	*Hospital services expenditure*	*Total expenditure*	*Hospital services expenditure*	*Total expenditure*
Clwyd	10·67	11·29	15·80	18·48	12·03	14·93	11·59	15·05	13·80	16·24
East Dyfed	8·93	9·74	6·81	8·02	8·72	11·21	6·60	8·54	9·90	11·27
Gwent	7·24	9·33	7·91	9·15	14·58	15·78	14·67	15·59	14·58	16·16
Gwynedd	10·85	12·08	2·99	4·01	3·80	5·32	9·39	14·63	5·54	8·65
Mid Glamorgan	5·07	5·64	14·36	14·90	8·27	9·72	9·73	10·73	8·60	11·70
Pembrokeshire	10·85	11·60	14·91	15·86	20·43	21·59	21·81	23·95	22·85	24·00
Powys	6·60	8·58	4·81	11·28	5·76	10·55	6·43	8·57	6·50	9·02
South Glamorgan	12·72	15·83	7·75	9·16	14·76	16·28	10·72	11·56	8·77	12·79
West Glamorgan	12·82	14·42	21·12	22·93	28·25	29·82	28·58	30·91	30·31	34·87
Wales	15·72	18·41	16·00	19·27	17·28	21·52	16·95	21·36	16·40	22·05

Note:
The population figures used are based on mid-year estimates of resident population of district health authorities. However, it should be noted that district health authorities are currently funded to serve catchment populations rather than resident populations.
Sources: Health Authorities Annual Accounts, Welsh Office, OPCS.

Total expenditure

£ per capita

	1984-85		*1985-86*		*1986-87*		*1987-88*		*1988-89*	
	Hospital services expenditure	*Total expenditure*	*Hospital services expenditure*	*Total expenditure*	*Hospital services expenditure*	*Total expenditure*	*Hospital services expenditure*	*Total expenditure*	*Hospital services expenditure*	*Total expenditure*
Clwyd	160·37	192·06	172·75	210·22	180·56	222·18	190·36	243·18	210·56	270·01
East Dyfed	174·58	213·34	177·77	219·44	193·05	241·69	194·09	256·45	217·21	283·01
Gwent	172·89	212·38	181·72	221·71	198·52	242·40	212·82	261·86	231·93	289·18
Gwynedd	157·41	202·04	161·93	207·41	173·87	224·37	192·59	253·56	204·70	271·10
Mid Glamorgan	167·68	200·48	187·73	221·82	194·56	233·13	212·30	257·95	228·98	280·14
Pembrokeshire	118·73	151·09	129·17	164·32	141·02	180·41	152·20	203·55	174·43	232·97
Powys	145·10	195·07	144·73	202·38	155·88	216·53	165·19	240·40	180·56	260·31
South Glamorgan	268·52	318·35	280·80	331·86	302·29	357·05	323·16	386·42	349·99	426·71
West Glamorgan	167·79	202·76	194·19	231·72	217·04	258·47	233·66	284·72	255·33	316·61
Wales	184·93	226·23	124·06	240·26	209·68	259·27	223·81	282·98	243·17	311·52

Note:
The population figures used are based on mid-year estimates of resident population of district health authorities. However, it should be noted that district health authorities are currently funded to serve catchment populations rather than resident population.
Sources: Health Authorities Annual Accounts, Welsh Office, OPCS.

Firing Range, Cardiff

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps have been taken to refurbish the range backstops at the national sports centre, Cardiff; when he expects work to be completed; and at what cost.

Mr. Grist: I would refer the hon. Gentleman to the Sports Council for Wales, which operates the national sports centre.

Leisure Facilities

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what assessment he has made of the cost of staff time that will be involved in the legal, financial and administrative work necessary to put the operation of leisure facilities out to tender in respect of *(a)* each district council in Wales and *(b)* each county council in Wales;

(2) what assessment he has made of the number of staff hours that will be involved in the legal, financial and administrative work necessary to put the operation of leisure and sports facilities out to tender in respect of *(a)* each district council in Wales and *(b)* each county council in Wales.

Mr. Grist: None. We are confident that the savings that will result will outweigh any initial costs incurred by authorities in preparing for competition.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will obtain for his Departmental library a copy of the report, "New Technology, the NPT and the International Atomic Agency Authority Safeguards System" by D. Fakley and Adolf Von Baeckmann, published by the Programme for Promoting Nuclear Non-Proliferation.

Mr. Maude: The report, "New Technology, the NPT and International Atomic Agency Authority Safeguards System" by D. Fakley and Adolf Von Baeckmann, published by the Programme for Promoting Nuclear Non-Proliferation, is an occasional paper issued by the Centre for International Policy Studies at the university of Southampton. A copy will be added to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office library in due course.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the European Council Ministers meeting in Dublin on 20 January discussed *(a)* European Community initiatives to export nuclear technology to eastern European states and *(b)* ways of using articles III and IV of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty to assist eastern Europe with nuclear technology.

Mr. Waldegrave: No. At the informal meeting of EC Foreign Ministers hosted by the Irish presidency on 20 January, there was no discussion of these matters.

Nepal

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he will take concerning violations of human rights in the Nakkhu prison, Nepal.

Mr. Maude: We will continue to make known to the Nepalese Government, as and when necessary, our concerns about respect for human rights.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Nepal concerning that country's non-party assembly system and the banning of the opposition.

Mr. Maude: None.

Kashmir

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has had seeking his intervention with the Indian Government concerning recent civil disturbances in Kashmir; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: None. We have no sympathy with those who espouse violence to achieve political ends. We hope it will prove possible to find a peaceful solution to the current problems in Kashmir.

Visas

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take steps to bring about the mutual abolition of visas for travel between the United Kingdom and Hungary.

Mr. Maude: There are no plans at present to abolish visas for Hungarians travelling to the United Kingdom. However, we recognise that the situation in eastern Europe is changing rapidly. Although the final direction of these changes is far from clear, we welcome the moves towards greater democracy and freer movement of people. We shall continue to watch the situation closely and will adjust our policies in the light of developments, keeping in touch with our European Community partners.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who will represent his Department at the Council of Ministers meetings; and what will be the agenda, on *(a)* general affairs: 5 and 6 February, 4 to 6 March, 2 and 3 April, 7 and 8 May, 18 and 19 June, 28 and 29 April and *(b)* development: 29 May.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and I normally attend Foreign Affairs Council meetings. Depending on the weight of trade items on the agenda, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry may also attend. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs attends informal Foreign Ministers' meetings, and my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development attends Development Council meetings.

Subjects expected to be discussed by the next and subsequent Foreign Affairs Councils include relations with eastern Europe, economic and monetary union, the Uruguay round, and trade relations with Third countries.

Kurds

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees concerning the problems of Kurdish people.

Mr. Maude: We are in regular touch with UNHCR on the problem of Kurdish refugees. We are currently studying an international appeal launched by the UNHCR on 20 December for assistance to Iraqi Kurdish refugees in Turkey.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations have been made to the Government of Iraq concerning the treatment of Kurdish people.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave the hon. Gentleman on 25 October last year at column 490.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps have been taken by the staff of Her Majesty's embassy in Turkey to visit the refugee camps of Kurdish asylum seekers from Iraq.

Mr. Maude: Staff from Her Majesty's embassy, Ankara, last visited the Iraqi Kurdish refugee camps in Turkey in July 1989. A request to the Turkish Government for a further visit in December was refused. We have repeatedly urged the Turkish Government to reconsider their position.

El Salvador

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has received on the progress of the investigations into the killing of six Jesuits in El Salvador.

Mr. Sainsbury: I understand that a colonel, two lieutenants, one sub-lieutenant, two sergeants, one corporal and two soldiers of the Salvadorean armed forces have now been detained in connection with the killing of the six Jesuits, their cook and her daughter.

Export Services

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will supply figures for spending by his Department on export services, in constant prices, for each year since 1979.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* Spending on export services is not identified separately in statistics on resources devoted by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to commercial work overseas. Generally, about 90 per cent. of commercial work is in support of British exports. Since 1984-85, the following amounts, excluding London overheads, have been devoted to commercial work overseas (at 1984-85 constant prices):

	£ million
1984-85	56·9
1985-86	54·8
1986-87	54·8
1987-88	52·8
1988-89	49·0

No comparable figures are available for the years before 1984-85.

The decline in spending in real terms during this period paralleled a similar decline in the FCO's overall overseas spending, but higher productivity in both responsive and initiative work led to increased output from fewer staff. For example, between 1983 and 1989, posts overseas reported a 14 per cent. increase in export intelligence notifications and a 60 per cent. increase in the number of market inquiries.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Rain Forests

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will name each of the research projects on the *(a)* medicinal and *(b)* nutritional plants and trees of the rain forest funded by (i) Her Majesty's Government and (ii) the European Community.

Mrs. Chalker: The research projects in nutritional plants and trees of tropical forests funded by the Overseas Development Administration are as follows:

African acacias: study and acquisition of genetic resources.

Evaluation of central American multipurpose hardwood tree species for dry zones.

Exploration and collection of calliandra calothyrsus.

Intensive study of leucaena genetic resources in central America and Mexico.

Evaluation of genetic variation in gliricidia sepium.

Acacia karoo: evaluation and acquisition of genetic resources.

There are currently no Overseas Development Organisation-funded projects on medicinal research, but we are ready to consider requests from developing countries for assistance in this area.

The European Community currently has a number of research projects under consideration. Details are not yet available.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Stephen and Christopher Fellows

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Attorney-General what was the cost of the case of Stephen and Christopher Fellows heard at Stafford crown court.

The Attorney-General: This case was tried in the Crown court at the election of the defendants, who there entered guilty pleas. The cost of 20 minutes' court time was about £300. The cost to the legal aid fund of solicitor and counsel will be about £280 to £380. Prosecution costs were £270, although these costs should be offset by the effects of an order made against the defendants to pay £120 each towards the costs of the prosecution.

European Community Reports (Disclosure)

Mr. Aitken: To ask the Attorney-General how many reports he has received of the unauthorised disclosure of internal EEC reports and documents since the passing of the Official Secrets Act; and what action he has taken in consequence.

The Attorney-General: I have received no such reports.

Abortions

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Attorney-General what criteria are taken into account in considering prosecutions in cases where medical personnel fit intra-uterine devices with the intention of aborting pregnancies in their early hours without obtaining the certification appropriate under the Abortion Act 1967.

The Attorney-General: The criteria set out in the code for Crown prosecutors, issued under section 10 of the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985, are applied in all prosecutions considered by the Crown prosecution service. The criteria require that there is sufficient evidence to afford a realistic prospect of a conviction and that the public interest requires a prosecution in the circumstances.

EC (Internal Market Document)

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Attorney-General what action he proposes to take under the Official Secrets Act in relation to the publication in the British press of the internal Community document relating to the impact of the internal market on regions; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: None.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Mortgage Interest Relief

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the value today of the ceiling for mortgage interest tax relief if it had been indexed in line with inflation and if it had been indexed in line with average house prices.

Mr. Lilley: The ceiling for mortgage interest relief was set at £30,000 in 1983-84. It would be £41,000 in 1989-90 if it had increased in line with the movement in retail prices, and £64,000 if it had increased in line with the movement in average house prices.

Earned Income (Taxation of Benefits)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will increase in line with inflation the current level of earned income above which all benefits are taxable.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* I cannot anticipate my right hon. Friend's Budget statement.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the current level of earned income above which all benefits are taxable if the existing level had risen in line with the retail price index since the time it was fixed at £8,500.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* The earnings threshold—also known as the PIID limit—above which employees' benefits are taxed would be £18,100 in 1989-90 if it had risen in line with the retail price index since it was fixed at £8,500 in 1979-80. All directors are liable to tax on their benefits regardless of the level of their earnings.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Recruitment Advertising

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the posts advertised for the last three years by *(a)* health and social services boards, *(b)* the Department of Health and Social Services, *(c)* education and library boards and *(d)* the Department of Education for Northern Ireland showing which publications each post was advertised in and the number of applicants who replied to each.

Mr. Cope: Statistics relating to general service grades are not available by Department as all posts in this category are advertised by the Civil Service Commission to fill vacancies on a Northern Ireland Civil Service-wide basis.

The information requested at parts *(a)* and *(c)* is set out in the tables below:

Department of Health and Social Services

Newspapers and number of applicants	*Grades Advertised*											
	Auditor/ Senior Auditor	*Chief Inspector (SSI)*	*Chief Nursing Officer*	*Director of Estate Services*	*Medical Officer*	*Medical Officer*	*PPTO Mech and Elect Engineer*	*Prison Medical Officer*	*Security Guard London-derry*	*Super-intending Architect*	*Tracer Technical Grade 2*	*1987 Totals*
Independent	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Social Services Insight	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Social Work Today	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Health Ser Journal	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Belfast Telegraph	11	3	2	13	8	9	9	2	—	1	18	76
Irish News	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	—	0	0	0
News Letter	1	0	0	1	1	0	2	1	—	1	0	7
Guardian	—	0	0	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
The Times Sunday Times	—	0	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
The Observer	—	0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
Nursing Times	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
Architects Journal	—	—	—	3	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	4
Building	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	0	—	2
Engineering News	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0
British Med. Journal	—	—	—	—	0	4	—	5	—	—	—	9
Chartered Mech. Eng.	—	—	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	—	0
Hospital Engineering	—	—	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	—	0
The Lancet	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	0
Londonderry Journal	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	173	—	—	173
Londonderry Sentinel	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	193	—	—	193
Building Design	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0	—	0
Community Care	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Totals	12	3	4	22	9	13	11	8	366	3	18	469

Newspapers and number of applicants	Grades Advertised										
	Inspector (SSI)	Medical Officer	Tracer Technical Grade 2	1988 Totals	Chief Executive H&PSS	Chief Insp. (SSI)	Inspector (SSI)	Medical Officer	Medical Officer	PTO—Electronic (Electro Medical Tech Engineers)	1989 Totals
Independent	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	—	—	0
Social Services Insight	1	—	—	1	—	0	—	—	—	—	0
Social Work Today	1	—	—	1	—	0	0	—	—	—	0
Health Ser Journal	—	—	—	—	3	—	—	—	—	—	3
Belfast Telegraph	10	28	0	38	1	[illegible]	7	7	12	74	104
Irish News	0	0	0	0	0	[illegible]	0	0	0	3	3
News Letter	1	4	0	5	0	0	0	1	0	4	5
Guardian	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
The Times Sunday Times	—	—	—	—	4	—	—	—	—	—	4
The Observer	—	—	—	—	—	0	—	—	—	—	0
Nursing Times	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Architects Journal	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Building	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Engineering News	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
British Med. Journal	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	3	10	—	13
Chartered Mech. Eng.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Hospital Engineering	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
The Lancet	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Londonderry Journal	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Londonderry Sentinel	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Building Design	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Community Care	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
Totals	13	33	0	46	8	5	7	11	22	81	134

Newspapers	Overall total
Independent	0
Social Services Insight	1
Social Work Today	1
Health Ser Journal	3
Belfast Telegraph	218
Irish News	3
News Letter	17
Guardian	3
The Times Sunday Times	5
The Observer	0
Nursing Times	2
Architects Journal	4
Building	2
Engineering News	0
British Med. Journal	23
Chartered Mech. Eng.	0
Hospital Engineering	0
The Lancet	0
Londonderry Journal	173
Londonderry Sentinel	193
Building Design	0
Community Care	1
Totals	649

Table II
Department of Education—Newspapers and number of applicants

Grades advertised	Belfast Telegraph	News Letter	Irish News	Times Educational Supplement	Total
Inspector of Schools (Commerce and Business Education)	18	2	1	2	23
Inspector of Schools (Construction)	16	1	0	2	19
Inspector of Schools (Engineering)	14	2	0	1	17
1987 Totals	48	5	1	5	59
Inspector of Schools (Construction)	20	1	0	0	21
Inspector of Schools (Mathematics)	12	1	0	2	15
1988 Totals	32	2	0	2	36
Inspector of Schools (Commerce and Business Committee)	20	4	4	3	31
Inspector of Schools (Construction)	26	1	2	0	29
Inspector of Schools (11-16 Support Inspector)	15	0	2	4	21
Inspector of Schools (Biology)	23	2	1	7	33
Inspector of Schools (Catering/Home Economics)	10	2	0	3	15
Inspector of Schools (Electrical Engineering)	20	0	0	1	21
Inspector of Schools (Geography)	23	8	2	2	35
Inspector of Schools (Mathematics)	12	0	0	3	15
Inspector of Schools (Science)	22	0	2	7	31
1989 Totals	171	17	13	30	231
Overall Total	251	24	14	37	326

Cerebral Palsy

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what research he has commissioned to investigate the causes of cerebral palsy;

(2) what steps his Department is taking to monitor trends in cerebral palsy.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* None. The main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research in the United Kingdom is the Medical Research Council. However, I understand the Department of Health is funding some research into the causes of cerebral palsy.

Construction Materials

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what effects on steel reinforcing have been reported to him as a result of alkali silica reaction or alkali aggregate reaction in the concrete used for the construction of any public building, bridge, sewage works, or water impoundment dam in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* None.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether any alkali silica reaction or alkali aggregate reaction has been reported in any concrete used in the construction of any building or other publicly or Government-funded construction now in public ownership in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* I am aware of only one concrete structure in public ownership in Northern Ireland with a problem which may have been caused by alkali aggregate reaction. The problem is not considered serious, but further investigations are being carried out.

Firearms

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what definition his Department uses of a replica firearm.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* Article 2 of the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 defines imitation firearm as

"anything which has the appearance of being a firearm whether or not it is capable of discharging any shot, bullet or other missile".

Additionally, under the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 any imitation firearm which is readily convertible with a firearm is treated as if it were a firearm.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he has taken to investigate with the British Standards Institute the specifications for a standard for *(a)* firearms and *(b)* ammunition enclosure for use in domestic premises in Northern Ireland for sporting firearms and ammunition.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* None directly, but the Royal Ulster Constabulary has contributed to the Home Office study with the British Standards Institute on the subject.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the Royal Ulster Constabulary issues a receipt for each firearm taken into the possession of the police when a firearm certificate is not renewed.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* The Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary has informed me that an official receipt is given in such circumstances.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the Royal Ulster Constabulary issues reminders to the holders of firearms certificates before the expiry of the certificates *(a)* before the renewal of the certificate and *(b)* before the normal period taken to process such a renewal application.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* The Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary has informed me that a reminder is sent to the firearm certificate holder one month prior to the month in which his certificate is due for renewal. A final reminder is sent one month after the end of the month in which the certificate was due for renewal. Local police may also contact the firearm certificate holder if they consider it justified.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether, within the last three years, any firearm in Northern Ireland was taken into the possession of the police because the owner's firearm certificate had not been processed and returned before the expiry date, in cases where the certificate had been sent, or given to the police for renewal before the expiry date.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* The Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary has informed me that the information is not available in the form requested and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. If the hon. Gentleman has any specific case in mind, I will make inquiries.

Harland and Wolff

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement concerning the disposal of Harland and Wolff and that shipyard's present and future work load.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 25 January 1990]:* The sale of the Harland and Wolff business to a new company set up by the management and employees backed by Fred Olsen was completed on 8 September 1989. As the company is no longer in public ownership, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on its work load.

Fair Employment Commission

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the Fair Employment Commission was requested to register in accordance with the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989 prior to the nominated date of 15 January 1990; and how many persons are presently employed by the Fair Employment Commission.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 26 January 1990]:* The Fair Employment Commission is specified as a public authority in the Fair Employment (Specification of Public Authorities) Order (Northern Ireland) 1989 and is therefore automatically treated as registered under the Act. At 19 January 1990, the commission employed 34 staff.

EMPLOYMENT

Earnings

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of the increase in average earnings each year for manuals and non-manuals in the private sector less manufacturing, based on the weighted average difference between the figures given in his letter of 11 January and those for the public sector as a whole.

Mr. Nicholls: The calculation requested would not be meaningful, for the reasons stated in my letter to the hon. Member.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 20 December 1989, *Official Report*, column *235*, whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the information supplied in his letter of 11 January, together with his best estimate of the numbers currently employed in *(a)* each of the specified categories, *(b)* manufacturing in the public sector and *(c)* private sector other than manufacturing.

Mr. Nicholls: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 18 January 1990 at columns *396—98*. The remaining earnings information requested is provided in the table.

Estimates of the numbers in employment for the categories requested are not available except for non-manual male employees in manufacturing, of which there were 917,300 employees in September 1989, the latest available estimate.

Percentage increase in weekly and hourly earnings of full-time adult male employees (a)

	Manual	
	Not in public sector	
April of each year	*Weekly earnings per cent.*	*Hourly earnings per cent.*
1980(b)	18·6	20·4
1981(b)	8·1	11·2
1982(b)	10·1	9·9
1983(c)	7·5	7·7
1984	8·9	7·7
1985	8·1	7·7
1986	6·3	6·6
1987	7·0	6·7
1988	8·1	6·8
1989	9·5	8·8

Notes:

(a) average gross weekly and hourly earnings, not affected by absence, for those on adult rates; manufacturing as defined in the 1980 SIC (but see notes (b) and (c)).

(b) males aged 21 and over on all rates; 1968 SIC definition of manufacturing.

(c) males aged 21 and over on all rates; 1980 SIC definition of manufacturing.

Home Workers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to provide equal employment rights for home workers.

Mr. Nicholls: Home workers who are employees already have the same employment rights as other employees.

Employment Training

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will identify the relevant costs per head for employment training trainees participating in the programme through training managers who operate nationally and locally in the voluntary sector.

Mr. Nicholls: Information on the cost per trainee in employment training for training managers which are voluntary organisations is not available.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, what are the statistics for Great Britain and each Training Agency region, for each month since October 1989 showing the results of new client adviser interviews with people who want to register as unemployed, broken down in the same categories as in his answer of 30 October 1989, *Official Report*, columns *1-2*.

Mr. Eggar: As the information requested is contained in a number of tables, I will write to the hon. Member, and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Tourism

Mr. Lee: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the latest national estimate of the numbers of *(a)* white on brown tourism signs and *(b)* tourist information centres.

Mr. Nicholls: A figure for the total number of white on brown tourist signs is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

There are currently 581 tourist information centres in England.

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many individuals are currently circulated with the following minutes of Health and Safety Commission meetings (i) commission minutes, (ii) management board minutes, (iii) chief inspectors management meeting minutes and (iv) executive minutes; if he has knowledge of any proposals to extend the current circulation; and if he will place copies of these in the Library.

Mr. Nicholls: The circulation of these minutes is an internal matter for the Health and Safety Commission and Executive.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many prosecutions have been undertaken by the Health and Safety Executive under section 6 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974; and how many of these were successful.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* From 1975-1980, HSE's factory inspectorate laid 130 informations under section 6, of which 110 resulted in convictions, while five informations were withdrawn. In the period 1981 to the end of the financial year 1987-88 (the latest year for which figures are currently available), the factory and agricultural inspectorate laid 224 informations, of which 184 were successful and 17 withdrawn. Data on section 6 prosecutions taken by other inspectorates within HSE cannot be provided without disproportionate cost.

Building Safety Regulations

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he proposes to introduce new building safety regulations to accommodate contemporary requirements in the glass and ceramic industry.

Mr. Nicholls: *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* I am informed by the chairman of the Health and Safety Commission that there are no current plans for new regulations concerning glazed structures under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

However, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment is proposing to issue a consultative paper including proposals for requirements relating to safety glazing under the Building Regulations 1985.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment who will represent his Department at the social affairs meetings of the Council of Ministers on 1 and 2 March, and 26 and 27 April; and what the agenda will be for both meetings.

Mr. Eggar: I expect to attend the informal meeting of the Labour and Social Affairs Council on 1 and 2 March. The agenda is expected to include discussions on long-term unemployment, training in eastern Europe and the social dialogue.

It is likely that a Social Security Minister will attend the informal Social Security Ministers Council on 26 and 27 April. This will depend on the agenda, which is not yet known.

Repetitive Strain Injury

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will give details of the research project into repetitive strain injury being planned by the Health and Safety Executive; when it started; when it is expected to finish; what are the objectives; and what will be the total cost;

(2) if he will place in the Library the two studies on repetitive strain injury which have just been completed for the Health and Safety Executive by the universities of Birmingham and Edinburgh.

Mr. Nicholls: The report of the study carried out by the Institute of Occupational Medicine in Edinburgh is found in the Library, Deposited Paper No. 5131. The Health and Safety Executive is still awaiting the report from the university of Birmingham. The executive is currently supporting a small study at the Institute of Occupational Medicine in Edinburgh, which follows on from the earlier project. The current study aims to produce an ergonomic guide or assessment aid which will enable non-experts to identify work activities which may lead to upper limb disorders. It started on 1 October 1989, finishes on 31 March 1990 and will cost £17,783. Negotiations are currently taking place between the Health and Safety Executive and the institute on possible support for research into upper limb disorders occurring in keyboard operators.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when the Health and Safety Executive plans to publish guidelines aimed at preventing repetitive strain injury; and what plans he has to publicise these guidelines.

Mr. Nicholls: The Health and Safety Executive plans to publish guidance entitled "Work Related Upper Limb Disorders: A Guide to Prevention" in spring this year. The guidance will be publicised by means of a press notice. The executive's inspectors and employment medical advisers will bring it to the attention of employers in the course of their duties. The HSE is also producing clinically oriented guidance for occupational health professionals and a check list and risk assessment guide aimed at employers.

"Action for Jobs"

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much of the expenditure on printed material for "Action for Jobs" in 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88 was spent through the Central Office of Information.

Mr. Eggar: All the expenditure on producing and distributing printed material for "Action for Jobs" during the periods 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88 was spent through the Central Office of Information.

Training Agency

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what arrangements the Training Agency is making to monitor the quality of the corporate plans presented by prospective training executive councils; and when he expects to place copies of these plans in the Library.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 24 January 1990]:* Corporate plans submitted by training and enterprise councils will be assessed by the national training task force under the chairmanship of Brian Wolfson. The task force's recommendation will be forwarded to me for approval.

The contract between my Department and the TEC will require that a full copy of the plan must be made available to the public at the registered office of the TEC. The contract will also provide that the TEC publishes a summary of the plan within three months of the start of the plan. I shall arrange for these summaries to be placed in the Library as they become available.

Coal Mines

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many major injuries were suffered by men in mines operated by British Coal in 1978-79 and each succeeding year;

(2) how many major injuries were suffered by men in private licensed mines in 1978-79 and each succeeding year;

(3) how many men were killed in mines operated by British Coal in 1978-79 and each succeeding year.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answers 29 January 1990]:* It is not possible separately to identify fatal and major injuries in British Coal and licensed coal mines before 1985-86 without incurring disproportionate costs. The following tables give the information that is valuable to Her Majesty's inspectorate of mines.

	Major injuries at all coal mines	*Fatal injuries at all coal mines*
1978	494	63
1979	473	46
1980	512	42

	Major injuries at all coal mines	*Fatal injuries at all coal mines*
[1]1981	815	35
1982	865	38
1983	824	30
[2]1984-85	378	22

[1] The introduction of NADO Regulations 1980 on 1 January 1981 widened the coverage of the serious injury category. Figures from 1981 are therefore not directly comparable with those for earlier years.
[2] Covering the 15 month period January 1984-March 1985.

	Major injuries at licensed coal mines	*Major injuries at British coal mines*	*Fatal injuries at British coal mines*
[1]1985-86	17	715	28
1986-87	30	952	15
1987-88	27	729	9

[1] The introduction of the RIDDOR Regulations 1985 on 1 April 1986 further widened the major injury category.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether the mines inspectorate received copies of the annual reports of the National Coal Board and the British Coal Corporation in each year since 1978-79.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* The Health and Safety Executive's mines inspectorate has received copies of these annual reports.

DEFENCE

Firearms Range, Cardiff

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of his Department's report into the condition and maintenance of the national sports centre, Cardiff indoor firearms range completed between July and December 1989 following the incident which led to the temporary closure of the range last summer.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The report on the condition of the indoor range at the national sports centre, Cardiff was provided by the Army in its capacity as safety advisor to the Sports Council of Wales. Decisions about the publication of the report and the future of the range are matters for the Sports Council of Wales.

Low Flying

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will ensure that, henceforth, information will be gathered to establish the amount of low-flying activity over Northumberland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neubert: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so.

Captain Fred Holroyd

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the Royal Military Police interviewed Captain Fred Holroyd, retired, concerning the Kincora boys' home as referred to in his reply to the Adjournment debate on 29 November 1989, *Official Report*, column 819.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* Captain Holroyd was initially interviewed by the Royal Military Police about Kincora on 22 May 1982.

Mr. Colin Wallace

Mr. Michael Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make a statement about the allegations of Mr. Colin Wallace concerning the activities of the Army and of the security service in Northern Ireland during the 1970s and about Mr. Wallace's appeal against his dismissal from the Civil Service for disclosing a classified document to an unauthorised person on 4 February 1975.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In the course of recent work in dealing with parliamentary inquiries about the case of Mr. Colin Wallace, records have been found which have brought to light new information relating to matters which arose under earlier Administrations. Ministers have not, of course, been told what advice was given to former Labour Ministers, nor what views they expressed, with the exception of decisions by the then Attorney-General. I think it right to report this new information to the House. My noble Friends Lord Carrington and Lord Whitelaw, the noble Lord, Lord Mason, and the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds South (Mr. Rees) have been consulted about the terms of this statement.

As the House knows, Mr. Wallace accepted on 15 March 1968 an appointment as an assistant information officer at the Army's Northern Ireland command headquarters (HQNI). He became an established information officer from 14 December 1971 and a senior information officer with effect from 27 September 1974, having first held this latter post on temporary promotion.

Mr. Wallace left HQNI for the Army's north-west district headquarters on 4 February 1975, having handed over his duties at HQNI on 31 January 1975. On 4 February 1975 Mr. Wallace delivered a restricted document at the home of a journalist, without any authority to do so. On 25 June 1975, Mr. Wallace was informed that he would be dismissed from the Civil Service for this action.

He appealed to the Civil Service Appeal Board, which heard his case on 17 October 1975. The CSAB concluded that there was justification for the Department's decision that Mr. Wallace's services could not be retained: but that, having regard to his previous good record of service, if Mr. Wallace wished to offer his resignation, the Department should accept this as an alternative to dismissal. Mr. Wallace resigned with effect from 31 December 1975.

Mr. Wallace claimed in his appeal that his action in passing the document to the journalist was done with the intention of safeguarding the interests of the Department, and that it was in accordance with his terms of reference and the nature of his duties. He said that those duties included unattributable briefing of journalists, which sometimes included the revelation of privileged and sensitive information; and that he often had to exercise his judgment as to how much information he could reveal.

In its statement to the CSAB, the Ministry of Defence accepted that the duties of the post, as described in the job specification set out in the relevant trawl notice, came in practice to include some kinds of unattributable briefing. Mr. Wallace claimed that the job specification given in the

trawl notice dealt only with his straightforward public relations duties and that there was also a further job specification classified secret.

MOD did not contest the evidence on Mr. Wallace's behalf, but it did not acknowledge the existence of a supplementary job specification; nor did it make a copy available, as Mr. Wallace had requested. More recently, the existence of any supplementary job specification has been denied; and indeed no evidence has been found in the documentation still available that Mr. Wallace was given any formal supplementary directive or job specification.

However, the papers which have now come to light indicate that, when the case was made to establish Mr. Wallace's post, it was proposed that its duties should include responsibilities for providing unattributable covert briefings to the press; and it was stated that the incumbent would be required to make on-the-spot decisions on matters of national security during such interviews.

It seems that, in the event, the arguments for including these responsibilities in Mr. Wallace's job description were made orally rather than in writing to those who approved the establishment of the SIO post. But presumably Mr. Wallace was told what duties he was expected to carry out; and indeed it would appear that he had already been undertaking unattributable briefing activities of this kind, which may have included disinformation. It has not since the mid 1970s been the policy to disseminate disinformation in Northern Ireland in ways designed to denigrate individuals and/or organisations or for propaganda purposes. That remains the case.

The fact remains that the disciplinary offence with which Mr. Wallace was charged was committed after he had relinquished his post at HQNI; that he sought no authority for the disclosure from his successors or from his former superiors; that he did not even report what he had done; and that if he had sought permission for his proposed action he would certainly not have received it. Whilst he attempted to argue that he had not completed the handover of his duties at HQNI at the time that he made the disclosure, it seems clear that the CSAB did not accept that argument.

Nevertheless, in the light of this re-examination of the papers it would be right to consider again the handling of Mr. Wallace's appeal to the CSAB.

Accordingly, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has invited Mr. David Calcutt QC, the Master of Magdalene College Cambridge, to make an investigation of the papers on these matters. Mr. Calcutt has agreed to do so. His terms of reference will be as follows:

"To consider, and to advise the Secretary of State for Defence, whether an injustice was done to Mr. Colin Wallace as a result of the manner in which his case was presented to the Civil Service Appeal Board when on 17 October 1975 it considered the decision of the Ministry of Defence to terminate his employment on disciplinary grounds; and, if so, to recommend whether compensation should be paid to him."

Procedures will be discussed with Mr. Calcutt to ensure that he sees all relevant papers in circumstances that protect their confidentiality. Mr. Wallace will, of course, be able to make representations to him. My Department is writing to Mr. Wallace to advise him how he should do so. Mr. Calcutt's conclusions and recommendations will be made public; but classified matters and material will not, of course, be published.

For the avoidance of doubt, I should make it clear that the re-examination of departmental papers has revealed no evidence at all that the decision to terminate Mr. Wallace's employment was taken for reasons other than his serious lack of judgment in disclosing classified information to the media without having proper authority to do so.

I should also like to take this opportunity to correct a number of errors in previous statements which have now come to notice as a result of the re-examination of departmental papers.

Some of Mr. Wallace's allegations relate to a project with the title "Clockwork Orange". Two documents have been found dating from 1975 which contain brief references to a proposed project with that title: the second of these documents was clearly based on the first. It appears that this title was given to a project contemplating the dissemination of an account of the organisation and activities of PIRA. The documents show that Mr. Wallace was involved in the project. The documents also state that the project was not cleared.

No evidence has been found that, before work on the "Clockwork Orange" project was stopped, it had been extended to cover Protestant organisations and individuals or to include Northern Irish and British politicians, as Mr. Wallace has alleged. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister stated on 6 May 1987 at column 723-732, allegations that the Security Service was engaged, during the mid and late 1970s, in a plot to destabilise Lord Wilson's Government were thoroughly investigated by the then director general, who gave her his personal assurance that these stories were false.

I should also make it clear that the new information which has come to light does not substantiate Mr. Wallace's allegations of a cover-up relating to the Kincora boys' hostel in Belfast. If, nevertheless, Mr. Wallace has allegations that he wishes to press about criminal activity or other wrongdoing in Northern Ireland, then the best way for him to deal with this is to give any information in his possession to the RUC in the first instance: if this information is classified, he should first consult the Director of Army Security.

I am writing to my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel (Mr. Marshall) and to the hon. Members for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) about some further points of detail which require correction or classification. I will place copies of my letters in the Library of the House.

I greatly regret that the fact that relevant records were not brought to Ministers' attention has in recent years caused inaccurate statements to be made to the House and in both ministerial and official correspondence. I have thought it right to correct these inaccuracies forthwith; and to settle once and for all the allegations of injustice to Mr. Wallace over his appeal to the CSAB by arranging the investigation by Mr. Calcutt.

ENERGY

Scottish Electricity

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what progress has been made in the work to expand the capacity of the interconnector allowing the purchase by English distribution companies of electricity generated in Scotland.

Mr. Baldry: I understand that the SSEB and the National Grid Company are preparing the necessary

environmental assessments and applications for consent which will be required if the interconnection capacity is to be increased. The decision to increase capacity of the interconnector will depend on successful conclusion of contracts for increased energy exchanges over the existing link.

Offshore Health and Safety

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what further proposals he has to improve the health and safety of workers on offshore oil and gas installations.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran) on Monday 13 November 1989 at columns *99-100*.

Coal Imports

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many tonnes of coal were imported into Britain 10 years, five years ago and for the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Baldry: Coal imports into the United Kingdom in these years, and for the most recent period in 1989 for which information is available, have been as follows:

Calendar year	*Million tonnes*
1980	7·3
1985	12·7
1988	12·0
[1]1989	11·2

[1] January to November.
Source: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

British Coal

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairman of British Coal; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Baldry: I meet the chairman of British Coal regularly to discuss all aspects of the coal industry.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what further proposals he has for promoting greater energy efficiency in electricity generation.

Mr. Baldry: Competition between generating companies will provide them with a major incentive to make the most efficient use of fuel in their power stations.

Severn Barrage

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the latest estimate of the cost of building the Severn barrage.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Severn tidal power group, in its report on the latest phase of studies, estimates the cost of building the Severn barrage at £8·5 billion.

The report was published last year in the Energy Paper series and copies placed in the Library of the House.

Independent Generators

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his assessment of the prospects for the establishment of independent generators after the privatisation of the electricity supply industry.

Mr. Baldry: The encouragement of competition in generation has always been one of the fundamental aims of our privatisation proposals. My Department is aware of around 20 major private generation projects in prospect, totalling some 7GW of capacity. The first of the new independent generating companies to take advantage of the opportunities offered as a result of our proposals is Lakeland Power, which last October signed a contract with the North Western electricity board.

Coal Burn

Mr. Lofthouse: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proposals he has for promoting the burning of coal in more energy-efficient ways.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Government have supported British Coal's research on new technologies such as pressurised fluid bed combustion and integrated coal gasification combined cycle plant. Further support has been given for British Coal's topping cycle concept.

My Department also encourages the more energy efficient use of coal through its promotion of combined heat and power technology and through its participation in the domestic solid fuel appliance approval scheme.

Heating Bills

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what further proposals he has to assist low-income households with their heating bills.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Social Security Bill, which received its second reading on 22 January, provides powers for my right hon. Friend to make grants towards the cost of measures to improve energy efficiency in low- income households. My Department will be issuing a consultation document on the proposed grant scheme shortly.

French Nuclear Reactors

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will seek to obtain from the Government of France full details of recent safety assessments of nuclear reactors within 100 miles of the British coast; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) on 25 January at column *814*.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a further statement on progress in the development of economic renewable energy resources.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Government continue to support a major research and development programme aimed at developing commercially viable and environmentally acceptable renewable energy technologies to contribute to future energy supply.

Nuclear Energy

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if his Department will be represented at the conference on the nuclear fuel cycle 1990 to be held in Nashville, United States of America between 25 and 28 March.

Mr. Baldry: There are at present no plans for my Department to be represented at this conference.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if his Department will be represented at the seminar on decommissioning of nuclear plants to be held in London on 19 and 20 March.

Mr. Baldry: No.

Falkland Islands

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy, *Official Report*, 18 December, column *46*, he will make it his policy to request *(a)* United Kingdom NIREX Ltd. and *(b)* the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority to conduct feasibility studies to assess the suitability of the Falkland Islands geology for nuclear waste disposal.

Mr. Baldry: No.

Gas Exploration (South Yorkshire)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list by location, any sites in south Yorkshire due for exploratory drilling for gas.

Mr. Peter Morrison: There are 12 current petroleum licences (nine exploration and three production) in south Yorkshire. All proposals to drill are subject to specific approval. No such proposals have been received from current licensees although it is possible that they will wish to drill before licences expire.

Nuclear Powers (Thesis)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what use was made by his departmental library of the thesis, "Nuclear Powers—An Assessment of Nuclear Decision Making, 1932-1979, with Special Reference to the Anglo-American Atomic Relationship", to which he made reference in his reply of 13 February 1989, *Official Report*, column *41*.

Mr. Wakeham: The librarian of my Department borrowed a copy of the thesis to assess whether a copy should be purchased should sufficient demand arise. No request has been received for this thesis to date.

Electricity Supply Industry

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what advice his Department has given to the electricity supply industry as to the method of flue gas desulphurisation;

(2) what consideration his Department has given to the comparative environmental costs of *(a)* the regenerative method and *(b)* the limestone-gypsum method of flue gas desulphurisation.

Mr. Baldry: The choice of FGD process is a matter for the industry.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received as to the method of flue gas desulphurisation that will be fitted to power stations.

Mr. Baldry: A few representations were received some time ago favouring the regenerative FGD process, but none has been received recently. The choice of FGD process is a matter for the industry.

Creches

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list by location, where creche facilities are provided for working mothers employed in his Department; and if they have to make any payment for this service.

Mr. Wakeham: My Department does not provide creche facilities for working mothers.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy who will represent his Department at the EC Council of Energy Ministers meeting on 21 May; and what the agenda will be.

Mr. Wakeham: The United Kingdom representative at the Energy Council will be decided on nearer the time. The agenda for the Council will not be published until shortly before the Council; but we expect discussion to cover the Commission's four internal energy market proposals and other issues, including possibly energy and the environment.

Nuclear Power

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department will be represented at the seminar on nuclear power, Planning for Emergencies, to be held in Manchester on 6 March.

Mr. Baldry: I have been asked to reply. It is not proposed that representatives from either my Department of the Home Office will attend this seminar.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Ambulance Dispute

Mr. Denis Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many inquests have been held during the course of the ambulance dispute into deaths which may have been accelerated by reason of delay in the response of the ambulance service or by the attendance of ambulances not carrying adequate resuscitation or other necessary equipment.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No information is collected centrally from which any such cases could be identified.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Denis Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department will take steps to remind doctors and members of the public of their lawful duty to report cases to the appropriate coroner for his investigation when they have reason to believe that the

death of any person has been aggravated or accelerated by reason of delayed response from the ambulance service or the attendance of an ambulance not carrying adequate equipment for the resuscitation or emergency treatment of patients.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There is an obligation at common law to report to the coroner any violent or unnatural death or sudden death, the cause of which is unknown. There is at present no difference between the legal duty of doctors and that of other members of the public. Since we have no evidence that the obligation is being neglected, we see no need for special steps to be taken to remind members of the public about it.

Kurds

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of Kurdish asylum seekers from Turkey who have *(a)* arrived in the United Kingdom since January 1989, been *(b)* granted political asylum, *(c)* returned to Turkey, *(d)* given exceptional leave to remain and *(e)* held in detention; and if he will make a statement on his policy towards Kurdish asylum seekers.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Immigration statistics do not record ethnic origins of asylum seekers. Since January 1989, some 3,900 Turkish nationals have applied for asylum on arrival: 164 have been granted asylum; 44 have been removed to Turkey; 249 have left the United Kingdom of their own accord before their examination was completed; 611 have been given exceptional leave to enter. On 29 January, there were three Turkish asylum seekers in detention.

The Government are committed to their obligations under the 1951 United Nations convention on refugees. All asylum applications are considered on their individual merits and where the applicant is found to have a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, he or she will be granted refugee status.

Prevention of Terrorism Act

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state the number of people *(a)* stopped and questioned under the Prevention of Terrorism Act for each month since January 1989, *(b)* the number held under an order issued by him, *(c)* the number who subsequently received exclusion orders and *(d)* the number charged with other offences.

Mr. Waddington: Information on the operation of the prevention of terrorism legislation is compiled quarterly and published in Home Office statistical bulletins. Issue 36/89 contains information up to the third quarter of 1989. The next bulletin, covering the whole of 1989, will be published shortly. Home Office statistical bulletins are held in the Library.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions since their release from prison in October 1989, Paul Hill and Gerard Conlon have been questioned under the Prevention of Terrorism Act; and for what length of time they were held.

Mr. Waddington: No central record is kept of examinations under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 which last one hour or less. Neither Mr. Hill nor Mr. Conlon has been examined for more than one hour or detained under the 1989 Act.

Guildford Four

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to receive the report from Sir John May into the conviction of the Guildford Four.

Mr. John Patten: Sir John May has not yet indicated when he expects to be able to produce his report.

Obscene Publications

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of prosecutions which have taken place under the Obscene Publications Act 1959 for each of the past five years and how many resulted in convictions.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is given in the table. Data for 1989 will not be available until autumn 1990.

Defendants proceeded against and found guilty of offences under the Obscene Publications Act 1959
England and Wales

Year	*Total proceeded against*	*Total found guilty*
1984	583	429
1985	275	226
1986	129	126
1987	121	93
1988	158	130

Magistrates Courts Scrutiny

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has yet reached any conclusions on the recommendations in the magistrates courts scrutiny relating to services provided by the police for these courts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: The scrutiny report recommended that the police should not be regarded as responsible for maintaining order or general security duties in magistrates courts on a routine basis. In the light of the consultations which have taken place with interested bodies on this matter, I accept this conclusion. I am issuing guidelines intended to assist local discussion between the police and the magistrates courts about the appropriate level of police presence in individual cases.

The guidelines (a copy of which is being placed in the Library) make it clear that, while the police have a responsibility, as part of their general duties, to protect magistrates and courts staff where the police consider that there are reasonable grounds for believing that they may be at risk, the courts should reduce these risks so far as possible and should consider the provision of appropriate physical security measures to that end. I am considering the case for clarifying the legal powers available to magistrates courts and their staff to ensure the uninterrupted administration of justice.

The scrutiny report also recommended that steps should be taken to improve the management of services now routinely provided by the police for the courts, including the service of summonses, the execution of

warrants and the custody of prisoners at court. As to the first two services, I am asking magistrates courts committees, in consultation with their paying authorities and the relevant police authorities, to undertake an assessment of the practical consequences of transferring responsibility for routine work from the police to the courts service. We have already made provision in public expenditure for the appointment of a substantial additional number of court fine enforcement staff and have asked magistrates courts to consider the greater use of bailiffs to enforce fines.

In the light of legal advice about charges to magistrates courts committees for the execution of warrants by the police, I propose, with effect from 1 April, to disregard any such charges for the purpose of paying specific grant to local authorities. I shall be consulting the relevant local authority associations about the effect of this decision. I also propose to disregard any such charges for the service of summonses by the Metropolitan police with effect from the same date and with effect from 1 April 1991 in the case of other police forces in England and Wales, subject to consultation with the local authority associations.

I am still considering the question of responsibility for the gaolering services.

Mr. Colin Wallace

Mr. Michael Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has completed his consideration of the book entitled "Who Framed Colin Wallace" by Paul Foot; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: I have carefully examined the arguments put forward by Mr. Foot in his book and am satisfied that there is no new evidence or other consideration of substance which casts doubt on the safety of Mr. Colin Wallace's conviction for manslaughter. Before coming to a final decision on this case, I examined carefully the matters referred to in a statement today by my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Mr. Hamilton), and I am satisfied that they are unconnected with the case and in no way cast doubt upon the safety of the conviction. I have placed in the Libraries of both Houses a memorandum which sets out in greater detail the reasons why I have reached this conclusion.

Creches

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list by location where creche facilities are provided for working mothers employed in his Department; and if they have to make any payment for this service.

Mr. Waddington: In addition to its support for Cabinet Office initiatives towards the provision of child care in the Civil Service and to the secondment of an officer to the Midland bank nursery project, the Home Office is planning to provide, for payment, creche facilities for its employees in Croydon and Bootle shortly, and is considering the possibility of making similar provision in London.

Inquests

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average lapse of time between the occurrence of a sudden death and the date of the inquest.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I regret that this information is not collected centrally. I understand that coroners endeavour to hold inquests as soon as practicable following the death, but sometimes delays are experienced—for example, because of the need to wait for witnesses or other evidence.

Mrs. Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the procedure for determining the date of an inquest.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: This is a matter for the coroner to decide.

Greyhound Race Courses

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many greyhound race courses are owned by companies involved in the business of off-course bookmaking; and which of these greyhound race courses supply betting services to the off-course betting shops in the same ownership.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Companies have no obligation to inform the Home Office of their ownership of greyhound tracks. Certain information of the character of that requested is, however, recorded in "Grand Metropolitan plc and William Hill Organisation Ltd. A report on the merger situation" (Cm. 776), by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission which was published in August last year and a copy of which is in the Library.

That information relates to the supply of daytime greyhound racing meetings by greyhound track promoters under annual contract to Bookmaker Afternoon Greyhound Services Ltd. (BAGS). I understand that, following the subsequent acquisition of William Hill by Brent Walker plc of the 10 greyhound tracks which at present have contracts with BAGS, five are owned and operated by companies which own off-course bookmaking companies. Coverage of meetings at all 10 tracks is available, via Satellite Information Services, to licensed betting offices in general.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Retirement Pensions

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security by what percentage *(a)* the basic retirement pension and *(b)* prices increased between April 1979 and 1990.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The latest available information shows that, between April 1979 and April 1989, the basic retirement pension rose by 123·6 per cent., whilst prices rose by 110·5 per cent. This represents an increase of 6·2 per cent. in the real value of the retirement pension over the period.

Nursing and Residential Homes

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of evidence submitted to his Department on the cost of providing care in voluntary and private nursing homes and the level of income support payable to residents in residential and nursing homes.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The amount of income support payable to people in residential care and nursing homes is

subject to national limits and is reviewed every year. We take account of a variety of evidence, including detailed and differing representations from interested organisations and individuals. The evidence is considered along with our own information.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the costs of keeping an aged person in *(a)* a nursing home and *(b)* in residential care for a year.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I regret that the figures are not available in the form requested. The information available for May 1989 shows that the estimated total number of people in nursing homes in receipt of income support was 56,000 at an annual cost of £446 million. This gives an estimated average annual expenditure figure on income support of £8,000 per claimant. The estimated total number of people in residential care homes in receipt of income support was 119,000 at an annual cost of £658 million. This gives an estimated average annual expenditure figure on income support of £5,500 per claimant.

These figures do not include payment of other benefits such as retirement pension and attendance allowance which are paid depending on the individual's circumstances in addition to income support.

Repetitive Strain Injury

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he intends to extend the categories of repetitive strain injuries which are recognised by his Department as prescribed workplace injuries.

Mr. Scott: Once both of the studies on repetitive strain injury commissioned by the Health and Safety Executive from the universities of Edinburgh and of Birmingham are available, the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council will consider whether the research evidence might justify further detailed consideration of occupational repetitive strain injuries.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what advice he has received on the types of industrial tasks which are most likely to result in workers suffering from repetitive strain injury; and in which industries there are likely to be significant numbers of sufferers.

Mr. Scott: A position paper adopted by the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council in September 1986 identified repetitive strain injury as being complained of by word processor operators, assembly line workers and workers in the print, textile and furniture industries.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what information he has on the incidence of repetitive strain injury in the pottery industry;

(2) what proportion of the known sufferers from repetitive strain injury are women.

Mr. Scott: I regret that this information is not available.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information he has on the trend of repetitive strain injury as measured by the number of claims for compensation.

Mr. Scott: Information on the number of prescribed diseases A4 and A8 diagnosed in connection with claims for industrial injuries benefits in 1985, 1986 and 1987 is provided on page 22 of the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council periodic report—January 1990 (copies are available in the Library). For reasons of sample size, this information is unlikely to provide a reliable indication of trends.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which forms of repetitive strain injury are recognised by his Department as prescribed workplace injuries.

Mr. Scott: Two repetitive strain injuries are listed in the schedule of prescribed industrial diseases:

Prescribed Disease A4: Cramp of the hand or forearm due to repetitive movements.

Prescribed Disease A8: Traumatic inflammation of the tendons of the hand or forearm or of the associated tendon sheaths. Benefit can also be paid for carpal syndrome if it occurs as a result of prescribed disease A8.

Invalidity Pension

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many people will be affected by the abolition of earnings-related additions to invalidity pension;

(2) how much money will be saved in the first year by the abolition of earnings-related additions to invalidity pension.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on 19 January at columns *484-85*.

Industrial Benefit

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many people will be affected by the abolition of reduced earnings allowances in the industrial benefit scheme;

(2) how much money will be saved in the first year by the abolition of reduced earnings allowances in the industrial benefit scheme.

Mr. Scott: An estimated 14,400 new claimants a year will be affected by the abolition of reduced earnings allowance, which will result in a reduction in expenditure of about £1 million in 1990-91.

Board-and-lodging Allowance

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what regulations govern the administration and use of the pocket money element in the board-and-lodging allowance;

(2) what steps his Department has taken to ensure the pocket money allowance in the board-and-lodging allowance is not used to top up fees paid to private residential establishments.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Applicable amounts payable for persons in independent residential care and nursing homes are prescribed by the Income Support (General) Regulations 1987, as amended. They include an amount in respect of personal expenses which is at present £10·05 each week. The regulations do not prescribe how that allowance is to be used, as this is a matter for the claimant.

Departmental Cash Limits

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether there have been any changes to the cash limit or running costs limit of his Department for 1989-90.

Mr. Scott: The cash limit for class XV, vote 7 will be reduced by £426,000 from £1,595,118,000 to £1,594,692,000, and the running costs limit for the Department by £170,000 from £1,736,531,000 to £1,736,361,000. These reductions reflect the following changes.

The transfer of £25,000 from the Cabinet Office: Office of the Minister for the Civil Service (class XX, vote 1) is in respect of the challenge funding scheme for senior management development training, as announced by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Privy Council Office. This increase in running costs is offset by the transfer of £195,000 to the Department of Health and Social Security (Northern Ireland) for the running costs of the Belfast social security centre. There will be a corresponding increase on Department of Health and Social Security (Northern Ireland) vote 3, administration and miscellaneous services.

An increase of £244,000 in the agency payment to Department of Employment to meet an increase in the costs of administering the unemployment benefit service. A corresponding amount will be appropriated in aid of class VII, vote 2. This increase in current expenditure will be offset by the transfer of £500,000 to the Department of Health and Social Security (Northern Ireland), in respect of capital improvements to the store for paid orders at Lisahally. There will be a corresponding increase on Department of Health and Social Security (Northern Ireland) vote 3, administration and miscellaneous services.

Consultants

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many studies or reports have been commissioned from commercial consultants since June 1987; what has been the cost; what proportion of the studies or reports has been put out to tender; what is the value of those tendered; what proportion of the studies or reports has been commissioned from Arthur Andersen; and what is the value of those commissioned from Arthur Andersen.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* The number of studies or reports commissioned from commercial consultants by the Department since June 1987 is 90, at a total cost of £3,529,844. The proportion of the studies put out to tender was 33 per cent. and their value was £1,066,482. The proportion of the studies or reports commissioned from Arthur Andersen was 8·9 per cent., and their value was £976,316.

Housing Benefit

Mr Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which local authorities have received and processed the most applications for transitional payments as a percentage of housing benefit payments they make.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 14 December 1989]:* Applications for housing benefit transitional payments were received and processed at the transitional payments unit in Glasgow. The 20 local authority areas from which the largest number of applications were received expressed as a percentage of estimated housing benefit caseload is as follows:

	Per cent.
Monklands	41
Hamilton	35
East Kilbride	33
Motherwell	32
Glasgow	32
Waltham Forest	31
Inverclyde	30
South Tyneside	30
East Lothian	28
Ipswich	28
East Staffordshire	28
Bromsgrove	25
City of London	25
Cumbernauld	25
Irvine (DC)	25
Daventry	25
Cumnock and Doon	24
Wyc[illegible]von	23
Warrington	23
Newham	22

Source:

1. Estimate of housing benefit caseload using local authorities management information system returns for 1988-89.
2. Transitional payments unit statistical data.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Queen's Consent

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council which Minister is responsible for reviewing the operation of the system of signifying or withholding Queen's Consent in relation to particular Bills and of advice relating to the use of the Royal Prerogative.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Requests to Her Majesty for the grant of her consent to either House debating a Public Bill affecting her interest or prerogative are put forward by the Minister responsible for the subject to which the Bill relates. Amendment of the present arrangements would require a decision of Parliament. There is, of course, at present no question of a review of the need for consent. If the question arose, the matter of which Minister would be responsible for promoting such a proposal would be one for the Government of the day to decide.

Disabled People (Parking)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Lord President of the Council whether permission was given by the Services Committee to British Telecom engineers on 15 January, for their equipment to be placed in the parking area reserved for disabled drivers at Norman Shaw North building; and if he will take steps to ensure that there is no recurrence of this in the future.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: British Telecom's London network organisation should not have placed this equipment in the parking area reserved for disabled drivers in the area of the Norman Shaw buildings earlier this month. Steps have been taken to ensure that the correct procedures are adhered to in future.

Copying Machines

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Lord President of the Council why all but one of the copying machines in Norman Shaw North are switched off at night while the House is sitting and hon. Members are still working; and if he will seek to rectify this position.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The copying machine on the ground floor of Norman Shaw North is left on until the rising of the House, on sitting Mondays to Thursdays. All the remainder are switched off at 9 pm, in accordance with the guidance for the use of these machines issued by the Services Committee which takes account of fire regulations and supervision requirements. If the hon. Member wishes to suggest changes to the hours of operation of copying machines, he should in the first instance raise the matter with the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee.

PRIME MINISTER

Middle East

Q47. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Prime Minister what steps she has taken to help free British hostages in the middle east; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The plight of the British hostages in Lebanon is high among our concerns. We have raised the matter with a wide range of Governments and organisations who might have influence on the hostage holders. Her Majesty's ambassador in Beirut, in a difficult and dangerous environment, follows up every lead. We will continue to make every possible effort on behalf of the hostages.

Jobs

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister if she will raise at the next meeting of the European Council the report commissioned by the EEC on the impact of the 1992 proposals on jobs in the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I am always interested in any developments which affect jobs in the United Kingdom and will not hesitate to discuss them at the European Council, if this is appropriate.

The single European market is a major opportunity for the United Kingdom. The impact on employment in the United Kingdom depends crucially on the responses of United Kingdom firms to this opportunity.

Engagements

Mr. Cox: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 30 January.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 30 January.

Mr. John P. Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 30 January.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 30 January.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Sir Maurice Oldfield

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what authorisations have been sought from Her Majesty's Government by potential authors of a biography of the late Sir Maurice Oldfield; and what Her Majesty's Government's response has been.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* No such authorisation has been sought.

HEALTH

Product Licences

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been paid to the Medicines Control Agency in fees for product licences in 1987, 1988 and 1989; and how many applications for which fees have been paid remain outstanding.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Product licence application fees collected for fees years were

	£
1986-87	354,143
1987-88	252,495
1988-89	738,425

The total number of outstanding product licence applications as at 31 December 1989 was as follows:

	Number
Product Licences	1,867
Product Licences (Parallel Imports)	991

No information is available on the numbers of applications outstanding for which fees have been paid but the application fee becomes due at the time the application is made.

Abortions

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if Bourn hall, Bourn, Cambridge has a licence to perform abortions under the Abortion Act 1967.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent guidance he has issued on the

application of the Abortion Act 1967 in those circumstances in which medical personnel fit intra-uterine devices with the intention of causing pregnancies to abort during their early hours; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The handbook on contraceptive practice, a copy of which is available in the Library, last published in 1984 and shortly to be reissued, describes the mode of action of post-coital contraceptives, including intra-uterine devices. The Department's policy on these matters is based on advice given to the Department about the legal position under the Abortion Act 1967; the interpretation of the law in any particular case is, of course, a matter for the courts.

Assessment Procedures

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will consult with voluntary organisations in drawing up his code of guidance to local authorities on the proposed assessment procedures outlined in "Caring for People";

(2) if, in his code of guidance to local authorities on the proposed assessment procedures outlined in "Caring for People" he will direct local authorities to consult local voluntary organisations and representatives of disabled people and carers when determining their own assessment procedures.

(3) if, in his code of guidance to local authorities on the proposed assessment procedures outlined in "Caring for People" he will advise that carers should have a right to ask for an assessment of their needs;

(4) whether he will involve voluntary organisations experienced in the field in his discussions on the training needs of those involved in the proposed assessment procedures outlined in "Caring for People".

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department has in hand a programme to develop guidance for local authorities. Voluntary and professional organisations will be consulted during the preparation of this guidance. In the course of preparing the guidance we shall be considering what advice to give authorities on local consultation and the training needs of those carrying out assessments. Under our community care proposals, carers will be able to ask that their own care needs should be considered as well as those of the person they are caring for.

Insurance

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will issue advice to local authorities on the insurance implications for voluntary organisations and bodies providing services involving lifting and bathing in poorly equipped homes.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Problems involving insurance in such situations have not been brought to our attention. Consequently, we have no plans at present to issue guidance to local authorities on this subject.

Private Hospitals

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the private hospitals in England and Wales and the amount of financial assistance they receive from public funds.

Mr. Freeman: Health authorities have power to award grants or loans to voluntary and charitable organisations, but the extent to which they do so is for local decision and information is not collected centrally. Information for Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Cancer Screening

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by regional health authority what health education is offered to schools explaining the call/recall system of cervical cytology screening.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information by regional health authority is not held centrally. I understand that a health education task group under the auspices of the National Curriculum Council is considering the content of health education in schools.

AIDS

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on guidance issued by the United States Food and Drugs Administration to doctors on the recommended dosage of the anti-AIDS drug Retrovir (AZT); and whether he has any plans to issue guidance to doctors in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We are aware of reports indicating that the United States Food and Drug Administration has recently announced labelling changes for Retrovir involving a lowering of the recommended daily dose approved for administration in that country. Any changes to the licensed indication of drugs marketed in the United Kingdom must be approved by the licensing authority on grounds of safety, quality and efficacy seeking, where necessary, the advice of the Committee on Safety of Medicines. Doctors already have extensive information on the currently licensed product from a wide variety of sources, and we have no plans at present to issue further guidance.

Carers

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he is putting forward in respect of the control and monitoring by his Department of private sector providers of care.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Local authorities will provide an arms length inspection and monitoring unit for a variety of provision, whether in the public or private sector. Social service departments will also through their contracts with providers, specify monitoring mechanisms. The Department will examine community care plans and monitor progress towards meeting service objectives. Health authorities will continue to have responsibility for registration and inspection of private nursing home care.

Creches

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by location, where creche facilities are provided for working mothers employed in his Department; and if they have to make any payment for this service.

Mr. Freeman: No nursery facilities are at present provided for parents employed in the Department. We are undertaking a feasibility study into the provision of such

facilities, and we are contributing to a study into interdepartmental provision being co-ordinated by the office of the Minister for the Civil Service. In addition we run holiday play schemes financed by parental and departmental contributions for children aged between five and 11 years.

NHS Travel Cost Scheme

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the cost of the National Health Service travel cost scheme in each of the last three years; and what steps he will take to increase public knowledge and take-up.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Summarised accounts of health authorities in England show the following expenditure, for the last three years, in respect of fares paid to patients travelling to and from hospital for NHS treatment:

Year	*£ million*
1986-87	3·037
1987-88	3·263
1988-89	3·265

These figures do not indicate NHS administration costs. We are currently considering measures to increase public awareness of the hospital travel costs scheme.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who will represent his Department at the EC's Council of Health Ministers meeting on 19 April; and what the agenda will be.

Mr. Freeman: No firm date has yet been fixed for the EC Council of Health Ministers meeting. It is likely that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, Lady Hooper, who has responsibility for international health matters, will attend.

The agenda for the meeting will be decided by the Irish presidency in cooperation with the European Commission. Details of the items to be raised have not yet been notified to us.

Prescriptions

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department intends to ask family practitioner committees to review the prescribing performances of those doctors who consistently under-prescribe medicines for their patients, compared to the average, in the same way as doctors who are deemed to be over-prescribing will be subject to peer review.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is our intention that family practitioner committees, which will have medically qualified advisers on prescribing, should consider the possibility of under-prescribing which would be injurious to patients and raise any such cases with the practice concerned.

Drugs

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department is proposing to publish a further working paper on the implementation of indicative drug budgets.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We propose to issue a further working paper on the implementation of indicative drug budgets within the next few weeks.

Slimming Aids

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has concerning the link between slimming aids and anorexia and bulimia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The Department knows of no research which directly links slimming aids to anorexia or bulimia.

Haemophiliacs

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health why the haemophiliac sufferers contaminated with the HIV virus have not yet received the capital sum promised them via the Macfarlane Trust; and when he expects the payments to be made.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley [*pursuant to her reply*, 26 January 1990, *c. 921*]: The arrangements for paying the ex-gratia sums have now been completed. In co-operation with the trustees of the Macfarlane Trust, a new discretionary trust called the Macfarlane (Special Payments) Trust has been set up to administer the payments. It is expected that payments will begin tomorrow.

Dennis and Cole Families

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will institute an inquiry into the arbitrary removal of the Dennis family from a doctor's list in the Old Swan health centre and the Cole family from a doctor's list in the Edge Hill health centre, both in Broadgreen, Liverpool; if he will ascertain the reasons for these removals; what redress is available to the families; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* The administration of the contract of service of general medical practitioners is a matter for the local family practitioner committee, in this case the Liverpool FPC, Refuge Assurance house, Lord street, Liverpool L2 1UT. It is, however, permissible for a practitioner to remove patients from his or her list and reasons do not have to be given. Similarly, patients may leave the list of a practitioner without giving reasons.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State made clear on 23 January at columns *728-29*, we should view with concern any evidence that doctors were acting unreasonably or under a mistaken interpretation of the terms of the new contract.

If any family are unable to find a doctor of their choice, they should ask the FPC (which has a duty so to do) to allocate them to a doctor's list.

TRANSPORT

Air Accidents

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the criteria used by the chief inspector of air accidents in determining whether or not an investigation into an incident or accident shall be carried out.

Mr. McLoughlin: The air accidents investigation branch's main task is to investigate reportable accidents, which are those involving serious injury or significant aircraft damage. Each reportable accident is inquired into by means of a formal investigation, a field investigation, or a form to the pilot or operator with follow up inquiries as appropriate.

Incidents, including air misses, are reportable to the Civil Aviation Authority and dealt with by it. However, the chief inspector of air accidents has the power to investigate incidents and does investigate serious incidents to public transport aircraft from time to time. A serious incident is defined as one which good fortune narrowly prevented from being a major accident.

Occurrence Report

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were the contents of the mandatory occurrence report filed with the Civil Aviation Authority by the captain of a British Midland Airways aircraft en route from London to Belfast on Saturday 11 November 1989.

Mr. McLoughlin: The pilot reported that at 2028 GMT and whilst descending on airway blue 3 into Belfast following a scheduled flight from Heathrow, as the aircraft passed through 11,200 feet at a position three nautical miles east of Kirkistown, the crew witnessed a ball of light pass overhead the aircraft heading due west. It descended to a position on the port beam where it appeared to burst into a cascade of white and blue magnesium lights. At the time, the aircraft was between two layers of stratus cloud less than 3,000 feet apart. Another aircraft in the vicinity witnessed the light, and it was reported to Belfast air traffic control.

I refer the hon. Member to my answer of 18 December 1989 to his earlier question on this matter at column 3.

Rescue Operations (Liverpool Airport)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has as to the arrangements that exist at Liverpool airport for conducting rescue operations in the event of an aircraft ditching in the Mersey at high tide.

Mr. McLoughlin: This is a matter for the Civil Aviation Authority, which has the statutory responsibility for the licensing of Liverpool airport.

I have drawn the hon. Member's question to the attention of the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority and will ask him to write to the hon. Member direct.

Learner Drivers

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any information on the number of accidents involving a newly qualified driver supervising a learner driver.

Mr. Atkins: The police records of accidents, on which national statistics are based, do not include information on the qualifications of supervising drivers. However, I have received a number of letters about accidents which have occurred in these circumstances.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he has received any representations from the motoring organisations regarding the supervision of learner drivers by recently qualified drivers; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make a statement on the progress of his plans to introduce a minimum experience qualification for newly qualified drivers who wish to supervise learner drivers.

Mr. Atkins: Our consultation paper issued on 20 December last year at column 278 invited comments by 28 February. One motoring organisation is among those who have so far written. I shall develop the proposals in the light of all the comments received.

RAF Finningley

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list *(a)* by date, *(b)* by type of aircraft and *(c)* by reason all civil aircraft that have had to divert to Royal Air Force Finningley during the last 10 years.

Mr. McLoughlin: RAF Finningley, being a military airfield, is not nominated as a diversion airfield for civil commercial air traffic required to nominate such a diversion airfield in the flight plan. Records are not available prior to 1985 but since that date only one aircraft has made a diversion and emergency landing at RAF Finningley. This occurred on Sunday, 27 November 1988, when an American-registered private microlight aircraft, call sign N85BZ, experienced an engine malfunction. Rather than continue with the flight, the pilot elected to land at Finningley, which was the nearest airfield available.

Near Misses

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his reply of 16 January to the hon. Member for Don Valley, *Official Report*, column *153*, if he will list the locations where the three air misses occurred.

Mr. McLoughlin: The incident on 2 November 1986 involving a civilian glider and a civilian Cessna 172 occurred at a height of 1,500 ft, 10 miles south-south-west of Doncaster. The incident involving an RAF Buccaneer and a civilian Cessna 152 on 1 July 1987 occurred at a height of 2,000 ft, four miles east of Mansfield.

The incident on 27 January 1988 involving an RAF Tornado and a civilian Cessna 152 occurred at a height of 800 ft, close to Netherthorpe aerodrome.

British Rail

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what amounts were deducted from his payments to the British Railways Board in the previous year 1988-89 in respect of retrospective charges made by him against payments to it in earlier years; on what basis the deductions were made; and in what manner he publicised them.

Mr. Portillo: A recovery of £64·5 million was made from PSO grant in 1988-89 for overpayments made in 1986-87 and in 1987-88. In both years grant was paid subject to a final adjustment once a review by my Department and British Rail of cost allocation between railway sectors was completed. British Rail made a number of accounting changes in 1988-89 and the Department recovered grant overpaid in 1986-87 and 1987-88 in accordance with the conditions of the grant settlements for those years. British Rail's annual report

and accounts for 1988-89, published on 5 July 1989, reported the outcome. Copies were placed in the Library of the House.

Mersey Travel

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will be in a position to reply to Mersey Travel's case for Government assistance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The case is being given consideration. A decision will be made as soon as possible.

Mark Woodward

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the messages received by Milford Haven coastguard and passed on to Swansea coastguard relating to the 999 call by Mr. Kevin Richards reporting an incident relating to Mark Woodward who was drowned on 16 August 1989 in Rappanee cove, Ilfracombe.

Mr. McLoughlin: The call received by Milford Haven coastguard, relating to this incident, and the action taken by it, was listed in my reply of 27 November 1989, at column 82, final paragraph.

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a transcript of the coastguard tape relating to the drowning on 16 August 1989 of Mark Woodward.

Mr. McLoughlin: The tapes referred to are not an official record, but extracts taken from the multi-track tapes for ease of use at the coroner's inquest. The tapes were heard by the Woodward family on Friday 26 January, following which they were made public, and available to anyone who wishes to hear them. It should be emphasised that the tapes are only extracts, do not contain associated conversations and cannot be linked to time. However a copy will be placed in the Library as soon as a transcription has been made.

Nuclear Convoys (Accidents)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies have been made of the problems of evacuating civilians in the event of a nuclear convoy accident in-transit through south Yorkshire.

Mr. Atkins: The preparation of evacuation plans is the responsibility of local authorities.

Merchant Shipping

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the merchant ships flying foreign flags and carrying British personnel which have been lost in the past five years; and if he will report on the progress of inquiries into the causes of loss by the authorities of the countries in which the vessels were, in each case, registered.

Mr. McLoughlin: Merchant ships flying foreign flags are the responsibility of the flag state. No records are available in the United Kingdom showing which foreign ships carry British personnel.

A57, Warrington

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received regarding speed limits on the A57 Liverpool road/Sankey way in Warrington; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Cheshire county council is the highway authority for the A57 in Warrington but would need my right hon. Friend's consent to a speed limit. The north-west regional office advised the council in November that a 50 mph limit for Liverpool road/Sankey way would not be justified by our nationally applied criteria and practice.

Greater Manchester Relief Road

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport with which organisations his Department has had consultations regarding *(a)* section 2 M56 to M62, and *(b)* section 3 M62 to M66 of the Greater Manchester western and northern relief road.

Mr. Atkins: No consultations have yet been carried out.

South Wales-Shrewsbury Line

Sir John Stradling Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will discuss with the chairman of British Rail the provision of services on the south Wales-Shrewsbury line.

Mr. Portillo: The Government set quality of service objectives for provincial sector services in July 1989. We shall monitor them closely and discuss any problems with the board.

Lighthouses

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many lighthouses there are around the United Kingdom, detailing the number with resident keepers and the number electronically controlled from land bases; and when he expects all lighthouses to be radio-controlled from land bases.

Mr. McLoughlin: The general lighthouse authorities operate 289 lighthouses around the United Kingdom. Of these, 58 are manned; 73 are monitored from other bases; and 158 are neither manned nor monitored from other bases. The automation of the remaining manned lighthouses, except those designed as area control stations, is planned to be complete by 1998; but a substantial number will remain neither manned nor monitored from other bases. I have no information on lighthouses operated by local lighthouse authorities.

Helicopter Crash, Eastwood

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking following the helicopter crash at Eastwood Toll; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The accident is the subject of an investigation by the Department of Transport's air accidents investigation branch. A team of specialists in both engineering and operations arrived at the site a few hours after the accident and began work immediately. The wreckage has subsequently been removed to the AAIB's base at Farnborough, where work is continuing.

M66 (Tree Pruning)

Mr. Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to undertake the pruning of the trees on the M66 at Ramsbottom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The planned work was completed on 10 October.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport who will represent his Department at the EC Council of Transport Ministers meetings on 29 March and 14 to 16 June; and what will be the agenda for both meetings.

Mr. Portillo: It is the intention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to attend the Transport Councils in March and June.

Subjects likely to be discussed include the international carriage of goods by road, air transport liberalisation, cabotage, transport infrastructure, and maritime relations with Third countries.

HGVs (Advertising)

Mr. Oakes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what are his plans for new regulations regarding the use of reflective material for advertising on the rear of heavy goods vehicles;

(2) which colours he intends to permit for advertising in reflective material on the rear of heavy goods vehicles; and which he intends to prohibit.

Mr. Atkins: We have no plans to change the general regulations governing the colour of reflective material fitted to vehicles.

Generally, the only colour of reflective material which may be fitted to the rear of a vehicle is red.

There is no regulation to prohibit the use of red reflective material fitted to the rear of a heavy goods vehicle for advertising purposes.

East London Assessment Studies

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the details of the alignment of the new roads and widened roads envisaged in the east London assessment studies.

Mr. Atkins: More detailed alignments will be produced only if decisions are taken to proceed further with any scheme following consideration of the comments received on the consultants' suggested options.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning the time allowed for consultation under stage 2 of the east London assessment studies.

Mr. Atkins: I have received a number of representations. Opinions are divided between those who request more time and those who wish decisions to be reached as soon as possible.

Traffic Commissioner

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to appoint the traffic commissioner outlined in his announcement on "Traffic in London," on 14 December 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: A decision on the appointment of a London traffic director will be taken in the light of consultation on the "Traffic in London" discussion document. Comments on the initiatives in the document have been requested by 28 February 1990.

Contracts

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all those contracts let by his Department from 1 November 1989 to date and these contracts which his Department hopes to let by the end of March.

Mr. Atkins: The following contracts worth more than £1 million have been awarded since 1 November 1989:

£ million

Scheme and successful tenderer	*Contract price*
A1/M1 link contract 1, Catthorpe interchange, Leicestershire Tarmac Construction Limited	3·1
A1/M1 link contract 5s, Northamptonshire Balfour Beatty	30·7
A1/M1 link contract 4, Rothwell to Kettering, Northamptonshire May Gurney and Co. Limited	4·4
A16 Louth bypass, Lincolnshire Clugston Construction Limited	4·9
A47 Eye bypass, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire Redland Aggregates	5·1

Tenders have been invited for the following schemes and it is expected that the contracts will be awarded before the end of March:

A1 Improvements at Brampton Hut, Cambridgeshire
A1 Improvements at Girtford, Sandy, Cambridgeshire
A6 Quorn and Mountsorrel bypass, Leicestershire
A12 Grade separated junction at Capel St. Mary, Suffolk
A16 Boston Algakirk diversion, Lincolnshire
A23 Warninglid to Brighton (Sayers Common to Muddleswood)
A30 Plusha to Bolventor, Cornwall
A42 Castle Donnington North, contract 2, Leicestershire
A43 Blisworth bypass, Northamptonshire
A47 Castor and Ailsworth bypass, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire
A47 Improvement at East Norton, Lincolnshire
A140 Dickleburgh bypass, Norfolk
A523 Macclesfield bypass, Cheshire
A650 Drighlington bypass, West Yorkshire
A1079 Market Weighton bypass, Humberside

M3 (Widening)

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy with regard to widening the M3 to four lanes each way between Bar End and Compton at Winchester.

Mr. Atkins: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 18 December 1989 at column 5.

Manchester Metrolink

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport from what Public Expenditure White Paper budget headings for 1990-91 and 1991-92 and from which subsection of which vote on account for 1990-91, the sums referred to for Manchester Metrolink in his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *491*, are drawn; how much in total there is, or is expected to be, under each budget heading and vote subsection, respectively for 1990-91 and 1991-91; and how much remains unallocated under each heading.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 26 January 1990]:* The sums for Manchester Metrolink given in my answer of 22 January at column *491* were composed of credit approvals for borrowing by the Greater Manchester passenger transport authority and public transport facilities grant to be paid at the rate of 50 per cent. of eligible costs. Discussions on costs eligible for grant are not yet complete but the PTA has been allocated £20·945 million credit approvals provisionally on the basis of expected Metrolink expenditure in 1990-91.

The national provision for public transport facilities grant and credit approvals planned for 1990-91 and 1991-92 are given in table 7.1 of chapter 7 of the Government's expenditure plans 1990-91 to 1992-93 (Cm. 1007), published today.

The provision and amounts as yet unallocated are:

£ million	*1990-91*		*1991-92*	
	Credit approvals (all local authority transport)	*Public transport facilities grant*	*Credit approvals (all local authority transport)*	*Public transport facilities grant*
Provision	486	29	570	20
of which now unallocated	25	not settled	570	20

SCOTLAND

Rents into Mortgages Scheme

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he plans to use local estate agents to promote sales of properties through the rents into mortgages scheme.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Responsibility for the administration and promotion of the rents to mortgages scheme lies with Scottish Homes and it is for that body to consider the most appropriate methods of encouraging sales under the scheme.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a further statement on the techniques Scottish Homes is using to promote the rents into mortgages scheme.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As a follow-up to the wide press coverage of the formal launch of the rents to mortgages scheme, Scottish Homes has made supplies of its explanatory leaflet available at each of its local offices and at the offices of the new town development corporations. It has also undertaken a mail drop of the leaflet to each of its tenants who are eligible to purchase under the scheme.

In addition to this general coverage, Scottish Homes has commissioned market research to enable it to target more concentrated sales campaigns in identified areas.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the proportion of council homes sold in the district council areas of Scotland where Scottish Homes is carrying out his Department's policy of allowing rents to be converted into mortgages; and what impact he expects this policy will have on the overall level of home ownership in those districts.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The pilot rents to mortgages scheme operates only in areas containing public sector housing rented from Scottish Homes or new town development corporations. The information requested for these areas is contained in the table.

While this is a pilot scheme available only to a specified range of tenants, I expect it to play a significant part in extending owner-occupation in its areas of operation.

Total sales from 1 April 1979 to 30 September 1989 as a percentage of stock in district council areas where Scottish Homes are operating rents to mortgage scheme

District Council	*Total sales from 1 April 1979 to 30 September 1989*	*Stock as at 30 September 1978*	*Percentage of stock sold since 1 April 1979*
Borders			
Berwickshire	638	2,864	22·28
Ettrick and Lauderdale	1,133	4,940	22·94
Roxburgh 1	1,158	6,269	18·47
Tweeddale	346	1,626	21·28
Central			
Clackmannan	1,586	9,547	16·61
Falkirk	5,705	33,368	17·10
Stirling	2,226	13,117	16·97
Dumfries and Galloway			
Annandale and Eskdale	1,194	4,825	24·75
Nithsdale	1,998	8,373	23·86
Stewartry	726	2,496	29·09
Fife			
Dunfermline	5,104	23,109	22·09
Kirkcaldy	5,566	26,418	21·07
North East Fife	2,547	7,851	32·44
Grampian			
Aberdeen 1	4,536	37,687	12·04
Banff and Buchan 2	2,599	12,393	20·97
Gordon	1,407	6,024	23·36

District Council	Total sales from 1 April 1979 to 30 September 1989	Stock as at 30 September 1978	Percentage of stock sold since 1 April 1979
Kincardine and Deeside	723	3,565	20·29
Moray	2,576	10,543	24·43
Lothian			
East Lothian	3,504	16,210	21·62
Edinburgh	11,048	56,664	19·50
Midlothian	2,899	13,031	22·25
West Lothian	2,859	22,517	12·70
Strathclyde			
Argyll and Bute	1,115	8,105	13·76
Bearsden and Milngavie	425	1,817	23·39
Clydebank	1,465	11,746	12·47
Clydesdale	1,099	9,590	11·46
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	681	4,350	15·66
Cumnock and Doon Valley 3	1,096	10,296	10·64
Cunninghame	3,475	23,531	14·77
Dumbarton	1,244	13,107	9·49
Eastwood	506	2,023	25·01
Glasgow	14,948	175,204	8·53
Hamilton	3,032	22,803	13·30
Inverclyde	2,085	20,014	10·42
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	2,317	18,254	12·69
Kyle and Carrick 1	3,830	18,290	20·94
Monklands 3	2,285	28,545	8·00
Motherwell	3,067	39,751	7·72
Renfrew	5,702	39,430	14·46
Strathkelvin 1	2,152	10,639	20·23
Tayside			
Angus	2,743	14,568	18·83
Dundee	3,870	39,845	9·71
Perth and Kinross	3,465	16,302	21·26
Shetland Islands	363	2,266	16·02
Western Isles	523	2,213	23·63

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects the first sale to be completed of a Scottish Homes property bought under his Department's rents into mortgages scheme.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I expect the first sale of a Scottish Homes property under the rents to mortgages scheme to be completed in March of this year.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has set a target for the number of homes to be sold through the rents into mortgages scheme by the end of the three-year experimental period.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: At the launch of the rents to mortgages scheme on 30 October last year, my right hon. and learned Friend announced that he expected up to 5,000 applications under the scheme during the three-year period.

Pre-School Playgroups

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what support his Department gives to the Scottish Pre-School Play Association; and whether he has any plans to increase that support.

Mr. Lang: The Scottish Pre-School Play Association in the current year has received grants totalling £78,000 under the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. Grants for 1990-91 have yet to be determined, in the light of applications and commitments.

Bus Routes

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make the number of Road Traffic Act convictions a necessary declaration for those companies bidding for bus routes.

Mr. Rifkind: No. Companies wishing to operate a local bus service, whether commercial or under contract to local authorities must hold a PSV operator's licence. In deciding whether or not to grant an operator's licence, the traffic commissioner takes into account relevant convictions of the operator or his employees. Licence holders are required to make known to the traffic commissioner details of convictions during the currency of the licence.

Playground Supervision

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the progress of consultations about school playground supervision.

Mr. Lang: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) on 6 December 1989.

Crown Office (Press Statement)

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the press statement made by the Crown Office on Friday 19 January concerning matters arising from the resignation of a judge at the Court of Session.

Mr. Rifkind: The press statement issued on behalf of Crown Office on 19 January was related to allegations of misconduct by Court of Session judges and was in the following terms:

"Commenting on allegations of misconduct by Court of Session Judges, a Crown Office spokesman said today:

'The Lord Advocate is responsible for investigation and prosecution of crime made known to him. No information or complaint has been provided to him which would allow him to instruct any police force or Procurator Fiscal to carry out a criminal investigation. Any rumour which has been conveyed to him has contained no sufficient specification for such instruction but what checks could be made have been made. They have revealed no basis on which to instruct further investigation.

If at any time the Lord Advocate were to be made aware of sufficiently specific allegations to instruct inquiry, the appropriate steps would of course be taken.

Allegations of non-criminal conduct by Judges are not matters for investigation by the Lord Advocate.'"

Creches

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by location, where creche facilities are provided for working mothers employed in his Department; and if they have to make any payment for this service.

Mr. Rifkind: My Department does not directly provide creche facilities. The central Edinburgh holiday play-scheme (for school-age children of civil servants), which is largely self-financing, is, however, used by Scottish Office staff.

Judges

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the public utterances of the Lord Advocate concerning the appointment and resignation of judges since 1 January; and if he will place copies and transcripts where available in the Library.

Mr. Rifkind: The Lord Advocate has made no such public statement.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he or any official of his tendered advice to the Lord President of the Court of Session in either December 1989 or January 1990; and on what subjects.

Mr. Rifkind: It is not the practice to make known the substance of discussions which Ministers or their officials have with the Lord President of the Court of Session.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the dates in November and December when officials of the Crown Office held lunchtime meetings with the Lord President of the Court of Session.

Mr. Rifkind: A Crown Office official, together with an official from the Scottish Courts Administration, attended upon the Lord President of the Court of Session at lunchtime on 20 December 1989.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer, *Official Report*, 22 January, column *547*, on what date since 1 November 1989 his meeting with the Lord President of the Court of Session took place; and whether, within the range of matters discussed was the question of an impending vacancy at the Court of Session.

Mr. Rifkind: On 22 December 1989.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *548*, if he will list the dates in November and December 1989, and January 1990 when he met judges of the Court of Session; and if he will name the judges he met.

Mr. Rifkind: The Secretary of State does not keep a record of all the occasions on which he meets judges of the Court of Session.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *548*, if he will list the dates in November and December 1989, and January 1990, when the Lord Advocate met judges of the Court of Session; and if he will name the judges.

Mr. Rifkind: The Lord Advocate does not keep a record of all the occasions on which he meet judges of the Court of Session.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan, 22 January, *Official Report*, column *548*, if he will place in the Library the information made available to the Lord President of the Court of Session by officials of the Lord Advocate since 1 January.

Mr. Rifkind: It is not the practice to make known such information.

Passenger Ferries

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he is in a position to estimate the number of orders for new passenger ferry vessels for Caledonian MacBrayne which are likely to be placed with United Kingdom shipyards over the next five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* Caledonian MacBrayne estimates that it will replace up to four major passenger ferry vessels and four minor passenger ferry vessels over the next five years.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the current passenger ferry fleet owned by Caledonian MacBrayne in terms of type, gross registered tonnage and age.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* The current passenger fleet of Caledonian MacBrayne is as follows:

	GRT (gross registered tonnage)	*Age (years)*
Major vehicle ferries		
MV Iona	1,324	20
MV Jupiter	849	16
MV Pioneer	1,071	16
MV Suilven	1,908	16
MV Juno	854	16
MV Saturn	851	12
MV Claymore	1,631	12
MV Isle of Arran	3,296	6
MV Hebridean Isles	3,040	5
MV Isle of Mull	4,719	2
MV Lord of the Isles	3,504	1
Small vehicle ferries		
MV Kyleakin	225	20
MV Lochalsh	225	19
MV Kilbrannan	64	18
MV Morvern	64	17

	GRT (gross registered tonnage)	Age (years)
MV Bruernish	69	17
MV Rhum	69	17
MV Coll	69	16
MV Eigg	69	15
MV Canna	69	15
MV Raasay	69	14
MV Isle of Cumbrae	201	13
MV Loch Striven	206	4
MV Loch Linnhe	206	4
MV Loch Riddon	206	4
MV Loch Ranza	206	3
Passenger ships		
MV Keppel	214	30
MV Lochmor	189	11

Salmon

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the annual tonnage of salmon caught in Scotland in each of the last 10 years *(a)* by anglers and *(b)* by commercial fishermen.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* Details of reported catches of Scottish salmon and sea trout by salmon fishery statistical district and by method of catch (rod-and-line, net and coble, and fixed engine) are given for the years 1982-88 in annual statistical bulletins and for previous years in "Scottish salmon catch statistics 1952-1981". Copies of these publications by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland are available in the Library.

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will publish figures on the level of salmon stocks in the principal Scottish rivers in recent years.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* Information on the size of the salmon stocks on each river in Scotland is not available. An electronic fish counter has been operated on the river North Esk by the freshwater fisheries laboratory of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland for some years. The numbers of adult salmon passing upstream past that counter are as follows:

Year	Numbers of adult salmon
1985	9,912
1986	6,987
1987	7,132
1988	11,243

DAFS scientists are also making a widespread survey of juvenile stocks of salmon in Scottish rivers.

Planning (Neighbour Notification)

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what progress has been made in revising the neighbour notification procedure in planning applications; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) on 25 July (*Official Report*, column *649*). The revision of the neighbour notification procedure is being undertaken by the Scottish Development Department as part of a wider review of the general development order and a consultation paper on the revised provisions of the general development order will be issued in due course.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether, in consequence of entries for domestic property on the valuation roll no longer being updated, he will accept notification on the occupant for the purpose of neighbour notification in planning applications.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood on 25 July (*Official Report*, column *649*).

Private Education

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by name all the private educational establishments in Scotland stating the amount of public assistance, financial or otherwise, which each receives.

Mr. Lang: A list of registered independent schools in Scotland has been placed in the Library. Details of private educational establishments in receipt of public funding in respect of their educational activities are set out in the table:

Establishment	Amount of public funding[4] in 1988-89 £
Corseford School, Renfrew[1]	549,246
Craigerne School, Peebles[1]	266,128
Donaldsons School for the Deaf, Edinburgh[1]	381,173
East Park School, Glasgow[1]	868,105
Harmeny School, Balerno[1]	269,184
Jordanhill School, Glasgow[1]	1,624,500
Queen Victoria School, Dunblane[2]	3,388,000
Royal Blind School, Edinburgh[1]	780,630
Scoraig Secondary School, Ross-shire[3]	8,000
Stanmore School, Lanark[1]	689,921
Thorntoun Manor, Kilmarnock[1]	300,741
Newbattle Abbey College[5]	322,271

[1] Grant-aided schools in receipt of central Government funding.
[2] Maintained by the Ministry of Defence.
[3] In receipt of funding from Highland Regional Council.
[4] Includes funding in respect of capital and recurrent expenditure.
[5] Government funding was withdrawn on 30 September 1989; with the exception of grant for redundancy and premature retirement compensation.

Crofters (Grants and Loans)

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage increases are required to adjust the levels of grant and loan available under the crofters building grants and loan scheme in line with inflation.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: On the basis of building costs and building materials indices and of the costs of new crofter housing an increase of nearly 30 per cent. would now be required.

Deprived Area Supplements

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will indicate the basis on which deprived area supplements to basic practice allowance for Scottish general medical practitioners will be paid when the new contract comes into force on 1 April.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: These payments will be made on the basis of an index devised by Professor Brian Jarman. Professor Jarman has recently revised his index to take account of the most up-to-date Scottish information available. The payments will be made at three levels: the lowest for index scores of 30-39, the next for 40-49 and the highest for scores of over 50. A total of 11·4 per cent. of the Scottish population live in postcode sectors with index scores of over 30. I am setting up a committee drawn from various interests to monitor the implementation of these payments.

Marine Fish Farmers

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much money was paid to the Crown Estate Commissioners by marine fish farmers in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 25 January 1990]:* I understand from the Crown Estate Commission that in the last five financial years the Crown Estate has received the following gross rental income from marine fish farming:

	£
1984-85	[1]7,000
1985-86	[1]8,200
1986-87	[1]8,800
1987-88	340,000
1988-89	485,000

[1] Approximate.

The commission explains that the figures represent gross income and that no account has been taken of management costs and reinvestment in research and training, which the commission states will amount to £450,000 in the current year.

Prison Population

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the prison population in each of the past 10 years; what are his estimates for the prison population for the next five years; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 25 January 1990]:* Information for the past 10 years is set out in the table:

Population in Scottish penal establishments 1980 to 1989

	Number
1980	4,860
1981	4,518
1982	4,891
1983	5,052
1984	4,753
1985	5,273
1986	5,588
1987	5,446
1988	5,229
1989[1]	4,985

[1] Provisional.

My latest projection is for an average population of 5,100 prisoners in each of the next five years. This projection, which was prepared some months ago for planning purposes, takes account of demographic trends.

I welcome the fact that, since the peak in 1986, the average prison population has fallen steadily, to the point where we are now projecting that the number of places in Scottish prisons will be adequate to meet needs for the foreseeable future. Such an improvement can only contribute to better conditions for prisoners and staff alike.

Lothian Health Board

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy on the closure of hospitals or wards; and if he has received any notification of the possibility of such closures by Lothian health board.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 26 January 1990]:* My right hon. and learned Friend will consider any hospital closure or withdrawal of a specialty within a hospital on its own merits and after the relevant health board has consulted all local bodies with a valid interest. I am not aware of any such public consultations being undertaken by Lothian health board at present.

I am, however, aware of speculation in the media about hospital closures in Lothian and the board has stated that it has no plans for "crisis closures".

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Farm Animals

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many representations he has received concerning the ill-treatment of farm animals.

Mr. Maclean: I receive many representations on all aspects of farm animal welfare.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to introduce legislation to improve the treatment of farm animals.

Mr. Maclean: The Government plan to introduce orders on the welfare of farm livestock and horses at markets and an amendment of the transport legislation in respect of unfit animals. We are also planning new regulations on the protection of livestock on farms and at the point of slaughter. Proposed Community controls will also require implementing legislation in due course.

Sheep

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the reason for the change of colour coding of sheep infected by the aftermath of Chernobyl.

Mr. Maclean: This enables groups of sheep which have been out of the restricted area for a minimum period of time to be identified, subject to appropriate checks, as candidates for block release. The "mark and release" arrangements for sheep leaving the post-Chernobyl restricted areas are described in full in my Department's evidence to the Agriculture Committee's inquiry, "Chernobyl: The Government's Response", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Scrapie

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether his Department is conducting any research into genetic predisposition of sheep to scrapie.

Mr. Gummer: Research into the genetic predisposition of sheep to scrapie is being undertaken by the AFRC at the neuropathogenesis unit. The scrapie resistant flock at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Redesdale experimental husbandry farm is being used in this work.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food who will represent the Ministry at the EC Council of Ministers meetings; and what will be on the agenda on *(a)* Agriculture: 22 and 23 January, 12 and 13 February, 4 to 6 March, 26 and 27 March, 23 and 24 April, 21 and 22 May, 11 and 12 June, 18 and 19 June, and *(b)* Fisheries: 18 January and 27 June.

Mr. Curry: The Council of Ministers' meeting on 18 January was cancelled. For the meeting on 22 and 23 January I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) on 24 January, *Official Report*, column *768*. Agendas for future Councils will be decided nearer the time, as will the question of representation. However, I expect the Councils of 12 and 13 February, 5 and 6 March, and 26 and 27 March to concentrate on the Commission's proposals for 1990 farm prices and that my right hon. Friend the Minister, and I will represent the United Kingdom at these meetings.

Bull Fights

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will invite the EEC Commission, at the next meeting of the Agricultural Council, to produce measures on animal welfare with particular regard to the banning of bull fights; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The Commission has already produced measures on animal welfare and is preparing others. The EEC treaty contains no legal basis for justifying Community intervention on bull-fighting.

Live Horses (Exports)

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the proposals by the European Economic Community Commission on the transportation of animals within the EEC; and if they will permit the United Kingdom to maintain its restrictions on the export of live ponies and horses.

Mr. Maclean: The Government intend to negotiate the highest possible welfare standards during forthcoming discussions in Brussels. We shall press strongly to retain controls designed to prevent horses and ponies being exported for slaughter; the Commission's proposals do not provide for our existing restrictions to continue.

Bovine (Brain Removal)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a further statement on the implications for contamination from the practice of splitting bovine cranium with band-saws for the purpose of brain removal.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to my previous replies and have nothing further to add.

Common Agriculture Policy

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has of the proportion, by value, of United Kingdom agricultural products which are covered by the common agriculture policy regime.

Mr. Curry: The European Commission estimates that 90 per cent. of final agricultural production in the United Kingdom in 1987 was subject to market regimes under the common agricultural policy.
Source: The Agricultural Situation in the Community 1988 Report EC Commission.

Intervention Butter

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food under what conditions intervention butter is sold or given to the National Health Service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Intervention butter was available to non-profit-making organisations, including the National Health Service, at subsidised prices until July 1988 when the relevant Community regulation was suspended. The NHS continues, however, to make use of supplies of subsidised butter from the open market under EC rules which allow for a subsidy of £1,065/tonne (compared to the current market price of around £2,000/tonne).

Pesticides

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has any plans to commission outside bodies to carry out his pesticide reviews; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I wish to make rapid progress with the review of older pesticides. All ways of achieving this are currently being evaluated.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Foreign Language Teaching

13. **Sir Michael McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he plans any fresh approaches to foreign language tuition among those at primary schools or earlier.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. Friend has no such plans at present.

37. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the extent to which modern foreign languages will be taught in primary schools.

Mrs. Rumbold: The national curriculum includes a modern foreign language as a foundation subject at

secondary level only. Individual local education authorities and primary schools are free to provide foreign language teaching to their pupils outside the national curriculum, if they have the necessary staffing and other resources to do so.

Scottish Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals

14. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to meet the Scottish Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals.

39. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to meet the Scottish Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals.

Mr. Jackson: I believe that the hon. Members are referring to the executive committee of the Standing Conference of Scottish Universities. My right hon. Friend has seen a number of Scottish Vice-Chancellors and he plans to visit some Scottish universities in May.

Capital Allocations

15. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received regarding the 1990-91 capital allocations announced in December.

61. **Mr. Franks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received concerning the capital allocations for the schools building programme.

81. **Mr. Barry Porter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received concerning the school building programme capital allocations.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. Friend has received a number of letters and requests for meetings from hon. Members, LEAs and others about the annual capital guidelines which he announced on 20 December.

101. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on capital allocation grants to voluntary-aided and special schools.

42. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the capital allocation for schools in England for 1990-91.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I refer the hon. Members to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) on 20 December 1989 at columns *254-58*.

Open University

16. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many Open university students have graduated since the university was founded; and what proportion of British university graduates are now produced by the Open university each year.

Mr. Jackson: The Open university has awarded 101,900 ordinary BA degrees, and 18,094 honours degress since it admitted its first students in 1971. In 1988 it produced 9·9 per cent. of United Kingdom university graduates, and 5·3 per cent. of all United Kingdom graduates.

Parent Governors

17. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of parent representation on the boards of governors of schools in the maintained sector.

67. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether the new arrangements for parent governors are working satisfactorily.

Mrs. Rumbold: A survey last year showed that new governing bodies, with a much larger number of parents, are already getting to grips with important educational issues. The most effective governing bodies are those where all members work as a team, in which parents have an important part to play.

Computers

18. **Mr. Andrew Mackay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many computers are now in schools in the maintained sector.

Mr. Alan Howarth: There is an average of three microcomputers per maintained primary school and 30 per maintained secondary school.

Local Financial Management

19. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on progress on the introduction of local financial management in schools.

Mrs. Rumbold: Eighty-four authorities have either received formal approval for their schemes or are being consulted on modifications prior to approval. We have indicated to five authorities that their schemes cannot be approved in their present form and that formal implementation will therefore be deferred until April 1991.

Teacher Numbers

20. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the current supply of teachers and on the position at this time in 1989.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Department collects data on vacant posts from local education authorities each January. I hope that local authorities will submit their returns for January 1990 quickly. We shall publish the results as soon as they are available. Data for 1989 were shown in the reply my right hon. Friend gave on 21 December 1989 to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) at columns *353-55*.

Disabled Students Allowance

21. **Ms. Mowlam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to announce the result of his review of the disabled students allowance.

41. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to review the disabled students allowance.

48. **Mr. Sillars:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects the review of disabled students allowance to be completed.

95. **Mr. Boyes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he will be announcing the result of his review of the disabled students allowance.

98. **Dr. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to make a statement on the level of the disabled students allowance.

Mr. Jackson: I refer the hon. Members to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) on 15 January at column *8*.

Teacher Shortages

22. **Miss Hoey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has had in the last month from inner London boroughs with regard to teacher shortage.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend on 8 January received a letter from the Association of London Authorities on the subject of teacher recruitment and retention in inner London. He will reply shortly. My right hon. Friend is well aware of the difficulties relating to teacher supply in some parts of London. He recently announced grant of £4 million over two years to assist local authorities with teacher recruitment schemes. A substantial amount of this will go to the inner London authorities. Discussion of further measures is taking place at official level.

27. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what evidence he has on teacher shortages; and what action is being taken to encourage greater recruitment to the profession.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Department's annual January survey of vacancies showed in 1989 a vacancy rate in secondary schools of 1·2 per cent.—the same as in 1979. Wastage from the profession has remained broadly constant for many years.

For the future we shall continue and reinforce the range of measures we are already pursuing to encourage greater recruitment to the profession. These include expanding the teaching as a career unit, providing bursaries to trainee teachers of shortage subjects, funding in-service training for retraining teachers in the shortage subjects, and encouraging mature entrants to the profession through a series of taster courses and through the licensed teacher scheme. In addition, from April 1990, education support grant of £4 million will be available to support the recruitment of married women returners and mature new entrants to teaching.

29. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what new steps he proposes to take to tackle the problem of teacher shortages in London.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. Friend has asked the Interim Advisory Committee to advise on measures to improve teacher supply in areas where vacancy rates are highest, notably the inner London weighting area.

In addition he has made available over £100,000 to support a London-wide recruitment campaign; and from April 1990 funding under education support grant will be available to support the recruitment of married women returners and mature new entrants to teaching. This will be of particular benefit to London authorities.

87. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment he has made of the shortage of teachers *(a)* generally and *(b)* in mathematics, science and foreign languages; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Department's memorandum to the Education Science and Arts Committee in November 1988 describes the indicators that the Department uses to assess teacher supply and includes an assessment of shortages generally and by subject at that time. A more recent assessment was made in the Department's written evidence to the Interim Advisory Committee. Copies of both documents are in the Library. The Government recognise that there are difficulties in recruiting teachers in some parts of the country and in some subjects, in particular mathematics, physics, chemistry and modern languages.

89. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what measures he is taking to attract people into the teaching profession.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), on 16 January 1990 at column *159*.

Higher Education

23. **Dr. Moonie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he is taking to monitor quality in higher education provision; and if he will make a statement.

96. **Mr. Fisher:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he is taking to monitor quality in higher education provision; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The main responsibility for quality in higher education rests with the institutions themselves and their validating bodies. In addition, Her Majesty's inspectors continue to provide, through their published reports, an assessment of the quality of provision in the polytechnics and colleges sector. My right hon. Friend encourages the work in hand in both sectors of higher education to develop improved quality assurance measures and looks to the higher education funding councils and others to consider ways in which these could be used to secure the yet more effective use of the substantial public funds allocated to higher education.

43. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the number of full-time students currently in higher education establishments; and what were the comparable figures for 1980.

Mr. Jackson: Information for academic year 1989-90 is not yet available centrally. Provisional figures for 1988-89 indicate that there were 628,000 full-time and sandwich students of higher education courses in Great Britain, compared with 521,000 in 1980-81.

Grant-maintained Schools

24. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about progress with the development of grant-maintained schools.

Mrs. Rumbold: Twenty schools have been incorporated as grant-maintained schools since September 1989. They are now experiencing the benefits of greater financial and administrative autonomy. They are proving popular with parents and pupils. I share their confidence in the future and expect them to take full advantage of the opportunities which grant-maintained status offers.

91. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many grant-maintained schools are currently in operation; how many new approvals have been given; and how many schools are in the process of consultations with a view to obtaining grant-maintained status.

Mrs. Rumbold: To date 86 schools have embarked on the process of applying for grant-maintained status and parents at 57 of them have so far voted in favour of proceeding with an application. My right hon. Friend has approved 32 of the 41 proposals which have so far reached him for decision. More secondary schools have now been approved for grant-maintained status than the number of secondary schools in half of English LEAs.

A-levels

25. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what discussions he has had about the future of A-levels; and if he will make a statement.

54. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what discussions he has had about the future of A-levels; and if he will make a statement.

59. **Mr. Rogers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what discussions he has had about the future of A-levels; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Members to the reply that my right hon. Friend gave on 28 November to my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) at column *181*. In addition my right hon. Friend has asked the School Examinations and Assessment Council to develop general principles to govern A and AS examinations. The sixth form curriculum and the future of post-16 education generally, frequently arises in discussions with representatives of teachers' associations and others.

Global Climate (Research)

26. Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what programme he is supporting for systematic research into the impact of the terrestrial environment on the global climate comparable to the programmes on the atmosphere and the oceans; and whether he has any plans to increase the resources allocated to them.

Mr. Jackson: Through the research councils, the following programmes are being supported through the science budget:

NERC is carrying out a broad programme of research in terrestrial and freshwater sciences. This provides a firm scientific base for studies of the impact of global climate change on the terrestrial environment.

Current research specifically on the interaction between the terrestrial environment and global climate is as follows:

(i) changes in the floristic composition of habitats and the abundance and geographical range of animals.
(ii) the effects on coastal ecosystems of sea level rise.
(iii) the productivity of freshwater plankton and their population dynamics in response to changes to lake stratification.
(iv) investigation of the change in rates of soil organic matter decomposition and the production of trace gases.
(v) modelling changes in forest productivity.
(vi) the effect of climate change on water resources.
(vii) predictive modelling of the frequency of extreme events such as flooding and high winds.
(viii) studies of the dynamics of Antarctic terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems projects carried out by higher education institutions supported by research grants, postgraduate studentships and fellowships.

AFRC's current research in this area concerns:

(i) the absorption or release of carbon dioxide by plants in photosynthesis and respiration and the effects of carbon dioxide on plant growth, production and development.
(ii) the fate of nitrogen in plants and soil and the release of gases such as nitrous oxide to the atmosphere.

Within the increased resources for each of the research councils announced on 10 January, NERC is planning to extend its work and has allocated resources to a programme of Arctic ecology; AFRC intends to increase its level of spend in the area mentioned above; and SERC will be devoting resources to a research initiative on clean processes and technology.

78. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his Department's expenditure on research into the effects on the global climate of *(a)* the atmosphere, *(b)* the oceans and *(c)* the terrestrial environment.

Mr. Jackson: Expenditure by the research councils on these categories of research in 1989-90 is estimated to be as follows:

	£'000
The atmosphere	
NERC	1,555
SERC	c.4,000
The oceans	
NERC	11,487
The terrestrial environment	
NERC	1,325
AFRC	10,000

In addition to the above, NERC spends £6,618,000 on research into paleoclimates and on land and sea glaciology.

97. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will increase funding to the NERC for research into the effects of global warming.

Mr. Jackson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Amos) on 10 January at columns *623-24*.

In addition to the specific allocations referred to, it is for the councils to decide on how the resources allocated to them should be spent.

Four-year-olds

28. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he is taking in response to the Her Majesty's inspectorate's report on the quality of education of four-year-olds in primary classes.

33. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he is taking in response to Her Majesty's inspectorate's report on the quality of education of four-year-olds in primary classes.

104. **Ms. Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he is taking in response to the Her Majesty's inspectorate's report on the quality of education of four-year-olds in primary classes.

Mrs. Rumbold: The findings of Her Majesty's inspectorate in "The Quality of Education for Four-Year-Olds in Primary Classes" published in December are chiefly for local education authorities and schools to consider. The Government have addressed one important need by designating in-service training for teachers with responsibility for these children a national priority area within the local education authority training grants scheme. The committee of inquiry which I am chairing is considering how three and four-year-olds may have improved educational experiences in various settings.

Performance Indicators

30. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps his Department is taking to encourage schools to make greater use of performance indicators.

Mrs. Rumbold: We regard the development of performance indicators as a key element in the effective management of schools. The Department has recently circulated to all local education authorities a list of indicators identified by schools in a pilot exercise as particularly valuable for this purpose. I shall send my hon. Friend a copy of the aide memoire, together with my speech on the occasion of its publication.

Teachers' Pay

31. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he next expects to meet teachers' union representatives to discuss pay; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend will be meeting the teacher unions in due course to discuss the report of the Interim Advisory Committee on school teachers' pay and conditions and the Government's proposals in response to the committee's recommendations.

65. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to introduce greater regional flexibility in pay for teachers in England and Wales.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Interim Advisory Committee on school teachers' pay and conditions has been asked to advise on what modifications should be made to the system of selective payments to teachers. My right hon. Friend will be considering its recommendations carefully.

75. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the real rate of increase in teachers' pay since 1979; and what was the corresponding figure for the 1974 to 1979 period.

Mrs. Rumbold: Teachers' average salaries have risen by 30 per cent. in real terms since 1979. The estimated increase in real terms between March 1974 and 1979 is approximately 6 per cent.

84. **Mr. Ashton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on teachers' pay.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend expects shortly to announce the Government's proposals in response to the recommendations of the Interim Advisory Committee.

Dr. Michael Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress is being made in creating a joint negotiating body for teachers' pay; and if he will make a statement.

85. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress has been made in establishing a new negotiating body for teachers' pay and conditions.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend held a series of meetings with the teacher unions and the local authority employers in October and November last year. He is considering carefully the points made to him then. Further meetings will take place in due course.

Standardised Testing

32. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the implementation of standardised testing in schools.

50. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to improve the arrangements so far made for assessment of pupils' progress following the introduction of the national curriculum.

106. **Mr. Barron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress has been made on agreeing a system of assessment for the national curriculum in primary schools.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has received further advice from the School Examinations and Assessment Council about the arrangements for national curriculum assessment. He is considering that advice and will make a statement shortly.

School Transport and Travel Expenses

34. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent discussions he has had with representatives of local education authorities regarding school transport and travel expenses.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The costs of school transport are taken into account in the discussions which my right hon. Friend holds with representatives of local education authorities as part of the annual cycle for determining the local authority grant settlement. He has not had any discussions about the law regarding school transport and travel expenses, which I set out in the reply I gave my hon. Friend on 14 November at column *229*.

Deaf Children

35. **Mr. Ashley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will set up an inquiry into the desirability of totally deaf and profoundly deaf children, for whom sign language is their first language, being taught by at least one deaf teacher using sign language.

Mr. Alan Howarth: This is a matter for local education authorities, as the employers, to decide for themselves in the light of local circumstances. It would not be appropriate to seek to limit the teaching options available to them.

English Teaching

36. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress has been made since 1979 in improving standards of English, written and spoken in schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Examination results for the 16-plus age group indicate a small but steady rise throughout the decade in the standard of English attained by school leavers. Government initiatives such as the education support grant programmes for oracy and English language in the curriculum will continue this process. Above all the national curriculum will give pupils and teachers clear objectives for written and spoken English and the ways and means of reaching them.

National Curriculum

38. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the progress of the implementation of the national curriculum.

99. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the progress of the implementation of the national curriculum.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave to the hon. Members for Truro (Mr. Taylor), for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) and for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn) on 19 December 1989 at col. *201*.

51. **Ms. Walley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much time he recommends teachers in primary schools should spend on assessment of the core curriculum.

66. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much time he recommends teachers in primary schools should spend on assessment of the core curriculum.

83. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much time he recommends teachers in primary schools should spend on assessment of the core curriculum.

Mrs. Rumbold: Assessment should be an integral part of teaching. It is not possible, therefore, to say precisely how much time teachers should spend on it.

Departmental Literature

40. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will take any measures to limit the use of jargon in the literature published by his Department and by other educational organisations.

Mrs. Rumbold: Yes.

Student Loans

44. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the average debt expected for a student studying a four-year arts degree at a Scottish university assuming the student loans scheme was in operation and the student was entering the first year of the course in autumn 1990.

Mr. Jackson: A student beginning a four-year degree course in autumn 1990 would repay just under £2,000 over five years from April 1995. This assumes that the RPI increases by 3 per cent. a year on average over the next 10 years, and that there is no deferment of repayments. Repayments will not vary according to the subject of study, or the institution at which the course was undertaken.

46. **Mr. Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a further statement on progress in establishing revised arrangements for the proposed scheme for studen loans, following his statement of 21 December, *Official Report*, column 617.

Mr. Jackson: Preparatory work on the student loans scheme is well in hand. As already announced to the House, the Student Loans Company Limited has selected a managing director and has secured premises in Glasgow.

60. **Mr. Gerald Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he expects to make any changes to the present proposed scheme for the repayment of student top-up loans.

Mr. Jackson: None of significance. The withdrawal of the banks means that their branches will no longer be available to handle loan applications, or to counsel borrowers. It does not affect the principles of the scheme, or its administration, in other respects.

72. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress he has made towards implementing the student loans scheme.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress he has made with the student loans scheme; and if he will make a statement.

93. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress has been made with the student loans scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Preparatory work on the student loans scheme is well in hand. As already announced to the House, the Student Loans Company Limited has selected a managing director and has secured premises in Glasgow.

74. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what research his Department has carried out into the potential impact of his student loans scheme on the numbers of undergraduate students.

Mr. Jackson: A study of different countries' student support systems, including the effect on participation in higher education, was published as Annex C to the White Paper. This concluded that

"there is no direct correlation of either the quantity of support or its form with participation rates".

The Department will be monitoring the effect of top-up loans on student participation.

76. **Mrs. Rosie Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what, if any, studies his Department has undertaken, or has had undertaken on its behalf, into the feasibility of students repaying their maintenance loans through the income tax system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: In drawing up proposals for top-up loans for students a wide range of repayment options was considered. I am confident that the Government's scheme represents the most effective means of providing additional resources for students and securing value for money to the taxpayer.

90. **Miss Emma Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment he has made of the special financial needs of the disabled in formulating his proposals for the introduction of the top-up loan for students.

Mr. Jackson: The top-up loans scheme is designed to provide an additional source of support for all students. The Department is examining the evidence submitted by organisations representing the interests of disabled students, relating to both top-up loans and the present system of student support.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has for the administration of the student loans scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has for the administration of the student loans scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran).

110. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what decision has been made on whether supplementary allowances for dependants will be frozen following introduction of student loans.

Mr. Jackson: Supplementary allowances in respect of dependants will continue to be available to all eligible students under the mandatory awards system after the introduction of top-up loans. The rates for 1990-91 are currently being considered and will be announced shortly.

The levels of these allowances for 1991-92 and subsequent years will be considered at the appropriate times in the light of all relevant circumstances, including available resources.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will set out the decisions he has made to date on the administration of the student loans scheme, pursuant to the withdrawal of the banks from the administration of the scheme and his statement to the House of 21 December 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: It remains the Government's intention that, subject to the passage of the Education (Student Loans) Bill, the Student Loans Company Limited will administer the scheme. The Secretaries of State for Education and Science and for Scotland have acquired the company and have appointed directors. The company has selected a managing director and acquired premises. Detailed information about the administration of the scheme will be made public as soon as possible. The principles, objectives and funding of the student loans scheme are not altered by the withdrawal of the banks.

School Leaving Age

45. **Mr. Holt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last received representations to consider further the statutory school leaving age.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. Friend has received no such representations.

Temporary Classrooms

47. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether any research into the disadvantages of education carried out in temporary classrooms separate from the main school building has been carried out; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I am not aware of any recent research into the subject in question.

Youth Service

49. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much has been spent on the running of the youth service in each of the last three years.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The information requested is given in the table. The figures consist of direct expenditure by the Department to voluntary organisations, and local authority expenditure on the youth service as recorded by them in their annual returns, including that supported by specific grant. The figures include recurrent and capital expenditure on the youth service.

Expenditure on the Youth Service—England

	£ million Cash
1986-87	156
1987-88	188
1988-89	175

Teacher Training

52. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many people were recruited onto teacher training courses in England and Wales in 1989 and 1988.

Mr. Alan Howarth: A total of 21,757 students started initial teacher training courses in September 1989—an increase of 1,574 on the corresponding 1988 total of 20,183.

Essex Education Committee

53. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the chairman of Essex county council education committee.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. Friend has not met the chairman of Essex county council education committee recently, but I met her on 23 November. I also met, on 22 January, the chairman of the county council, who is standing in for her while she is in hospital.

City Technology Colleges

55. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his latest estimate of the cost to public funds of implementing his policy on city technology colleges.

Mrs. Rumbold: Total planned Government expenditure from the announcement of the city technology colleges programme to the end of the financial year 1991-92 is £122·4 million. In addition to this, there are sponsors' contributions totalling over £43 million.

69. **Mrs. Currie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on progress on the development of city technology colleges in the midlands.

Mrs. Rumbold: We are making rapid progress on the establishment of CTCs in the midlands. During the last two weeks my right hon. Friend has announced plans for CTCs in Corby and in Derby, and in addition sponsors have declared their wish to fund a CTC in Telford. These are in addition to the CTC already open in Kingshurst, Birmingham.

PhD Students

56. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proportion of university PhD students are now of British nationality.

Mr. Jackson: Sixty per cent. of university students registered for PhD qualifications in 1988 were of United Kingdom domicile.

Teacher Supply

57. **Mr. Buckley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what new proposals he has to improve the supply of teachers.

Mr. Alan Howarth: We shall continue and reinforce the range of measures we are already pursuing to meet the staffing demand of schools in the 1990s. These include expanding the teaching as a career unit, providing bursaries to trainee teachers of shortage subjects, funding in-service training for retraining teachers in the shortage subjects, and encouraging mature entrants to the profession through a series of taster courses and through the licensed teacher scheme. In addition, from April 1990, education support grant of £4 million will be available to support the recruitment of married women returners and mature new entrants to teaching.

Education Reform Act

58. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the work of teachers implementing the Education Reform Act 1988.

Mrs. Rumbold: Teachers are at the forefront of implementing our education reforms. The success of the reforms depends crucially on their contribution. I am encouraged by the evidence I have received of the enthusiasm and dedication with which the reforms are being implemented, and I pay tribute to the dedication, professionalism and hard work of teachers in this.

Local Management of Schools

62. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what reductions in staff numbers employed in local education authority offices he anticipates as a result of local management of schools.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) on 19 December 1989 at column *206*.

Interim Advisory Committee

63. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the chairman of the Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay and Conditions; and what matters were discussed.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend meets Lord Chilver from time to time in the normal course of business.

70. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the progress being made by the Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay and Conditions.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend asked the Interim Advisory Committee to report by the end of January.

Science Budget

64. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the allocation of the science budget for 1990-91.

Mr. Jackson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my right hon. Friend gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Amos) on 10 January at columns *623-4*.

Classroom Closures

68. **Mr. Blunkett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many teaching days have been lost to children in the current academic year due to their classroom's closure on structural grounds.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Surplus School Places

71. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he has considered to ensure that local education authorities reduce their number of surplus school places.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Local education authorities are aware of the high cost of under-used capacity at schools with a substantial proportion of surplus places. They recognise therefore that it is very much in their own financial interests to continue to come forward with proposals to rationalise their school provision where appropriate and continue to make proposals to that end.

University Education

79. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many applications for university education have been received in 1990; and what were the comparable figures in each of the previous three years.

Mr. Jackson: By 15 December 1989, the Universities Central Council on Admissions had received 195,600 applications from home and overseas students for admission to university in 1990. Comparably incomplete figures for previous years are, for entry in 1989, 176,600; in 1988, 164,800; and in 1987, 156,600.

Higher Education (Salaries)

80. **Dr. Marek:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the average annual increase in real terms between 1979 and 1989 of national average earnings, average professors' salaries, senior lecturers' salaries, and PhD research student grants respectively.

Mr. Jackson: The average annual increases in real salary-grant over the 10-year period 1979 to 1989 were:

	Per cent.
Average national earnings	2·5
Professors' average salaries	1·9
University senior lecturers' maximum salaries	1·3
Research council studentships (London)	0·6
Research council studentships (elsewhere)	0·4

Notes:

1. The figure for average national earnings has been derived from the New Earnings Survey and is based on males and females on full time rates across all occupations, industries and services.
2. Average salaries and earnings are based on the period 1 April to 31 March in each of the years. The figures for academic salaries do not include non-salary earnings.
3. Studentships grants are based on the period 1 October to 30 September in each of the years. The figures do not include British Academy grants.
4. All figures have been calculated by use of the Retail Price Index.

Saturday Sports Facilities (Schools)

82. **Mr. Favell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the level of provisions of Saturday sports facilities in schools.

Mrs. Rumbold: Figures on Saturday use of sports facilities in schools are not available. The Government wish to encourage the wider use of school sports facilities by the local community and will shortly publish a practical guidance booklet on dual use.

Standard Assessment Tests

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what decisions have been made about the publication of standard assessment tests at seven years; and if he will make a statement.

86. **Mr. Stott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what decisions have been made about the publication of standard assessment tests at seven years; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner) earlier today.

National Union of Teachers

88. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the president of the National Union of Teachers; and what subjects were discussed.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend met the NUT president last week to discuss teacher supply and other matters.

Ko Hsuan School, Chawleigh

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps Her Majesty's inspectorate has now taken to ensure that the Ko Hsuan school at Chawleigh in north Devon conforms with approved practice in terms of sleeping arrangements, religious instruction and supervision outside school hours; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave on 11 January 1990 at column *706*.

Under-fives

92. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he is taking to bring public education services for the under-fives into line with other European countries such as Denmark, Holland, France, Spain and Sweden.

Mrs. Rumbold: European countries vary in the nature and extent of their provision for the under-fives. The Government do not see conformity as a desirable end in itself; our intention is rather to build on the strengths of our existing services, including the important contribution made by the voluntary sector.

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are his latest figures for each local education authority for expenditure on the education of under-fives.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information requested is not collected centrally. Local authority expenditure returns to the Department of the Environment do not identify separate figures for the education of under-fives. Expenditure is returned for all pupils in the nursery and primary sector taken together.

Supply Teachers

94. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what discussions he has had with local education authorities about the number of supply teachers; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) earlier today.

Examination Results

100. **Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment he has made of the factors which most influence whether schools and local authorities achieve good public examination results.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Department has undertaken numerous analyses and commissioned research in this field. HM Inspectorate also records and comments upon examination results in its reports on schools, local education authorities and aspects of the education system.

In the light of the evidence, my right hon. Friend has concluded that the major influence on examination results is the quality of teaching and organisation of individual schools. The reforms now being instituted under the Education Reform Act, including in particular the introduction of the national curriculum, are intended to improve the quality of teaching and learning in all schools, and across all local education authorities.

School Visits

102. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received over his Department's revised policy on charging for school visits.

Mrs. Rumbold: Letters to the Department about the new law, which include requests for clarification as well as expressions of opinion, have reduced considerably in recent months. It is clear that many schools are managing well within the new arrangements, but we are continuing to monitor the situation.

Interactive Video

103. **Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what support he is giving to the development and testing of interactive video teaching material on compact discs for use in the school science curriculum.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Department is taking a number of steps to stimulate the production of interactive video materials. Currently we are funding the production of five discs in mathematics. The question of support for other curriculum areas will be considered in due course.

Underspending

105. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the areas in which his Department is underspending.

Mr. MacGregor: DES public expenditure Votes in 1988-89 were underspent by 1·8 per cent. Three quarters of this arose on two programmes of specific grant where local authorities did not claim as high a proportion of grant within the financial year to which it related as had been projected. Action has been taken to ensure that in future outturn more closely matches Vote provision for these programmes.

Infant and Junior Schools (Manchester)

107. **Mr. Litherland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received from head teachers of infant and junior schools in Manchester regarding present working conditions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. Friend last year received via the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) a representation from the headteacher of Oldwood infant school in Manchester concerning staff facilities at the school.

As part of a visit to Manchester last December my right hon. Friend visited Ravensbury county primary school where he saw working conditions at first hand.

Decisions about the allocation of capital resources in county schools are a matter for Manchester education authority.

Physical Education

108. **Mr. O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to be able to announce the appointment of the working party on physical education and the national curriculum; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) on 23 January, 1990 at column *598*.

Local Management of Schools

109. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on pupil-led funding and the system of local management of schools.

Mrs. Rumbold: Pupil-led funding is a key element of local management of schools. At least 75 per cent. of the resources to be allocated to schools by authorities' formula must be allocated on the basis of pupil numbers weighted for age. The remainder may be used to reflect variations in the circumstances of schools within each authority, including the size and condition of premises, the number of pupils with special needs and the need to provide a balanced curriculum in small schools.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has had from governing bodies about local management of schools.

77. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has had from governing bodies about local management of schools.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations from governing bodies. Very many of these have expressed support for the greater role that governing bodies will play in the running of schools under local management.

Science Libraries

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he is taking to make it possible for university science libraries to acquire more of the relevant periodicals in their disciplines.

Mr. Jackson: It is for individual universities to decide their own priorities within the total resources at their disposal.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science who will represent his Department at the European Community Council of Ministers meeting on 31 May, education and 18 May, culture; and what the agenda will be for both meetings.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend represents the United Kingdom at the meetings of European Community Ministers of Education. It is too early to predict the final agenda for the meeting on 31 May. Early indications are that it may include discussions on education co-operation, European schools, equality of educational opportunity in initial and in-service training of teachers, education for enterprise and distance education. The Council will also receive from the Commission a number of progress reports on education programmes.

Responsibility for cultural matters rests with my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Arts, who expects to be present at the 18 May meeting of European Community Ministers of Culture. Present indications are that the following items may be among those discussed: education and training in the cultural sector, free movement of cultural goods in the single European market, the MEDIA programme, library co-operation in the field of data banks, and the European City of Culture programme.

Grant-Maintained Status

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will place in the Library a copy of each proposal for acquisition of grant-maintained status required from the governing body of the school under section 62 of the Education Reform Act 1988 received by him to date.

Mr. MacGregor: Under section 62 of the Education Reform Act 1988 the governing body of a school applying for grant-maintained status must publish statutory proposals, a copy of which they are obliged to send to me. I shall put in train arrangements for the Library to receive a copy of the proposals for those schools on which I have reached decisions.

Creches

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list by location, where creche facilities are provided for working mothers employed in his Department; and if they have to make any payment for this service.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Department has not yet provided creche facilities but is participating in an interdepartmental study of the scope for providing creches centrally and in commuting areas.

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, further to his reply to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby of 13 December 1989, *Official Report*, column *651*, concerning the accountancy firms employed by his Department; if he will give *(a)* the names of the four firms, *(b)* a list of the payments made to each in 1988 and 1989 and *(c)* details of the consultancy contracts given to each firm.

Mrs. Rumbold: The four firms and the overall amounts paid during the 1988 and 1989 calendar years are as follows:

	1988 £	*1989* £
Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte, Haskins and Sells Ernst and Whinney (now Ernst and Young) Peat Marwick McLintock	205,674	336,073

It is not possible to state the amount paid to each firm as this would break commercial confidentiality. The contracts awarded to each firm are listed below. The 1987 contracts are listed as some expenditure fell in 1988.

1987
Coopers and Lybrand
Study of education and training databases.
Coopers and Lybrand
Financial delegation to schools.
Peat Marwick McLintock
Resource Management.

1988
Coopers and Lybrand
Management framework for the control of information system projects.
Deloitte, Haskins and Sells
Financial management advice to the University Grants Committee.
Ernst and Whinney
Management system for HM Inspectors travel and subsistence.
Peat Marwick McLintock
Study of requirements for an integrated Vote and Management accounting system.

1989
Coopers and Lybrand
Review of MRC capital expenditure systems.
Delloitte, Haskins and Sells
Assistance with the implementation of the Department's accounting system and selection of the accounts payable system.
Ernst and Young
Specification and selection of a teachers superannuation payment system and reorganisation.
Peat Marwick McLintock
Financial management survey of SERC.
Peat Marwick McLintock
Study into student loans.
Peat Marwick McLintock
Assistance with the implementation of the accounting system.

School Building Regulations

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the final date for compliance with the 1981 school building regulations; what is the extent of compliance to date in *(a)* Humberside, *(b)* West Sussex and *(c)* the Inner London education authority; what will be the cost of full compliance in each; what national funding is available for this work and what is his estimate of the impact on the community charge in each case necessary to comply if these costs fall on the local authority.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The operative date of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981 is 1 August 1981

except for certain provisions which represent a marked change from the corresponding requirements of the 1972 regulations. In these cases the regulations provide that the operative date for existing buildings is 1 September 1991.

Under section 10(2) of the 1944 Education Act, it is the duty of LEAs to secure that their schools conform to the standards prescribed in the regulations. The Department does not maintain records on the nature of the building stock in individual local education authorities which would enable the community charge implications of compliance to be estimated.

Since 1981, capital expenditure on schools, including buildings, land, plant, machinery and equipment, has totalled £3,914 million (£4,775 million in 1989-90 terms). From April 1990, funding for capital expenditure at LEA schools will cease available through local authority borrowing in respect of credit approvals announced by the Department of the Environment, from receipts from the disposal of capital assets, and from contributions from revenue expenditure. Capital grants are available for expenditure at voluntary-aided schools.

Teachers (National Curriculum)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he has taken to ensure that there are sufficient teachers to teach the national curriculum; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he has taken to ensure that there are sufficient teachers to teach the national curriculum; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I refer the hon. Members to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) on 12 December 1989 at column *553*.

ENVIRONMENT

Water Pollution

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by water authority the action that is being taken by the National Rivers Authority to monitor water contaminated by toxic chemicals discharged into the sewerage system and recycled into the drinking water system and the toxic chemicals discovered.

Mr. Trippier: The National Rivers Authority undertakes regular monitoring of consented substances discharged from sewage treatment works. Routine monitoring of the receiving waters includes analyses for a wide range of substances. This information is entered on the public register held by each region. Water undertakers are responsible for monitoring water supplies in accordance with the requirements of the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989.

Telecommunications Masts

Dr. Woodcock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to alter the permitted development regulations in relation to telecommunication masts.

Mr. Moynihan: My right hon. Friend intends shortly to issue a consultation paper on possible changes to permitted development rights for a range of telecommunications development. Any proposals for amending those rights as they relate to masts can be considered in that context.

Vocational Training

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he collects statistics relating to the allocation of discretionary grants made by local authorities for full-time vocational training; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: Information about the allocation of such grants is not available.

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment further to his reply of 14 December 1989, *Official Report*, column *751*, if he will name the seven accountancy firms engaged by his Department; what payments were made to them in 1988 and 1989; and what factors are taken into account in assessing firms' suitability to provide advice.

Mr. Patten: The seven accounting firms engaged by my Department during 1989-90 were, Spicer and Oppenheim, Price Waterhouse, Coopers and Lybrand, Deloitte Haskins and Sells, Peat, Marwick, McLintock, Touche Ross and Paul Anthony. It is not our policy to comment on aspects of individual contracts. As far as the suitability of these firms to provide advice, I can do no better than refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 14 December 1989.

Contaminated Land

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department will be represented at the conference on policy regulation and technology applications for contaminated land to be held at the Royal Lancaster hotel, London on 22 and 23 February.

Mr. Trippier: Yes, officials from the Department will be attending for each of the two days.

Lindane

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he now expects the Advisory Committee on Pesticides to report on the matter of lindane; and whether it is considering this issue as a matter of urgency.

Mr. Trippier: The Advisory Committee on Pesticides is currently reviewing a number of pesticides. It is essential that this work is done thoroughly, and to the highest scientific standards. This necessarily takes time. I understand that the review of lindane will be completed by late 1990 or early 1991.

Water

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in what form Her Majesty's Government have responded to the requirements of the Commission of the European Economic Community consequent on the adoption of Council Directive 80/770 concerning the

quality of water supplied for human consumption; and what information is available to Her Majesty's Government concerning comparable information supplied by Governments of other member states.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Government are wholeheartedly committed to complying with the requirements of the EC drinking water directive as quickly as possible taking account of practicalities and have always co-operated fully with the European Commission. In particular, we have sent them details of the programmes which water undertakers in England and Wales will be carrying out at a cost of £1·8 billion over the next five years in order to remedy current situations of non-compliance with the drinking water directive.

The Commission does not reveal what information other member states have supplied.

Child Care

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the authorities whose social services spending allocations for 1990-91 is *(a)* greater and *(b)* less than the grant-related expenditure allocation for 1988-90; what are the gains and losses in percentage and cost terms; if he will list the child care gainers and losers on the same basis and what are the average net cash allocations for both.

Mr. Chope: I have today placed in the Library a table covering both children's and total social services, which shows 1989-90 GRE's, 1990-91 SSA's and the difference between the two in cash and percentage terms for each social services authority in England.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the reasons for gains and losses in *(a)* social services spending allocation 1990 and *(b)* child care allocation between different local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The new social services standard spending assessments are largely based on independent research evidence and were the subject of lengthy discussions with local authority representatives. The consequent changes in the method of calculating standard spending assessments (formerly grant-related expenditure assessments) between 1989-90 and 1990-91, and the complexity of the previous formula, make it impossible to identify in detail the reasons for differences in either total social services or children's services allocations between different authorities.

Social Services, Humberside

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the figures for (i) child abuse, (ii) domestic violence, (iii) proportion of lone parents, (iv) children at risk index and (v) the number of children in care for *(a)* Humberside and *(b)* the use national average as in his grant-related expenditure assessment and standard spending assessment for calculating social services expenditure.

Mr. Chope: Neither the grant-related expenditure nor the standard spending assessment formulae include information on child abuse, domestic violence or the number of children in care. The "children at risk index" is part of the SSA formula, no comparable indicator was calculated for the GRE. The proportion of children living in lone-parent households is an indicator in both the GRE and SSA formulae. It is calculated using information from the 1981 census and is therefore the same for each assessment. The national average and the Humberside values for the "children at risk" and lone-parent indicators are as follows:

(i) 'Children at risk'	
National average per authority	4,516
Humberside	9,930
(ii) Proportion of children living in lone-parent house holds	
National average	0·1300
Humberside	0·1355

Limestone Quarrying

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information his Department has as to the environmental impact of quarrying limestone for the limestone-gypsum flue gas desulphurisation process.

Mr. Trippier: No national assessment has been made of the environmental impact of quarrying limestone for the limestone-gypsum flue gas desulphurisation process. My Department has commissioned a research project into high purity limestone resources and the demand for non-aggregate uses. The report will also discuss environmental and planning issues and will be published later this year.

The CEGB has indicated that the complete 12GW retrofit programme would account for less than 2 million tonnes of limestone per year (less than 2 per cent. of current production).

The board also announced in August 1987 that it would not take limestone from quarries in national parks for the power stations selected for retrofitting with the flue gas desulphurisation process. The board went on to state that it hoped to follow a similar policy when obtaining limestone for new stations. That assessment was made in the knowledge of the Government's policy on mineral working in national parks set out in the statement by my then hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave) on 9 April 1987 (HC 393/394). I understand that the board's policy towards limestone supply has not changed since its August 1987 announcement.

Prefabricated Housing

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by local authority *(a)* the number and type of immediate post-war prefabricated housing which still forms part of the housing stock, *(b)* the amount of grant aid for structural improvement allocated for such housing each year since 1979, *(c)* clarify those types of such housing which qualify for grant aid, and the reasons and *(d)* indicate whether he has any plans to extend the list of types that so qualify.

Mr. Chope: Information on the numbers and location of such housing, and the extent to which it has been the subject of grant aid, is not available. From next April any privately owned housing over 10 years old could be eligible for renovation grant aid: we have no plans for further changes.

Nitrates

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what powers his Department have vested in the National Rivers Authority to monitor and control nitrate run-off from farmland into rivers.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Under section 112 and schedule 11 of the Water Act 1989, the National Rivers Authority has the power to propose that certain areas of land be designated as nitrate sensitive areas (NSAs) where it considers that the entry of nitrate into controlled waters as a result of the use of land for agricultural purposes should be prevented or controlled. In addition, section 106 of the Water Act 1989 also provides a general power for the National Rivers Authority to monitor pollution in controlled waters.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who will represent his Department at the EC Council of Environment Ministers meetings on 22 March and 7 June; and what the agenda will be for both meetings.

Mr. Chris Patten: Subject to parliamentary commitments, I shall represent the United Kingdom at the next two Environment Councils. The Irish Presidency has not yet confirmed the agenda for the meetings on 22 March and 7 June.

Homelessness

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information his Department has gathered regarding the percentage of homeless people who *(a)* have no home or family to go back to, *(b)* were forced to leave home by an adult member of the family, *(c)* left home after being abused by another member of the family and *(d)* could go safely back to their families; and what use he makes of this information in shaping his policies.

Mr. Chope: Local authorities in England report the number of households for whom they accept responsibility to secure accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 Housing Act in a summary quarterly return. They provide a breakdown of these by immediate reasons for homelessness. The categories covered include "Parents, relatives or friends no longer able or willing to accommodate"; more detailed information is not available centrally. My Department has commissioned a programme of research on homelessness and the findings were considered carefully, together with the regular statistics, as part of the recently completed review of homelessness legislation.

For information about Wales and Scotland, I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and Scotland.

Tyneside Enterprise Zone

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the present termination date of the Tyneside enterprise zone.

Mr. Moynihan: The Tyneside enterprise zone was designated on 25 August 1981 to last for 10 years from that date.

Pollution Control

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what responses he has received to his consultation document on cost recovery charging for Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution's implementation of integrated pollution control; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: I received responses from 53 organisations and individuals. A list of these has been placed in the Library of the House. Copies of individual responses are available through the Library.

Respondents generally agreed the suggested basic structure of an initial charge for each application for an IPC authorisation and an annual charge thereafter. Respondents underlined that the system should be as simple and practicable as possible.

Respondents' comments have led us to reconsider the proposals in the consultation document for differential charges for different categories of authorisations. We now propose that there will be one flat rate initial charge per specified component of a process for each application for an authorisation.

There will also be a flat rate once-and-for-all charge for subsequent substantial changes in either the firm's operations or in pollution standards which require a fresh authorisation to be drawn up. There will be no charge for non-substantial changes that do not necessitate a fresh authorisation. There will be a lower flat rate charge in the case of the conversion of an existing statutory approval into an IPC authorisation. There will be an annual charge per component of an authorised process to cover costs of inspection, monitoring and enforcement.

This system, based on the number of components for a process, is simple, whilst also relating firms' charge payments to their scale of operations and Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution's costs of regulation. Larger and more complex installations involve a larger number of components. For example, a steel works will typically involve 20 or more components, whereas a metal plating works may involve only one component and will pay correspondingly smaller charges.

Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution will monitor its resources employed in dealing with different categories of authorisation to check for anomalies. The structure and level of the charges will then be reviewed in the light of experience. We will consider further developments as necessary, including the merits and practicalities of individual billing, which some respondents to the consultation paper favoured.

The charging system for IPC will be compatible with other charging systems, notably HMIP's charges under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960 and those for the NRA. There will be a broadly compatible charging scheme in respect of the new local authority air pollution controls under part I of the Environmental Protection Bill.

These proposals will cover operations in England and Wales. Comparable proposals are being considered for pollution controls in Scotland. Legislation for introducing integrated pollution control and a related charging system in Northern Ireland is being considered.

My officials will be consulting with industry and other interested parties as they work up the details of the charging scheme, with a view to its introduction in April 1991.

This new charging system will underline the Government's commitment to the principle that the polluter pays.

Urban Programme

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to improve the management of the urban programme.

Mr. Moynihan: My Department has today issued a consultation paper to the local authority associations asking for their comments on our proposals for improving the operation of the urban programme management initiative. These proposals, most of which build on the existing best practices of the DOE and local authorities involved, are intended to maximise the impact of the resources dedicated to the urban programme by ensuring that inner area programmes are efficiently prepared, approved and delivered. I have laid a copy of this consultation paper in the Library of the House.

Cash Limits

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any changes to announce to his Department's cash limits for 1989-90.

Mr. Chris Patten: Yes. I propose the following changes subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates.

The non-voted cash limit DOE/HCI (capital expenditure by the Housing Corporation) will be increased by £120,000,000 from £694,250,000 to £814,250,000. The capital resources available to the Housing Corporation in 1990-91 will be reduced correspondingly by £120,000,000 from £1,105,500,000 (as announced in the Autumn Statement) to £985,500,000. This reflects a greater speeding up of housing schemes by housing associations than had previously been forecast. It is not expected to affect the total of resources available and houses provided over the two years taken together. The increase in 1989-90 provision will be charged to the Reserve.

The cash limit for class X, vote 2 (Central Environmental Services, etc) will be increased by £3,813,000 from £312,597,000 to £316,410,000 to cover increased grant in aid of £3,943,000 to the National Rivers Authority to carry out capital works inherited from the former water authorities. This increase will be fully offset by a reduction in the exit external financing limit of the former authorities and minor savings within the vote.

There will be a token Supplementary Estimate for class X, vote 5 (Department of Environment: administration) and the running cost limit for my Department will be increased by £6,580,000 from £162,154,000 to £168,734,000 which reflects increased expenditure on additional staff and consultancy work and the recent transfer of inner cities work from the Cabinet Office and the Department of Trade and Industry to my Department.

There will also be a token Supplementary Estimate for class X, vote 9 (Sale of shares in the water holding companies, etc). There will be a further announcement soon to Parliament giving details of the costs of water privatisation.

The non-voted cash limit DOE/UA1 (Urban aid and derelict land) will be reduced by £250,000 from £723,254,000 to £723,004,000 to cover a transfer from my Department to the Department of Transport to meet half the cost of a £500,000 grant to Thames Line plc. A matching increase will be made to the Department of Transport's cash limit for class VIII, vote 2.

The cash limit for class IX, vote 2 (Miscellaneous housing administration and grants) will be reduced by £1,000,000 from £79,417,000 to £78,417,000 reflecting reduced forecast expenditure on housing and construction research.

North Sea

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the quality of marine life and water in the North sea, what proposals he has for their improvement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 26 January 1990]:* A full quality status report on the North sea was prepared for the second North sea conference held in 1987. As a result of a United Kingdom initiative at that conference, a North sea task force was established to co-ordinate North sea research, identify gaps in knowledge and prepare an updated and improved quality status report for the fourth conference which is expected to be held in 1995. Work on this is under way and in the meantime an update of scientific material will be submitted to the third North sea conference in March 1990, together with reports from the task force on sensitive issues such as seals and algal blooms.

The Department of the Environment is co-ordinating the United Kingdom's input to the task force together with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland and the National Rivers Authority. Additional research is being undertaken on a range of topics including fish disease, seabird breeding failures, the seal epidemic, the role of nutrients and transport of contaminants; and there is a special Anglo-French study of the English channel.

I am confident that the third North sea conference to be held in March this year, primarily to review the work undertaken by member states in implementing the recommendations of the second conference, will also generate valuable new measures to improve protection of the North sea.

Eastbourne Water Company

Mr. Gow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with the Eastbourne Water Company about the level of its charges for the year ending 31 March 1991; and whether he will make it his policy to consult the hon. Member for Eastbourne before he decides whether to instruct the company to abate its proposed charges.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 26 January 1990]:* The Department's officials have had three meetings and detailed correspondence with the Eastbourne Water Company on this matter. Under the provisions of the Water Act 1989, the limits on charges must be set by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State at a level which enables each company to finance its functions but ensures that the interests of customers are properly safeguarded. There is no formal process of consultation with right hon. and hon. Members, but I am available to discuss the issues with those who wish to do so and would welcome a visit from the hon. Member for Eastbourne.

Animal Imports

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to the report of the Wildlife Trade Monitoring Unit in relation to the shortage of expertise to identify suspect species being imported contrary to CITES regulations.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* When the WTMU report was published, we had already started work on the establishment of a panel of consultant expert identifiers to assist the Department's wildlife inspectorate, Her Majesty's Customs and Excise or the police with the identification of wildlife species. The wide range of expertise already available within the Department's wildlife inspectorate will be further extended by the establishment of the panel.

Non-smokers

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what provisions are being made in all the offices and other places under his Department's control for the convenience and comfort of non-smokers; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy for non-smokers.

Mr. Chris Patten *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* My Department's policy is to respond to the wishes of staff in developing policies on smoking in the offices and buildings which it administers and to prohibit smoking in places where it could be a safety hazard. With this in mind consultations are in hand to establish an agreement on the designation of "no smoking" areas within office buildings where this is wanted by staff and in individual offices where this is the choice of staff.

Sulphur Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are his most up-to-date estimates of the reductions in the level of sulphur dioxide emissions from Britain's electricity generating plant by the year 1995, 2000 and 2003.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* The Government have agreed to the European Community directive on large combustion plants. It commits us to reducing sulphur dioxide emissions from existing plants of this type, which includes electricity generating plants, by 20 per cent. by 1993, 40 per cent. by 1998 and 60 per cent. by 2003 from their 1980 base line. The details of the contributions to this reduction from different sectors of industry have yet to be decided.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average level of poll tax for households in Liverpool.

Mr. Chope: The information requested is not available.

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the 1990-91 revenue support grant entitlement per head of population, before safety net adjustments, for each borough and district council in Kent in descending order of magnitude.

Mr. David Hunt *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* The information requested is set out in the table. For the purpose of this reply the population figures used are those for the relevant population of each council.

1990-91 revenue support grant entitlement per head of population, before safety net adjustments

Council	*£*
Thanet	206·9
Rochester Upon Medway	205·8
Gillingham	199·3
Dover	195·5
Shepway	194·7
Canterbury	192·8
Gravesham	192·6
Ashford	190·6
Swale	190·6
Maidstone	188·4
Tunbridge Wells	188·4
Dartford	184·5
Tonbridge and Malling	176·4
Sevenoaks	173·2

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 31 January 1990

ENERGY

Electricity Supply Industry

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his Department's estimate as to the tonnage of limestone required per year if the limestone-gypsum process of flue gas desulphurisation were to be used on 12,000 MW of electricity generating capacity.

Mr. Baldry: I am advised by the CEGB that the estimated annual limestone requirement for a 2,000 MW power station is 300,000 tonnes. On this basis a 12,000 MW programme would be likely to require the purchase of around 1,800,000 tonnes of limestone annually.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what percentage of the annual output of sulphur dioxide would be stopped from being discharged if 12,000 MW of generating capacity were fitted with flue gas desulphurisation equipment.

Mr. Baldry: Flue gas desulphurisation equipment can remove up to 90 per cent. of a power station's annual emissions of sulphur dioxide. The actual percentage of overall annual output abated would depend on the operating characteristics of the stations to which the equipment was fitted, including the sulphur content of the coal burnt.

Natural Gas (Water Removal)

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) how many installations on the United Kingdom continental shelf use triethylene glycol as a part of the process of water removal from natural gas; and how many of these installations use cold vent stripper gas;

(2) how many offshore installations on the United Kingdom continental shelf use the DRIZO process of water removal from natural gas; and what other methods of water removal are currently in use on offshore installations.

Mr. Peter Morrison: This information is not held within the Department. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what steps have been taken by his Department, under its obligations under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, to monitor the effect of triethylene glycol in water removal processes from natural gas.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Primary responsibility for safety of persons on offshore installations rests with the operator. My inspectors, in carrying out inspections of installations, monitor all aspects of safety including employers' responsibilities under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Mineral Workings (Offshore Installations) Act 1971.

Offshore Installations (Discharges)

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many prosecutions under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act he has initiated against operators of offshore installations on the United Kingdom continental shelf for the discharge of unsafe quantities of benzene and toluene into the atmosphere.

Mr. Peter Morrison: None.

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what studies have been undertaken by him into the exposure of offshore workers to benzene and toluene, the effects on the health of workers of such exposure, and into the present and future hazard such exposure presents to the health of offshore workers;

(2) whether he has made any assessment of the carcinogenic properties of benzene and toluene; and what steps he has taken to prevent the release of benzene and toluene into the atmosphere on oil and gas installations on the United Kingdom continental shelf.

Mr. Peter Morrison: It is the responsibility of the operator to ensure that all reasonably practicable precautions have been taken against any danger to which persons on an offshore installation may be exposed by the use of any dangerous substance.

There is a wide range of information available on these matters, which are not exclusive to the offshore industry. In particular, the Health and Safety Commission's Advisory Committee on Toxic Substances has considered the effects of both benzene and toluene on workers generally. Additionally, a study has been undertaken by this Department of the hazards of contaminants in diving breathing gases and in decompression systems. A follow-up study set out safe exposure limits for divers in decompression on a wide range of contaminants, including benzene and toluene. A survey has been undertaken of methods of accurately sampling gas contaminants in hyperbaric chambers.

Central Electricity Generating Board

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will call for a report from the Central Electricity Generating Board as to how much it has paid British Nuclear Fuels plc for *(a)* reprocessing and *(b)* decommissioning for each year from 1985 to 1989.

Mr. Baldry: This is a commercial matter for the CEGB. I have therefore asked the chairman to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Nuclear Power

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will provide a breakdown of his current assessment of total fuel cycle cost for nuclear power per kilowatt hour including the cost of uranium, reprocessing, enrichment, where applicable, and waste disposal.

Mr. Baldry: This is a commercial matter for the nuclear industry.

Gas-fired Power Stations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what assessments he made of the effect of methane leakages associated with gas-fired power stations, before consents were granted for the projects listed in his answer of 8 January, *Official Report*, column 475.

Mr. Wakeham: Environmental considerations are taken into account when considering gas burn consent proposals. Our assessment in general is that methane leakages from the high pressure distribution system are very low; and new gas-fired generation plant is not expected to add to the overall emissions of methane from the United Kingdom system.

Electricity Generation

Mr. Frank Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, what is his estimate of the current maximum electricity generating capacity in England and Wales in the public and private sectors, respectively; and what is his estimate for each year up to 1995-96.

Mr. Wakeham: The declared net capacity of (commissioned) generating plant in England and Wales is 55.1 GW in the public sector; private generating capacity for Great Britain as a whole is 3.7 GW. Capacity in subsequent years is a matter for future electricity generating companies.

Mine Closures

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will give the closure dates of Danygraid mine, Nant Medlyn mine, Darren mine (West Glamorgan), Hall of Auchinross mine (Ayrshire), Wrytree drift mine and Robin Rock mine (Northumberland).

Mr. Wakeham: The Department does not have this information. I have therefore asked the chairman of British Coal to write to the hon. Member.

NHS Ambulance Staff

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what National Health Service ambulance staff based in South Yorkshire have participated in any exercises of local emergency plans at nuclear installations; from which stations staff came; and what was the exercise location in each case;

(2) what specialist equipment, including personal dosimeters, radial survey meters and decontamination meters are available for National Health Service ambulance staff in South Yorkshire; and what specialist training they have received.

Mr. Freeman: I have been asked to reply.

Equipment for Health Service staff and emergency planning is a matter for health authorities. I suggest the hon. Member contacts the chairman of Trent regional health authority for the information he seeks.

WALES

Medical Laboratory Scientific Officers

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many medical laboratory scientific officers have been newly appointed to each health authority in Wales in each year since 1982.

Mr. Grist: Information on the number of newly appointed medical laboratory scientific officers is not available centrally. However, information on staff in post is shown in the following table:

Medical laboratory scientific officers in post as at 30 September (whole-time equivalents)

	1982	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	[1] *1989*
Clwyd	88·9	90·9	87·1	97·8	96·6	99·5	103·6	94·1
East Dyfed	76·6	79·1	77·8	77·0	80·5	81·4	82·2	70·4
Gwent	106·2	110·9	109·7	112·8	110·2	118·1	113·4	111·5
Gwynedd	47·0	54·0	61·0	62·0	64·9	62·0	58·0	59·0
Mid Glamorgan	138·1	141·5	138·0	154·5	155·7	159·0	159·2	141·2
Pembrokeshire	30·1	30·7	30·8	32·5	31·0	31·0	30·9	28·6
Powys	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
South Glamorgan	275·9	281·0	279·5	283·0	280·0	290·7	293·6	271·9
West Glamorgan	97·0	97·0	95·0	102·8	105·5	108·1	103·7	104·9

[1] Those staff previously graded as junior medical laboratory scientific officers who were not following a course of training leading to state registration have been regraded to the appropriate laboratory support grade and have not been included in these figures.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Salaries

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Lord President of the Council what information he possesses on comparable parliamentary salaries, exclusive of allowances in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* France, *(c)* Germany, *(d)* Australia and *(e)* the United States of America, for the latest published figures available.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The information requested is as follows:

Country	*Salary (per annum)*
United Kingdom Member of the House of Commons	£26,701. All Taxable
France Deputy in the National Assembly	FFr 424,111 (£44,776) of which 45 per cent., FFr 190,850 (£20,149), is tax-free
Federal German Republic Member of the Bundestag	DM 110,652 (£39,693). All taxable
Australia Federal Member of the House of Representatives	A$ 55,000 (£25,439). All taxable

Country	*Salary (per annum)*
United States of America Member of the House of Representatives	[1]US$ 89,500 (£54,039). All taxable

[1] Congressmen's salaries have not been increased since 1988.

Note: The sterling figures calculated using rates of exchange at the close of business on 24 January 1990.

Office Accommodation

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many personal offices are available and assigned to hon. Members of Parliament *(a)* within the Houses of Parliament, *(b)* within the Norman Shaw building and *(c)* elsewhere.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Rooms are available and allocated for right hon. and hon. Members' personal use as follows:

	Number
(a) Palace of Westminster	163
(b) Norman Shaw North and Norman Shaw South	129
(c) St. Stephen's House, 3 Dean's Yard, 2 The Abbey Garden and 7 Old Palace Yard	42

Secretarial and Research Allowances

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Lord President of the Council what is the level of secretarial and research allowance available to a Member of (i) the United Kingdom Parliament, (ii) the United States Congress and (iii) the Federal Republic of Germany Bundestag.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Members of the House of Commons are eligible to claim the office costs allowance for general office expenses and secretarial and research assistance up to a maximum of £24,903 per annum, with an additional maximum of £2,490 (10 per cent.) provided for employer pension contributions of any staff employed. I will provide the additional information requested as soon as possible.

Hong Kong

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Lord President of the Council, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Northampton, North, of 25 January, *Official Report*, column 1054, if he will give the *Hansard* reference for the answer to which he referred.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The clarity and distinction to which I intended to refer was of course that of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on 17 January at columns 291-304.

Televising of Proceedings

Mr. Page: To ask the Lord President of the Council what consideration the Select Committee on Televising of Proceedings of the House has given to changes in the rules of coverage for the televising experiment.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: At its meeting on 29 January, the Select Committee on Televising of Proceedings of the House considered a number of representations from the broadcasters for experimental modifications to the rules of coverage (the guidelines to the television director as to the types of shots which may or may not be used). On this basis, the following changes to the rules set out in the Committee's first report of Session 1988-89 have been approved.

1. *Reaction Shots*

The rule which permits a reaction shot of a Member who has been referred to will be interpreted less strictly so that a specific mention of the Member's constituency, or in the case of a Minister, his office, will not be necessary; so long as it is clear to the director which member is being referred to, a reaction shot will be permitted. As under the existing rules, this change will not apply at Question Time or during ministerial statements and subsequent questioning.

2. *Group Shots*

A group shot—mid way between the standard head and shoulders shot and the wide-angle shot—will be permitted; such shots may be used either for the purposes of showing the reaction of a group of Members or in order to establish the geography of a particular part of the Chamber. This shot will be available to the director at any time, including Question Time and during ministerial statements and subsequent questioning.

3. *Second Feed of Wide-Angle Shot*

A second feed, showing a continuous single wide-angle shot from the end of the Chamber, will be provided as soon as the necessary technical facilities are available. This feed may be used only for editing purposes; it may *not* be used for separate live transmission, or for mixing electronically with the main feed for live transmission. The second feed will be time-coded, and extracts from it may only be employed in their correct chronological sequence within the proceedings of the House.

4. *Zoom Shots*

The Committee has also decided that the director should be encouraged to make appropriate use of his ability, under the existing rules, to zoom in on a Member speaking or to zoom out to show the same Member in relation to colleagues in his or her vicinity.

All these changes, including the supply of the second feed, will be subject to the existing rules relating to the coverage of incidents of disorder. During such periods when the director is required to focus on Mr. Speaker, the second feed will be withdrawn.

In deciding to approve all these changes, the Committee has been particularly swayed by the argument that the House has agreed to an experiment and that the only way of establishing whether certain shots are appropriate is to see them in operation. The House will, of course, be the final judge when it considers the Committee's detailed Report on the outcome of the experiment.

It is hoped that these revised guidelines for the television director will be brought into effect on Thursday 1 February. Although no time limit has been set at this stage on the duration of the changes, the Select Committee will monitor very closely their impact on the way in which the House's proceedings are covered and will review their operation as the experiment continues. As the Committee's report made clear, further modifications

during the course of the experiment, whether in the direction of greater latitude or increased strictness, cannot be ruled out.

The report also stipulated that the rules of coverage for the Chamber (and, by implication, any changes in the rules)

"should apply *mutatis mutandis* to Committees".

I should stress, however, that there is no question at this stage of a second feed from Committees.

Officers of the House (Salaries)

Mr. Dykes: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will give figures, grades, titles and ranks for all officers of the House whose salaries are *(a)* higher and *(b)* lower than those of hon. Members.

Mr. Beith: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir. G. Finsberg) on 16 November 1989 at columns 374-77.

House of Commons Library

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, how many professional librarians in the Library are *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time.

Mr. Beith: Of the 32 professional librarian posts in the Library, 30 are filled by full-time staff. Four part-time staff share the remaining two posts.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, how many researchers in the Library are *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time.

Mr. Beith: There are 27 research posts in the Library. Of these, 24 are filled by full-time staff. Six part-time staff share the remaining three posts.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, how many researchers in the Library are currently working in the fields of defence and foreign affairs.

Mr. Beith: Four full-time research staff (one of whom specialises in defence matters) currently work in these areas. Certain aspects of defence and foreign affairs—for example, those inquiries involving statistical and economic expertise—are handled by research staff in other sections of the Library.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what is the current annual budget of the Library; and how much is allocated to *(a)* research activities and *(b)* librarian activities.

Mr. Beith: The current annual budget of the Library Department, which includes the Vote Office as well as the parliamentary and research divisions, stands at £3,241,000. This figure covers staff costs, the cost of purchase, binding and repair of books, and other Library services. The Library runs an integrated service, and it is therefore not practicable to separate the costs of research activities from those of librarian activities.

WALES

Midwives

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many staff midwives were in post on 30 September in each health authority in Wales in 1985, 1986, 1987 and 1988.

Mr. Grist: Information is available centrally only on the total staff in post for all nursing and midwifery staff. Currently, breakdowns of these figures into occupation category are not considered reliable.

Medical and Dental Staff

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the number of medical and dental staff whole-time equivalents in Wales in each year between 1978 and the latest available year, by health authority.

Mr. Grist: The information requested is shown in the following table:

Medical and Dental Staff (W.T.E.)

	1978	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*
Clwyd	244	246	258	268	273	283	277	286	287	275	283
East Dyfed	199	216	222	225	173	179	186	191	197	196	201
Pembrokeshire					60	71	66	73	70	69	75
Gwent	298	318	321	330	338	342	340	340	345	360	365
Gwynedd	123	133	139	147	152	151	164	164	165	162	161
Mid Glamorgan	324	343	368	373	379	379	392	384	392	403	420
Powys	34	34	35	34	33	35	34	35	32	33	37
South Glamorgan	588	603	599	634	644	660	653	675	674	648	682
West Glamorgan	283	288	292	297	301	304	308	317	308	325	321

Cardiac Surgery

Mr. Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will make a statement on the availability of coronary bypass surgery facilities in West Glamorgan;

(2) whether he will initiate policies to improve the development of cardiac surgery services in south-west Wales.

Mr. Grist: Cardiac surgery facilities are presently available to patients from West Glamorgan at the regional cardiac unit at the University hospital of Wales, Cardiff. Our policies for the improvement of cardiac services, based on the report of the cardiology committee of the Royal College of Physicians, were announced in July 1989. They include the development of the regional unit, which is presently in hand, and the appraisal of options for a second unit in south Wales, which will commence shortly.

Creches

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether creche facilities are provided for working mothers employed in his Department; in what locations; and if they have to make a contribution to this service.

Mr. Grist: The Department does not currently provide creche facilities for its staff. It is looking at the possibility in conjunction with other Government Departments in Cardiff.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his letter of 12 January 1990 to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside on employment in Wales, if he will state in the *Official Report (a)* total civilian work force in employment in Wales, and sub-divided by males and females, in (i) March 1979, (ii) June 1979, (iii) September 1979 and (iv) December 1979; *(b)* the actual and percentage quarterly changes for each in *(a)*; the actual and percentage quarterly change between March 1980 and June 1980 and *(d)* the actual and percentage annual change for each in *(a)*.

Mr. Peter Walker: The information requested is shown in the following tables:

Table 1
Civilian Workforce in Employment in Wales Thousands, Unadjusted

	Males	*Females*	*Total*
March 1979	710·9	429·3	1,140·2
June 1979	716·2	440·7	1,156·9
September 1979	719·9	439·7	1,159·6
December 1979	712·0	442·8	1,154·8

Table 2
Civilian Workforce in Employment in Wales Quarterly Changes, Thousands, Unadjusted

	Actual	*per cent.*	*Actual*	*per cent.*	*Actual*	*per cent.*
March 1979	−2·7	−0·4	−3·6	−0·8	−6·3	−0·5
June 1979	5·3	0·7	11·4	2·7	16·7	1·5
September 1979	3·7	0·5	−1·0	−0·2	2·7	0·2
December 1979	−7·9	−1·1	3·1	0·7	−4·8	−0·4
Change between March 1980 and June 1980	−10·0	−1·4	2·0	0·5	−8·0	−0·7

Table 3
Civilian Workforce in Employment in Wales Annual Changes, Thousands, Unadjusted

	Males		*Females*		*Total*	
	Actual	*per cent.*	*Actual*	*per cent.*	*Actual*	*per cent.*
March 1979			Data not available			
June 1979	0·7	0·1	14·5	3·4	15·3	1·3
September 1979	2·8	0·4	9·9	2·3	12·7	1·1
December 1979	−1·6	−0·2	9·9	2·3	8·3	0·7

Storm Damage

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to make special financial allocations to Welsh local authorities to assist them in tackling the storm damage of 25 January; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: I announced on Friday 26 January that special financial assistance under the Bellwin scheme would be available to local authorities in Wales which would otherwise suffer an undue financial burden because of the effects of the severe weather on 25 January. The Welsh Office will shortly be writing to all local authorities with full details of how the scheme will apply in Wales.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the estimated extent of damage in Wales concerning the 25 January storm; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: It is still too early to quantify the cost of damage for Wales as a whole.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Mr. Kevin Taylor

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Attorney-General whether he will make a statement on the discontinuance of the trial against Mr. Kevin Taylor.

The Attorney-General: No.

Queen's Counsel

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Attorney-General how many Queen's counsel there are at the English Bar; and, of these, how many are *(a)* men, *(b)* women, *(c)* black and *(d)* Asian.

The Attorney-General: As at 1 October 1989, there were 640 Queen's counsel at the English Bar, of whom 610 were men and 30 were women. Neither the Bar Council nor the Lord Chancellor's Department keeps records of the ethnic origin of Queen's counsel, but it is understood that there are three black and three Asian silks.

Serious Fraud Office

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Attorney-General whether he proposes any changes to the Serious Fraud Office's cash and running cost limits for 1989-90.

The Attorney-General: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the cash limit for class XI, vote 12 will be increased by £50,000 from £5,764,000 to £5,814,000. Within this total the running costs limit of the Department will increase by £50,000 from £5,372,000 to £5,422,000. This increase will enable the Serious Fraud Office to meet extra costs arising from its casework. The increase will be charged to the reserve.

Management Consultants

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Attorney-General (1) if he will list any research reports or policy analyses received from outside management consultants after January 1985, but commissioned by his Department before that date, and the date of completion and cost of each contract;

(2) if he will list the contracts his Department has given to outside management consultants in policy areas concerning his Department since January 1985, and the date of completion and cost of each contract.

The Attorney-General: The legal secretariat to the Law Officers, the Treasury Solicitor's Department and the Serious Fraud Office have not received such research reports or policy analyses and have not given contracts to outside management consultants in policy areas. The Crown prosecution service has given the following contracts to outside consultants, largely in management areas, since the service was created in 1986:

Strategic planning and budgeting study by Hay Management Consultants, completed April 1987, cost £37,000;

Telecommunications strategy study by Logica, completed January 1987, cost £20,000;

Internal communication study by Charles Barker Communications, completed December 1987, cost £29,000;

Information study, asistance from the Mindworks Partnership, completed March 1989, cost £40,000;

Staffing model feasibility study by P. A. Management Consultants, completed December 1988, cost £37,000;

Staffing model development by P. A. Management Consultants, completed January 1990, cost £135,000;

Evaluation of the use of information technology to present evidence in court by the human science and advanced technology research centre, Loughborough university, for completion February 1990, cost £15,000.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Ethiopia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what action the Government are taking to persuade the Ethiopian Government to allow church workers to provide famine relief in Tigray;

(2) what aid the Government intend to provide to the Joint Relief Partnership of church agencies to provide famine relief in rebel-controlled areas of Ethiopia.

Mrs. Chalker: The Government very much welcome the announcement on 18 January of agreement between the Ethiopian Government's relief agency and the Joint Relief Partnership (JRP) of local church groups on arrangements for the distribution of relief supplies within Tigray. A positive response from the rebel side is vital, and we have been in touch with their representatives here to this end. The Ethiopian Government meanwhile issued a fresh appeal for food aid on 26 January, taking account of the needs of Tigray. I have approved an immediate response to this appeal of 10,000 tonnes of wheat flour (equivalent to 13,700 tonnes of wheat) to be channelled through British NGOs in support of this JRP operation. The cost of this will be about £2·6 million. I have also approved a further £1 million of emergency aid. Much of this will be used to support JRP operations in Tigray and Eritrea. This new aid is in addition to commitments totalling £18·5 million in 1989.

Cambodia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what decision has been made in response to a request from Medical and Scientific Aid for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, for a grant to send oral rehydration sachets to Cambodia.

Mrs. Chalker: Supplies for oral rehydration treatment are already available in south-east Asia. It would not be cost effective to supply them from the United Kingdom as proposed. We are ready to consider proposals from NGOs for primary health care activities in Cambodia under the joint funding scheme.

Foreign Aid

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table or chart showing for the last five years *(a)* the flows of aid from the United Kingdom to (i) South America, (ii) Africa and (iii) Asia and the middle east and *(b)* the proportions in each case of this aid tied to trade deals involving United Kingdom companies.

Mrs. Chalker: The answer is as follows:

United Kingdom gross bilateral aid 1984-88 (£,000)

		Of which ATP[1]	*Percentage of ATP to gross aid*
South America			
1984	17,755	6,427	36·2
1985	19,591	3,713	19·0
1986	17,313	453	2·6
1987	16,301	85	0·5
1988	14,725	434	2·9
Africa			
1984	268,041	8,002	3·0
1985	315,397	3,547	1·1
1986	284,723	8,761	3·1
1987	304,650	10,534	3·5
1988	422,030	10,422	2·5
Asia and Middle East			
1984	306,226	37,090	12·1
1985	255,256	31,328	12·3
1986	315,577	68,973	21·9
1987	216,053	17,425	8·1
1988	298,499	42,838	14·4

[1] Expenditure under the Aid and Trade Provision.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official*

Report a table showing in United States dollars for each year since 1980 and for 1989 to the latest available date, the annual amounts allocated to Third-world development aid by *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the EEC, including the United Kingdom, *(c)* the EEC, excluding the United Kingdom, *(d)* the United States of America, *(e)* Japan and *(f)* Australia and New Zealand, and the proportions these amounts represent of each nation's gross national product.

Mrs. Chalker: This information is set out in the table. Figures for 1989 are not yet available. The figures for the EC relate to those EC countries which are members of the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD:

Disbursements of Net Official Development Assistance 1980-88

	United Kingdom (a)		*EEC Countries*[1] *(Including United Kingdom)* (b)		*EEC Countries*[1] *(Excluding United Kingdom)* (c)		*USA* (d)		*Japan* (e)		*Australia and New Zealand* (f)	
	$ million	*Per cent. GNP*	*$ million*	*Per cent. GNP*	*$ million*	*Per cent. GNP*	*$ million*	*Per cent. GNP*	*$ million*	*Per cent. GNP*	*$ million*	*Per cent. GNP*
1980	1,854	0·35	12,972	0·47	11,118	0·50	7,138	0·27	3,353	0·32	739	0·46
1981	2,192	0·43	12,704	0·53	10,512	0·56	5,782	0·19	3,171	0·28	718	0·40
1982	1,800	0·37	12,230	0·53	10,430	0·57	8,202	0·27	3,023	0·28	947	0·52
1983	1,610	0·35	11,537	0·51	9,927	0·55	8,081	0·24	3,761	0·32	814	0·46
1984	1,429	0·33	11,330	0·51	9,901	0·55	8,711	0·24	4,319	0·34	832	0·43
1985	1,530	0·33	11,620	0·51	10,090	0·55	9,403	0·24	3,797	0·29	803	0·46
1986	1,737	0·31	16,122	0·51	14,385	0·55	9,564	0·23	5,634	0·29	827	0·44
1987	1,871	0·28	19,093	0·49	17,222	0·53	8,945	0·20	7,342	0·31	714	0·32
1988	2,645	0·32	21,231	0·49	18,586	0·53	10,141	0·21	9,134	0·32	1,206	0·44

[1] EEC Countries which are members of DAC:—Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland*, Italy, Netherlands, United Kingdom.
* Ireland not included in 1980 and 1981 as figures not available.

Eastern Europe

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Government will include aid to eastern Europe when calculating the percentage of gross national product spent on aid for figures collected by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Assistance Committee.

Mrs. Chalker: The reporting of aid to eastern Europe is currently under discussion in the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD.

Yanomami Indians

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government are taking to make known to the Government of Brazil the concern in Britain about the treatment of the Yanomami indians.

Mrs. Chalker: I believe the Government's views about the treatment of indigenous minority groups are well known to other Governments, including Brazil. We shall take all suitable opportunities to express our legitimate concern about the plight of the Yanomami indians. However, we must respect the rights of sovereign countries to conduct their own affairs in accordance with their laws. In this case, we must await the outcome of the due legal processes in Brazil.

I hope that the environmental technical co-operation programme now being developed, in the context of the memorandum of understanding signed in Brasilia last July by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), will enable us to contribute directly or indirectly to solving some of these problems. I am ready to consider proposals from relevant organisations for medical or other humanitarian assistance for the Yanomami. None has so far been received, but proposals will be welcomed.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Creches

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list by location where creche facilities are provided for working mothers employed in his Department; and if they have to make any payment for this service.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Duchy of Lancaster does not provide creche facilities for working mothers.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disabled People

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what eligibility criteria he used in estimating in paragraph 4.13 of "The Way Ahead" that 150,000 people would benefit from the proposed mobility component.

Mr. Scott: It is assumed that the lower level of the mobility component will be awarded to people aged between five and 65 at the time of their claim who, by virtue of a physical or a mental disability, are not

independently mobile. Precise details of the eligibility criteria will be considered in working up proposals for the disability allowance.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consideration was given in the Government's proposals for disability benefits to the introduction of an allowance for disabled people for costs not arising from mobility or attendance needs but which are nevertheless associated with a person's disability; and what were the reasons for rejecting it.

Mr. Scott: In re-examining benefits which help with the extra costs of disability we considered ways in which these benefits might be restructured, including a range of points-based assessment schemes which took into account disabilities other than locomotion and self care. When related to existing benefit entitlements these produced widespread changes in people's entitlements to benefit, with unacceptably high numbers of losers. Such a scheme would also involve considerable administrative complexity.

The proposed disability allowance builds on the existing benefits. As paragraph 4.2 of "The Way Ahead" Cm. 917 explained, the surveys of disability carried out by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys suggest that the existing benefits are well directed towards the most common of the more costly disabilities. Equally important, the benefits provide help to people with other disabilities which are frequently combined with locomotion or self-care disabilities.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what eligibility criteria he used to estimate in paragraph 4.12 of "The Way Ahead" that 140,000 people would benefit from the proposed care component.

Mr. Scott: It is assumed that the lower level of the care component will be awarded to people aged 65 or under at the time of their claim who need repeated help in connection with their bodily functions but who need that help less frequently than those who currently qualify for attendance allowance. Precise details of the eligibility criteria will be considered in working up proposals for the disability allowance.

National Insurance Fund

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the surplus or deficit in the national insurance fund for each financial year since 1979; and what is his estimate for the current year and for 1990-91.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information requested is in the table.

	Surplus/deficit of fund income against expenditure for each year £ billion	*Balance held in the national insurance fund at the end of each year £ billion*
1979-80	+0·54	4·63
1980-81	+0·41	5·04
1981-82	−0·99	4·05
1982-83	−0·03	4·02
1983-84	+0·58	4·60
1984-85	+0·38	4·98
1985-86	+0·31	5·29
1986-87	+0·42	5·71
1987-88	+1·58	7·29
1988-89	+3·08	10·37
1989-90[1]	−0·96	9·41
1990-91[1]	−1·70	7·69

[1] Figures for 1989-90 and 1990-91 are estimates by the Government Actuary.

Creches

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list by location where creche facilities are provided for working mothers employed in his Department; and if they have to make any payment for this service.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: No creche facilities are available at present but there are plans for a nursery to open at our Hertford office in February 1990. This nursery will cater for 10 children under five years of age. Other locations are considering the introduction of nursery facilities and the development of new holiday play schemes. We have already established holiday play schemes in several different parts of the country, often in collaboration with other Government Departments and other local employers. All staff using child care facilities are required to make a financial contribution.

Mobility and Attendance Allowance

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how existing levels of benefit for mobility allowance claimants will be protected.

Mr. Scott: People will qualify for the upper level of the mobility component and the upper two levels of the care component and the upper two levels of the care component on the basis of assessment criteria similar to those currently employed for mobility allowance and attendance allowance respectively. The introduction of the disability allowance will produce only gainers, and we do not envisage any need for transitional protection.

Social Fund

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will give details of the formula by which social fund local office allocations will be calculated for the year 1990-91;

(2) when he expects to announce the local office allocations for the social fund for 1990-91;

(3) whether the additional allocations made to certain local offices for their social fund expenditure in 1989-90 will be taken into account when allocations for 1990-91 are calculated.

Mr. Scott: Individual social fund allocations to local offices for 1990-91 and details of the basis on which they are made will be announced in due course.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what criteria were used to determine which local offices would receive an extra allocation in December for their social fund budgets.

Mr. Scott: The extra allocation was made to those local offices whose budgets had come under exceptional

pressure as a result of high levels of demand. Particular factors taken into account included the extent to which the expenditure of individual offices exceeded their expenditure profiles, and changes in the levels of priority they were able to meet during the course of the year.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when it is expected that the social fund loans element will achieve a balance between the value of loans paid out and the value of repayments received.

Mr. Scott: It is not envisaged that the loans budget should achieve such a balance.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will take further action to ease the difficulties experienced by those local offices which were not given extra allocations for their social fund budgets in December and which are now experiencing difficulties as great as those that were given extra allocations in managing their budgets.

Mr. Scott: Additional allocations have been made to a further 10 offices bringing the total number of offices helped to 106. We are continuing to monitor the situation closely. A revised list of offices has been placed in the Library today.

State Pensions

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which countries of the European Economic Community have state pension schemes that include *(a)* an earnings-related retirement component, *(b)* an earnings-related component with a widow's pension on death before retirement and *(c)* an earnings-related component with invalidity pension.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer the right hon. Member to the Department's annual publication "Tables of Social Benefit Systems in the European Communities", copies of which are available in the Library.

Benefits (Charitable and Voluntary Payments)

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about the treatment of charitable and voluntary payments in the income-related benefits.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We propose to double to £10 a week the current disregard for charitable and voluntary payments made to people in receipt of an income-related benefit. In addition, we intend to disregard completely any regular charitable or voluntary payment which is intended and used for an item other than certain accommodation costs already met by benefit, food, ordinary clothing or footwear, and household fuel.

Regulations will be introduced shortly to give effect to both these proposals in income support and family credit from April 1990. Housing benefit and community charge benefit regulations will also provide for a £10 a week disregard from April 1990 and for a disregard of regular payments for certain items from October 1990.

These proposals will enable charities, voluntary bodies and relatives to give more help to people without affecting their benefits.

Community Charge

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people who are eligible for a rebate of the community charge will not receive the rebate because it falls under the minimum amount payable; and what is the total sum involved.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 24 January 1990]:* The most recent estimates for Great Britain for 1990-91 suggest that 130,000 benefit units or 170,000 individuals will be eligible for community charge benefit but not receive benefit because it falls under the minimum amount payable. The sum involved is about £1·5 million. These figures compare with current estimates of an expected caseload in Great Britain of some 7·9 million benefit units and 9·75 million individuals, with a total cost to central Government, in terms of community charge benefit, of £1·75 billion.

EMPLOYMENT

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Lee: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what importance he attaches to the involvement of the tourism and hospitality industry in the development of the training and enterprise councils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: It is very much in the interests of the tourism industry to become involved in the new training and enterprise councils so that the councils properly address the issues relevant to that industry. From 1 April regional tourist boards will be given much more Government money to help with this process; the North West tourist board, in particular, is already very active in this regard.

Employment Training

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the average weekly training allowance, including the training premium, for each ET trainee.

Mr. Nicholls: The average weekly training allowance including the training premium is estimated to be around £50 per trainee on employment training.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give for each region and for Great Britain as a whole the number of filled and contracted places in ET in the health and personal social services fields; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: Information about the number of filled and contracted places in employment training is not available broken down into health and personal social services or other occupational categories.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much has been paid by his Department in training bonuses to ET trainees since the start of the programme.

Mr. Nicholls: To the end of December 1989 the Training Agency had paid out £2·2 million in training bonuses.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much has been paid out through the underpinning arrangements to ET managers and agents; and how much has been paid to those organisations to cover redundancy payments, since the start of ET.

Mr. Nicholls: From September 1988 up to and including December 1989, some £1·19 million has been paid to employment training training agents and £31 million to employment training training managers under underpinning arrangements. In the same period £2·7 million has been paid to former community programme managing agents in redundancy payments, for employees in community programme schemes who transferred to employment training and were subsequently made redundant.

Factory Inspectorate

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many enforcement visits it is envisaged will be paid by the factory inspectorate in 1990 in order to enforce (i) the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988, (ii) the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 1989 and (iii) the Electricity at Work Regulations 1989.

Mr. Nicholls: The 1990-91 plans provide for factory inspectors in the Health and Safety Executive's new field operations division to make some 159,000 preventive inspections, at all of which inspectors will consider compliance with the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988, the Noise at Work Regulations 1989 and the Electricity at Work Regulations 1989 where these regulations apply, and take enforcement action where appropriate. Compliance with these regulations may also be considered at visits for other purposes, such as to investigate accidents, complaints and dangerous occurrences.

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many safety cases under regulation 7 of the 1984 CIMAH regulations are awaiting approval or examination by the Health and Safety Executive, by area office; when any backlogs are likely to be cleared; and if it is envisaged that any extra staff will be recruited in 1990-91 in this area of activity.

Mr. Nicholls: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) assesses but does not approve safety reports submitted under regulation 7 of the 1984 Control of Industrial Major Accidents Hazards Regulations (CIMAH). Work has started on assessing all the reports which have been submitted but it is not possible to say when this process will be completed. Information about the current position concerning those reports where completion of the assessment is outstanding could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, the table shows the position in August 1989, the latest date for which information is available, and gives a breakdown by area office.

Total number of reports submitted = 331

Area office	*Number of reports where assessment not completed*
01 South	3
02 South West	—
03 South East	—
05 London North	2
06 London South	2
07 East Anglia	10
08 Northern Home Counties	—
09 East Midlands	4
10 West Midlands	3
11 Wales	21
12 Marches	1
13 North Midlands	6
14 South Yorkshire and Humberside	26
15 West and North Yorkshire	5
16 Greater Manchester	8
17 Merseyside	30
18 North West	5
19 North East	24
20 Scotland East	38
21 Scotland West	3
Total	191

A substantial number of reports was submitted to HSE just before the deadline of 8 July 1989 set by the 1984 regulations despite encouragement to industry to phase their submissions. This has led to a short-term peak in assessment work which was anticipated and is being met from existing resources.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will establish an external inquiry, by a firm of management consultants, into the Health and Safety Executive; and if he is at present satisfied with the current ratio of management to inspection staff.

Mr. Nicholls: No. Under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, responsibility for ensuring the efficient organisation and management of the staff of the Health and Safety Executive lies with the Health and Safety Commission and HSE. My right hon. and learned Friend is satisfied that HSE has in place the systems and expertise needed for this purpose. A detailed account of organisational improvements, and other actions to increase efficiency and effectiveness, will be included in the HSC/E's annual report for 1988-89, to be published on 26 February.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will place in the Library *(a)* the report of the central policy review staff on the Health and Safety Executive and *(b)* the report on the recruitment and retention of specialists in the technology division of the Health and Safety Executive of September 1989.

Mr. Nicholls: The Government have no plans to publish the report of the review carried out by the central policy review staff in 1980 on the cost effectiveness of methods of implementing policy on health and safety at work. I have not received a copy of the report on the recruitment and retention of specialists in the technology division of the Health and Safety Executive. This was commissioned by the executive which I understand is currently considering its recommendations.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the current maximum exposure

limits for (i) ceramic dust, (ii) cotton dust and (iii) dust and fumes in the rubber, steel and foundry work areas; and how many enforcement visits it is envisaged will be paid in 1990 by staff of the Health and Safety Executive.

Mr. Nicholls: There are no maximum exposure limits (MELs) for ceramic dust and cotton dust. The MELs for "rubber fume" and "rubber process dust" are 0·75 mg/m³ and 8 mg/m³ respectively for eight-hour time weighted average reference periods (eight-hour TWAs).

There are no MELs for general airborne emissions in steel and foundry work areas, although some specific processes may give rise to substances for which MELs have been set.

It is not possible to provide a breakdown of the number of visits that will be made during 1990 to each sector of industry.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the total budget of the Health and Safety Executive; and how many Health and Safety Executive employees possess formal purchasing qualifications.

Mr. Nicholls: Gross financial provision to the Health and Safety Executive for 1989-90 is £119 million; of this an estimated £35 million will be spent on the purchase of goods (capital and current), services and general contracts. The Health and Safety Executive's director of purchasing and supply, appointed in February 1989, is a member of the Institute of Purchasing and Supply.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of the chairmen and secretaries of the Health and Safety Commission's advisory committees have any formal professional qualifications in the industries or subjects with which they deal.

Mr. Nicholls: There are currently 18 commission advisory committee chairmen and 19 secretaries; 33 per cent. of all chairmen and 26 per cent. of all secretaries have formal professional qualifications in the industries or subjects with which they deal.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion, by area office, of factory inspectors, excluding principal inspectors, are trainees and if it is the policy of the Health and Safety Executive for trainee inspectors to make their trainee status known when visiting a factory.

Mr. Nicholls: Factory inspector IIs (for their first two years) are designated as trainee inspectors. The number of trainee inspectors, expressed as a percentage of the total number of factory inspectors (excluding principal inspectors), in each Health and Safety Executive area on 1 January 1990 is as follows:

Area	*Trainees as percentage of total*
South West	30·4
South	26·3
South East	12·1
London North	17·0
London South	18·2
East Anglia	18·7
North Home Counties	23·5
East Midlands	25·0
West Midlands	9·1
Wales	29·2
Marches	40·0
North Midlands	30·0
South Yorks and Humberside	26·1
West and North Yorks	17·4
Greater Manchester	25·0
Merseyside	19·0
North West	31·1
North East	27·9
Scotland East	31·1
Scotland West	22·9

Health and Safety Executive inspectors do not normally announce their status or rank during visits.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he is taking to raise substantially the bi-annual recruitment of trainee factory inspectors; and what is the current target for the total number of inspectors.

Mr. Nicholls: Measures taken by the Health and Safety Executive to increase recruitment of trainee factory inspectors include improvement of salaries for inspectors at the basic grade, more effective targeting and advertising of recruitment campaigns, and new procedures to reduce delays between interviews and offers of appointment. The HSE's target is to have 640 factory inspectors by 1 April 1990.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment why the Bootle health and safety office public inquiry point is open for telephone inquiries only between the hours of 10 am. and 3 pm; and if he has any proposals to extend these hours.

Mr. Nicholls: Restricted hours of opening of HSE's public inquiry points at Bootle, Sheffield and London are necessary to allow staff time to gather information and do research to answer inquiries satisfactorily. I understand that the executive has no proposals at present to extend opening hours beyond 10 am to 3 pm.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the current level of job vacancies in Rochdale borough.

Mr. Nicholls: In December 1989 the number of unfilled vacancies at jobcentres in the Rochdale local education authority (the closest approximation to the borough for this data source) was 641. Vacancies at jobcentres do not represent the total number of vacancies in the economy. The latest research shows that nationally only about one third of vacancies are registered at jobcentres.

Tourism

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received for the development of tourism in the north-west of England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: Ministers from my Department have on a number of occasions met representatives from the tourism industry in the north-west, and have received correspondence on a wide range of issues affecting tourism in the area.

Mines (Accidents)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, further to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *721-22*, if he will now publish the equivalent figures for 1988-89.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested will form part of the HSC/E annual report for 1988-89 to be published on 26 February.

Mine Closures

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the closure dates of Danygraid mine, Nant Medlyn mine, Darren mine (West Glamorgan), Hall of Auchinross mine (Ayrshire), Wrytree Drift mine and Robin Rock mine (Northumberland).

Mr. Nicholls: I will write to the hon. Member.

PRIME MINISTER

Privacy and Individual Choice

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister what is the Government's policy on individual privacy and on individual choice as to who, or who may not, hold, use or disclose information that relates to that individual; and whether she will establish a Cabinet Committee to review legislation across the whole range of Government on these issues.

The Prime Minister: The Data Protection Act 1984, introduced by this Government, has greatly extended the safeguards relating to personal information held on computer; and privacy in the context of press activities is currently being examined by a committee under the chairmanship of Mr. David Calcutt QC. There are also sanctions against disclosure or misuse of information in particular circumstances, such as breach of confidence.

The Government subscribe to the conclusion of the Younger committee (1972) that a general right of privacy would be very difficult to define in law, given in particular the variety of situations to which it would have to apply and the inherent conflict with other principles such as freedom of expression. It keeps the issues under continual review, and believes that problems which arise are best considered in the context of particular aspects of people's lives.

General Sikorski

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Prime Minister what recent representations she has had in regard to reconsideration by the Government for the repatriation to Poland of the remains of General Sikorski; and what reply she is sending.

The Prime Minister: We periodically receive representations both for and against transfer of General Sikorski's remains to Poland. I told General Jaruzelski last June that we had reconsidered this question but felt the time was not yet right. We will continue to review our policy in the light of developments in Poland.

Rain Forests

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions she has had with the President of Mexico on rain forest problems.

The Prime Minister: The Mexican Government are well aware of our concern for rain forest conservation. Last year the Government, at Mexican request, financed a forestry expert to advise on reforestation in the state of Quintana Roo.

Parliamentary Answer (Cost)

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Prime Minister what was the cost of providing the answer to the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), *Official Report*, 18 January, columns *384-391*.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* The reply was assembled from material provided by a wide range of Departments. The total cost of time of those who contributed, including secretarial staff, measured by salary, overheads and other costs, including printing, is estimated at £2,620.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Firearms

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers in the country carry firearms.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In 1988—the latest year for which figures are available—7,194 police officers in England and Wales were qualified to carry firearms. Firearms were issued to police officers in 2,227 operations against criminals known or believed to be armed.

Gallows

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the reason for the keeping of gallows at Wandsworth prison; when these gallows were last used; how old are they; how often they are examined and tested and how this is done; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Gallows are kept at Her Majesty's prison, Wandsworth, for use if required. These particular gallows were last used on 8 September 1961. No record has been kept of when they were constructed. They are examined and tested every six months. The testing is undertaken by checking the equipment to see that it is functioning correctly.

Secondary Immigration

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment has been made of the ratio of secondary immigration to primary immigration since 1960; what studies have been undertaken to assess the likely levels of secondary immigration in different circumstances and with what results; and what estimates he has made of the likely level of secondary immigration per 100,000 primary immigration from different sources.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I would refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Butler) on 22 January at column *518*.

Death Sentence

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the offences for which a person can be sentenced to death by courts in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The death penalty is still available for offences of treason, piracy with violence and certain treasonable and mutinous offences re-enacted under the Armed Forces Act 1971.

Management Consultants

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list any research reports or policy analyses received from outside management consultants after January 1985, but commissioned by his Department before that date, and the date of completion and cost of each contract.

Mr. Waddington: Information is not readily available before 1984. The Home Office awarded one contract in 1984 concerning research and policy analyses to Price Waterhouse for a review of marketing and sales effectiveness in the prison service industries and farms. The contract was completed in August 1985 at a cost of £16,100 (exclusive of VAT).

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the contracts his Department has given to outside management consultants in policy areas concerning his Department since January 1985, and the date of completion and cost of each contract.

Mr. Waddington: The Home Department has let the following contracts to management consultants in policy areas since January 1985:

Consultant and contract	[1]*Cost*	*Completion date*
1990		
Capita Ltd.		
Assist with organisational review of the probation service	65,750	January
1989		
National Economic Research Associates		
Copyright protection for sound recordings	[2]14,000	December
Price Waterhouse		
Privatisation of IBA transmission system	84,000	December
J. K. Clayton		
Review of voluntary scientific effort in civil defence	9,122	October
Captain Hannant		
Standard system for control of police aviation	125,000	October
BIS Applied Systems		
Magistrates courts contingency planning	21,586	September
PE Inbucon		
Issue of TV licences and saving stamps by Post Office	[2]16,000	August
Coopers and Lybrand		
Review of passport issuing and management information systems	51,677	August
Lloyd's Merchant Bank		
Privatisation of the tote	79,200	April
Price Waterhouse		
Options for privatising the IBA's transmission network	[2]62,000	April
County Nat West		
Future of science and technology group	30,000	February
Broadcasting and Research Unit		
Radio broadcasting and listening	74,000	January
1988		
Peat Marwick McLintock		
Advice on the future of the laundry industry within PSIF	46,664	August
Deloitte Haskins and Sells		
Examination of clerical support within PSIF Farms and Gardens	25,625	May
1987		
Ernst and Whinney		
Review of charging arrangements	76,000	September
KMG Thomson McLintock		
Main strategy on office automation	35,000	July
Arthur Young Management Consultants		
Information technology strategy for accounting and financial management systems	72,231	June
Touche Ross		
Study on scientific support for the police service in England and Wales	109,000	June
CSP International Ltd. (Booz, Allen and Hamilton		
Subscription television	128,000	May
Christian Brann Direct		
TV licence evasion	171,000	March
Coopers and Lybrand		
The future provision of staff training—Magistrates' courts service	52,000	January
1986		
Lawson Somerset Ltd.		
Easy payment methods for TV licence fee	61,000	September
Deloitte, Haskins and Sells		
Development of a financial management information system for the probation service	35,000	June
Touche Ross		
Study of organisation in the directorate of telecommunications	38,000	March

[1] Exclusive of VAT.
[2] Figures represent only Home Office proportion of full cost.

Gwent Constabulary

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Gwent as to the whereabouts of the shotgun, the property of a Mr. G. W. Phillips, taken into the possession of the police by PC 853 Fairie of the Gwent constabulary on or before 10 November 1989.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the chief constable that the shotgun is being held at Newport police headquarters pending the outcome of further discussions with the owner.

Guildford and Woolwich Bombings

Mr. Couchman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements are being made to finance the cost of Sir John May's inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the convictions arising out of the bomb attacks in Guildford and Woolwich in 1974.

Mr. Waddington: Parliamentary approval to expenditure on this inquiry will be sought in a Supplementary Estimate for the Home Office Vote for administration etc. (class XI, vote 3). Pending that approval, expenditure estimated at £222,000 will be met by a repayable advance from the Contingencies Fund.

Immigration and Nationality Department

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether a decision has been reached on the relocation of the immigration and nationality department from Croydon.

Mr. Waddington: We have decided that those parts of IND which are at present located in Lunar house, Croydon, should for the most part remain there. This decision has been taken in the light of a report by consultants on the feasibility and desirability of the relocation of IND and further work on costings and benefits. That further work has revealed that most of the financial and other benefits of relocation were taken when IND moved to Croydon in the first place.

We have however decided that the nationality work of the Department can with advantage be brought together in the existing Liverpool nationality office which would otherwise not be needed beyond April 1991. In reaching this decision we have taken account of the likely reduction in the future volume of nationality work. We should complete the process of transferring the nationality work to Liverpool during 1991.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Creches

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether creche facilities are provided for working mothers employed in his Department; in what locations; and if they have to make a contribution to this service.

Mr. Ryder: No nursery facilities are yet available to staff in the Treasury, but London-based staff have access to a holiday play scheme financed by both parental and departmental contributions.

Drug Seizures

Mr. Butler: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many illicit drug seizures, broken down by drug category, have been made in United Kingdom ports in each of the last five years.

Mr. Ryder: Seizures made by Customs officers at United Kingdom ports and airports in the last five years have been as follows:

	Heroin	*Cocaine*	*Cannabis*	*Amphetamine*	*Other*
1987	193	174	4,609	62	306
1988	279	221	4,934	74	177
[1]1989	432	402	6,788	110	294

[1] All 1989 figures are provisional.

The total numbers of drugs seizures made by Customs officers in 1985 and 1986 were 3,910 and 5,534 respectively, but a breakdown by drug category for these figures is not available.

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has hitherto put forward for the United Kingdom's contribution to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development; and what proportion of the United Kingdom's contribution he intends should come *(a)* from the existing budget for overseas aid and development and *(b)* from new allocations of resources.

Mr. Ryder: The details of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development are still being discussed. The United Kingdom will be a generous and enthusiastic contributor. How the contribution is met will be decided in future public expenditure surveys.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish his best estimates of the effects on the retail prices index in 1990-91 of *(a)* the introduction of the community charge and *(b)* the combined impact of non-domestic property revaluation and the introduction of the uniform business rate.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 30 January 1990]:* The Autumn Statement forecast is for RPI annual inflation to fall to 5¾ per cent. by the fourth quarter of 1990. It is not the practice to provide more detail than published in table 2.7 of the Autumn Statement.

DEFENCE

Number Plates

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of whether the use of United Kingdom number plates on cars owned by British personnel serving in West Germany represents the best available security arrangement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not the practice to comment on security matters. However, all security measures, including the question of number plates, are kept under close and continuous review.

Radar System, Fylingdales

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the purpose of the large phased-array radar system being installed at Fylingdales RAF station; when installation work started; what is the total cost of the installation; whether the United States of America is making any financial contribution to this installation;

whether the phased-array radar is to become part of a battle management system linked to the SDI programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answers my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mr. Neubert) gave the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) on 20 June 1989 at column *71*. Installation work for the modernised facility started in August 1989, and at present exchange rates is expected to cost in the order of £160 million, of which the United States will pay in the order of 70 per cent. for the radar, and the United Kingdom approximately 30 per cent. for the supporting infrastructure. The modernised radar will provide an improved early warning system. It will not form part of a battle management system linked to the SDI programme.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will outline the procedures for the sale and disposal of surplus chemical type waste of the kind found stored on the Cleveland industrial estate, Darlington on Saturday 20 January.

Mr. Alan Clark: The material referred to comprised paints, pre-treatment solvents and adhesives. These had been purchased by a general trader from auctions held by the Ministry of Defence, which is the method by which low-value materials of this sort are disposed of. Hazardous and dangerous materials are dealt with under special disposal contracts placed by the Ministry.

Creches

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by location where creche facilities are provided for working mothers employed in his Department; and if they have to make any payment for this service.

Mr. Neubert: We are planning to open nurseries for the children of MOD civil servants in central London and at the Royal Aerospace Establishment Farnborough. We are also considering what might be done at other locations. The level of charges to parents has yet to be determined.

Trident

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of the cost of the Trident programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tom King: I am pleased to announce that for the fourth year running there has been, in real terms, a reduction in the estimated cost of the Trident programme. The revised estimate now stands at £9,380 million, based on the exchange rate used for the long-term costing of the defence programme, which this year is taken to be £1 = $1·62.

Although this estimate represents a cash increase of £291 million compared with the estimate announced in 1989, after allowing for the effects of inflation and exchange rate variations, there has been a real reduction of £432 million compared with that estimate, and a real reduction of £1,631 million over the original 1982 estimate. This is additional to the savings resulting from the decision to have United Kingdom missiles processed in the United States facility at Kings bay, Georgia.

The proportion of the programme to be undertaken in the United Kingdom has risen to its highest level so far —69 per cent.

The Select Committee on Defence previously asked that when announcing the annual revised estimate, I should report on the state of the project as a whole. I am pleased to say that the Trident project remains on programme to enter service in the mid-1990s. There has been no slippage in the in-service date since the decision to purchase Trident II was announced in March 1982. I am, as in the past, sending to the Chairmen of the Select Committee on Defence and the Public Accounts Committee a more detailed report covering the points on which the Select Committee on Defence sought advice. I am also placing a copy of this report in the Library of the House.

CIVIL SERVICE

Reconstruction Competitions

Mr. Stanbrook: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will give the precise date or dates of the last reconstruction competition or competitions held for administrative and professional officers for the Home Civil Service, and the dates of the last appointments resulting from these competitions.

Mr. Luce: I regret that the information requested is not available and cannot be obtained except at disproportionate cost. The 88th annual report of the Civil Service Commissioners mentioned that "one or two" reconstruction" competitions for technical grades were in progress due in 1953-54, but I am advised that the Civil Service Commission has no information subsequently.

THE ARTS

Creches

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will list by location where creche facilities are provided for working mothers employed in his Department; and if they have to make any payment for this service.

Mr. Luce My Department does not yet provide facilities for the use of its staff, but they have access to a local holiday play scheme financed by parental and departmental contributions.

SCOTLAND

National Health Service

16. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to meet Health Service unions in Scotland to discuss Health Service matters.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There are no plans at present.

54. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of the increase in National Health Service expenditure in Scotland since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Gross expenditure on the Health Service in Scotland has risen by an estimated 31 per cent. in real terms between 1979-80 and 1989-90.

51. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was National Health Service expenditure in Scotland for 1979 and 1990; and what increase or decrease this represents over and above inflation.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Gross expenditure on the Health Service in Scotland was £1,064 million in 1979-80, and is planned to rise to £3,041 million in 1990-91. This represents an increase of about 35 per cent. in real terms.

44. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current Health Service expenditure in Scotland; and what increase this is in real terms over 1979 expenditure.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Gross expenditure on the Health Service in Scotland in 1989-90 is estimated to be £2,816 million, representing an increase of about 31 per cent. in real terms since 1979-80.

33. **Mr. Eadie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to meet the Scottish Trades Union Congress to discuss the National Health Service.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: None.

23. **Mr. Sillars:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met trade unions from the National Health Service; and what was discussed.

47. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met trade unions from the National Health Service; and what was discussed.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. and learned Friend met the British Medical Association last month to discuss the new contract for general practitioners.

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of the current Health Service expenditure programme in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Expenditure on the NHS in Scotland will exceed £3 billion for the first time in the coming year; almost three times the budget we inherited on taking office.

Devolution

17. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has had from the business community in Scotland on devolution.

Mr. Lang: The senior management of many important companies in Scotland have repeatedly expressed their concern about the adverse effects which any form of devolution would have on the Scottish economy.

Rail Electrification

18. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last discussed the electrification of the Edinburgh-Linlithgow, Falkirk High-Glasgow and Edinburgh-Aberdeen lines with ScotRail.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Decisions on electrification schems are for British Rail working within guidelines set by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Self-governing Hospitals

19. **Mr. Favell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many hospitals have expressed an interest in the self-governing hospital proposals.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: We have had serious expressions of interest from Forfar and the Royal Scottish National hospital at Larbert whilst a number of others are seeking further information.

Craig Dunain Hospital

20. **Mr. Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the future of Craig Dunain hospital, Inverness.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No. Action is presently with the Highland health board.

ScotRail

21. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the general manager of ScotRail; and what matters were discussed.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend and I discussed various topics relating to rail transport when we met the general manager of ScotRail in the company of the chairman of British Rail, Sir Robert Reid, on 31 October 1989.

63. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to meet the general manager of ScotRail; and what will be discussed.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend and I have met the general manager of ScotRail from time to time and we expect to continue this practice with Mr. Bleasdale, the new director. Discussions at such meetings normally cover a wide range of topics.

Forestry Commission

22. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what planting incentives are currently offered by the Forestry Commission.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Forestry Commission currently offers the following planting grants, payable in instalments over 10 years, for both new planting and restocking, including natural regeneration, under its woodland grant scheme.

Rate of Grant (£ per hectare)

Area (hectares)	*Conifers*	*Broadleaves (including Native Pinewoods)*
0·25-0·9	1,005	1,575
1·0-2·9	880	1,375
3·0-9·9	795	1,175
10 and over	615	975

A better land supplement of £200 per hectare is payable where planting under the woodland grant scheme takes place on arable land or improved grassland (as defined for the farm woodland scheme). In addition, the following grants are offered by the Forestry Commission under its woodland grant scheme for new planting in association with the farm woodland scheme.

Rate of Grant (£ per hectare)

Area (hectares)	*Conifers*	*Broadleaves*
1·0-2·9	505	1,375
3·0-9·9	420	1,175
10 and over	240	975

The better land supplement is not available for planting under the farm woodland scheme through which annual payments are made by the agriculture Departments.

61. **Mr. Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the Forestry Commission's proposals for farm tree planting grants.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Grants for planting trees on farms are available under the Forestry Commission's woodland grant scheme, including grants for planting done in association with the farm woodland scheme. Full details of both schemes are given in the explanatory booklets which are in the Library.

Kelvin Central Bus Company

24. **Dr. Bray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will make a grant to employees on the same terms as to management to assist in the preparation of an employee bid for the Kelvin Central bus company.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my reply to the hon. Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram) on 22 January at column *545*.

National Health Service (Waiting Times)

25. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the average waiting time for patients in the Scottish Health Service in 1979; and what it is now.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Average waiting times for non-urgent patients have fallen by 10 per cent. since 1979; around half of all patients admitted to hospital are admitted immediately.

Competitive Tendering

26. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has had regarding competitive tendering in the National Health Service in Scotland.

37. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received regarding competitive tendering in the National Health Service in Scotland.

45. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received regarding competitive tendering in the National Health Service in Scotland.

46. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has had regarding competitive tendering in the National Health Service in Scotland.

55. **Mr. Ingram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received regarding competitive tendering in the National Health Service in Scotland.

56. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received regarding competitive tendering in the National Health Service in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer to the answer given earlier today to the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Mr. Hogg).

Operations (Commercial Sponsorship)

27. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if there are any plans for health boards in Scotland other than Lothian to seek commercial sponsorship for operations.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There are no plans for commercial sponsorship for operations.

Scottish Economy

28. **Dr. Moonie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the Scottish Council for Development and Industry to discuss the Scottish economy.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. and learned Friend met representatives of the Scottish Council for Development and Industry when he addressed the council's international forum at Aviemore on 29 September 1989.

43. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the rate of economic growth for Scotland for the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Lang: Using United Kingdom price deflators, the latest income-based estimate of Scotland's gross domestic product shows that in 1988 the Scottish economy grew by some 4·7 per cent.

Transport Links (Europe)

29. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to improve Scotland's road, rail and air links with Europe prior to 1992.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Current plans for the Scottish motorway network, linked to the proposed widening of the M6, M1 and M25, will substantially improve access to Europe. The Scottish Development Department is undertaking a review to ensure that the strategic Scottish trunk and key principal road network can meet demands. We are encouraging potential Scottish rail customers to make their requirements for services to the Channel tunnel known to British Rail. The Government's policy of liberalising air services will assist operators to provide improved services where demand exists.

Regional and District Councils (Elections)

30. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will instruct a study to be carried out of the number and characteristics such as age, sex and occupation of persons seeking election to regional and district councils in 1990 and 1992, respectively.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to do so at present. We do, however, have it in mind to update in due course the substantial programme of research commissioned by the Widdicombe committee of inquiry into the conduct of local authority business in 1985 and published in four volumes in 1986. Volume II contained a wide range of information on the personal and occupational characteristics of local government councillors.

Natural Heritage Agency

31. **Sir Russell Johnston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the latest progress towards the establishment in Scotland of a unified and autonomous natural heritage agency.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend announced his intention to appoint Magnus Magnusson KBE as chairman of the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland, and thereafter as first chairman of the proposed Scottish natural heritage agency, provided the Government's proposals to reorganise the Nature Conservancy Council receive parliamentary approval. These proposals are provided for in the Environmental Protection Bill now before Parliament.

Health Boards (Expenditure)

32. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on the actions which some health boards are taking to curtail their level of provision in order to remain within budget in the current year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: All health boards are given an allocation of resources for capital and current expenditure before the start of each financial year. Boards plan their services accordingly.

Motorways

34. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many miles of dual carriageway he plans to upgrade to motorway standard in 1990.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No new section of road upgraded to motorway is programmed to be opened during 1990. However, the 4·5 mile M80 Stepps bypass, which will relieve the existing heavily congested road at Stepps, is currently under construction and is expected to be open in April 1992. Further motorway schemes, including upgrading from dual carriageway, are expected to commence during 1990-91 and details will be announced in March by my right hon. and learned Friend.

Sewage Disposal

35. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to meet Scottish regional councils to discuss the matter of sewage disposal.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No. The Government are aware of developments in this field and my officials have regular meetings with regional and islands council staff at which sewage disposal matters are discussed. My right hon. and learned Friend holds regular meetings with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities on local government finance matters.

Local Government Expenditure

36. **Mr. Younger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a list of those local authorities in Scotland which are planning to increase their expenditure above the rate of inflation.

Mr. Rifkind: Once details of local authorities' budgets for 1990-91 are available to my Department, I will make a statement.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has issued or proposes to issue any regulations or guidance under section 16(1) of the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Regulation 9 of the Community Charges (Registration) (Scotland) (No. 2) Regulations makes provision relating to community charge appeals made under section 16(1) of the 1987 Act. The notes prescribed under these regulations informing people of their register entry or an amendment to that entry include information about a person's rights of appeal.

57. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many warrant sales have been carried out as a result of poll tax non-payment in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally.

52. **Mr. Shersby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make an estimate of the amount which a police officer in Scotland will on average have to pay in respect of the personal community charge following abolition of the rates element of the police rent allowance on 31 March.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Like other members of the community, police officers in Scotland have been liable to pay the community charge since April 1989. The level of the charge depends on the area in which they live.

Regulations made last November had the effect of restoring the rates element of rent allowance, on an interim basis, to those officers who were in receipt of rent allowance on 31 March 1989 for such period as their circumstances remain unchanged. Draft regulations now sent to the police negotiating board provide for the sum payable by way of rates on 31 March 1989 to continue to be included in the calculation of an officer's rent allowance and in any transitional rent allowance payable from 1 April 1990.

42. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his Department's latest estimate of the additional resources required to cover the administrative costs of poll tax collection in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Based on the latest local authority figures available, the increase in the administrative costs of collecting the community charge in 1989-90, as against rates collection in 1988-89, is estimated at £14·5 million.

Northern Ireland

38. **Mr. Gow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next intends to visit Northern Ireland.

Mr. Rifkind: I have no immediate plans to do so.

Fishing Industry

39. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received on the crisis in the Scottish fishing industry.

Mr. Lang: Since the hon. Member last inquired about this on 20 December 1989 the Government have received a variety of representations from organisations representing different sectors of the fishing industry, from MPs and MEPs and from local authorities and other bodies. Many of these expressed appreciation of the success achieved by the Government at the Council of Fisheries Ministers on 18 and 19 December 1989.

Violent Prisoners

40. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to be able to publish the conclusions of the consultative document "Assessment and Control: the Management of Violent and Disruptive Prisoners".

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: We have received a wide range of comments on the consultative document which aroused considerable interest. My right hon. and learned Friend and I are still considering the responses, but we expect to reach our conclusions within the next few weeks.

Lothian Health Board

48. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the finances of Lothian health board.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No.

Students (Housing Benefit)

49. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to provide suitable low-cost accommodation for those students displaced by the loss of housing benefit from September.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government's housing policies for both the public and the private sector will help to ensure an adequate supply of low-cost accommodation. The proposed top-up loans for student support will be at a level well in excess of a student's average likely entitlement to benefits.

Central European Time

49. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his Department's policy towards the imposition of central European time in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas Hamilton: The introduction of central European time throughout the United Kingdom is one of the options set out in the Green Paper "Summer Time—A Consultation Document" published last June. A decision on future summer time arrangements will not be taken until the responses, including those from Scotland, have been fully considered.

Knitwear and Textile Industry

50. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received on the state of the knitwear and textile industry in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: During the past six months my right hon. and learned Friend has received representations from Berwickshire district council, Ettrick and Lauderdale district council, and the Scottish Trades Union Congress. These representations expressed concern about the current state and future prospects of the knitwear and textile industry and suggested that renewal of the multi-fibre arrangement is essential to the future well-being of the industry. In addition, my right hon. and learned Friend received representations from two members of the public about the knitwear industry in the Hawick area, one of which stressed the importance of the multi-fibre arrangement.

Farm Incomes

53. **Sir Hector Monro:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussion he has had with the National Farmers Union of Scotland about the level of farm incomes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: My noble Friend the Minister of State met the president and senior officials of the National Farmers Union of Scotland on 15 January for a discussion on a range of issues, including the EC price-fixing proposals, which have a significant bearing on farmers' incomes. The union represented that a substantially greater green pound devaluation than was proposed by the EC Commission was justified. My noble Friend reaffirmed the Government's commitment to the removal of monetary compensatory amounts by 1992 and assured the representatives of the union that the need for our farmers to be able to compete on fair terms in the Community would be borne in mind in the negotiations in Brussels. My noble Friend and colleagues from other Departments yesterday met the United Kingdom farming unions to discuss further the price-fixing proposals.

Local Enterprise Companies

58. **Mr. Allan Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had with people interested in forming a local enterprise company for Renfrewshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: Neither I nor my right hon. and learned Friend have personally had discussions with people interested in forming a local enterprise company for Renfrewshire, but officials from my Department and from the Training Agency and the SDA have been working closely with the steering group led by Mr. John McClelland, director IBM, Greenock, which has now submitted an application for development funding for a local enterprise company for Renfrewshire.

Maternity Facilities (Glasgow)

59. **Mr. Michael J. Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to improve maternity facilities in the east end of Glasgow.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Greater Glasgow health board is presently consulting on its proposals to improve maternity services in its area.

National Museums of Scotland

60. **Mr. Buchan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chairman of the board of trustees of the national museums of Scotland.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. and learned Friend last met the chairman of the board of trustees of the national museums of Scotland on 30 November 1989.

Elderly People (Glasgow)

62. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what requests he has received from Greater Glasgow health board for additional revenue or capital allocations to meet the costs of dealing with the care of the growing elderly section of the population.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Requests for allocations of capital are contained within the health board's capital plan submitted yearly to the Department. No requests for additional revenue resources have been received.

Ravenscraig

64. **Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what investment there has been in Ravenscraig steel plant in each of the past five years.

Mr. Lang: Significant investment approved for Ravenscraig plant prior to privatisation of the British Steel Corporation was as follows:

1985—nil
1986—£17 million
1987—nil
1988—nil

Since privatisation, investment decisions have been a matter for British Steel.

North East River Purification Board

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will make a statement on the current situation in the North East river purification board and the situation regarding the cancelled appointment to the post of general manager;

(2) if he will make a statement regarding the current duties and structure of the North East river purification board; and if there have been any changes in these duties and the structure of the board.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: River purification boards have powers under statute to appoint such officers as they think necessary for the proper discharge of their functions. This is not a matter for which the Secretary of State is reponsible. Any queries about the staffing of a river purification board or the duties of its officers should be addressed to the board.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the rivers the North East river purification board is responsible for; and which are used as part of the Grampian water supply.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The boundary of the North East river purification board defines the catchments draining to the coast between Hopeman and Milton Ness. These cover the Rivers Lossie, Spey, Deveron, Ugie, Ythan, Dee, Don and Bervie, together with their tributaries and the coastal streams encompassed by the boundary. Except for the Rivers Ythan and Bervie, all these rivers, or tributaries of them, are used as sources of public water supply by Grampian regional council.

Manufacturing Investment

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the latest figures for levels of manufacturing investment in Scotland in *(a)* cash and *(b)* constant prices; and what are the annual figures for each of the previous 10 years.

Mr. Rifkind: The table gives estimates of gross domestic fixed capital formation by manufacturing industry in Scotland at current prices for each year from 1977 to 1987, the latest year for which estimates are available. There are no separate price deflators for Scotland and the use of United Kingdom deflators does not give sufficiently reliable constant price estimates.

Gross domestic fixed capital formation by manufacturing industry in Scotland

	£ millions
1977	491
1978	523
1979	561
1980	645
1981	586
1982	541
1983	470
1984	597
1985	861
1986	788
1987	738

Source: Central Statistical Office.

Trunk Road Improvements

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which trunk road improvement schemes in Scotland are expected to start in the financial year 1990-91.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend expects to make an announcement to the House, as is his usual custom, in March.

Timothy Williams

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Lord Advocate will order a fatal accident inquiry into the death of Timothy Williams, radio operator on the Ocean Odyssey drilling rig.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate hopes to make an announcement shortly about this matter.

Piper Alpha

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what surveys have been undertaken by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland in respect of pollution following the Piper Alpha tragedy; and what were the results.

Mr. Lang: I refer to the reply given to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) on 25 January 1990. The results of initial monitoring work by DAFS scientists were published on 6 June 1989 and copies of the reports were placed in the Library.

Nature Conservancy Council

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received recently about the proposed Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Since the publication of our proposals to reorganise the Nature Conservancy Council in the Environmental Protection Bill, my right hon. and learned Friend has received a number of representations covering a variety of views.

ENVIRONMENT

Rating Revaluation

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the average revaluation factors by property type for the top 20 and the lowest 20 rating authorities in England and Wales; if he will list the national average by property type; and if he will place the complete list in the Library.

Mr. Chope: I have today placed in the Library a table showing revaluation factors by property type in English local authority areas and nationally. The figures are based on the 1990 rateable values for properties as shown on the rating lists deposited with local authorities on 20 December. The new rateable values are based on market rents in each area in April 1988, the date by reference to which the valuation has been carried out under the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

The 20 authorities with the highest average revaluation factors are

	Figures
York	14·6
Bath	13·3
Kensington and Chelsea	13·0
Selby	12·8
Chichester	12·7
South Lakeland	12·6
Canterbury	12·4
West Devon	12·2
Winchester	12·1
Scarborough	11·9
Ryedale	11·9
Harrogate	11·5
Weymouth and Portland	11·5
Hart	11·4
Runnymede	11·4
Medina	11·4
Castle Morpeth	11·3
North Devon	11·3
Tunbridge Wells	11·3
South Wight	11·3

The 20 authorities with the lowest average revaluation factors are

	Figures
Knowsley	4·2
Wolverhampton	4·5
Sandwell	5·0
Derby	5·4
Walsall	5·4
Birmingham	5·5
St. Helens	5·6
Liverpool	5·6
Dudley	5·8
Halton	6·1
Wansbeck	6·1
Darlington	6·2
Lambeth	6·2
Middlesbrough	6·3
Leicester	6·3
City of London	6·3
Scunthorpe	6·3
Sedgefield	6·3
Gateshead	6·4
Wigan	6·4

Control of Pollution

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what provisions to make regulations under the Control of Pollution Act have still not been used.

Mr. Trippier: Sections 6, 11, 18, 23, 29, 45, 68, 93, 94, 102 and 103.

Humberside

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the total cost of *(a)* splitting county Humberside into two new counties and *(b)* merging the south bank into Lincolnshire and the north bank into North Yorkshire and what central Government financing is available for such changes.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My Department has made no such estimates: it is one of the matters that we expect to be covered in the report on the further review of the county of Humberside which the Local Government Boundary Commission is now undertaking. Apart from grant for specific services, central Government support to local government is concentrated in the revenue support grant, which is distributed on the basis of assessed needs which contain no specific provision for the costs of administrative reorganisation.

Creches

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by location where creche facilities are provided for working mothers employed by his Department; and if they have to make any payment for this service.

Mr. Chris Patten: My Department is undertaking a feasibility study of the provision of a nursery in Westminster and is also looking for opportunities to co-operate with other employers to provide nurseries in areas of the south-east from which staff commute into central London and at locations in the regions where the Department has offices.

Ordnance Survey Maps

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the percentage increase, in real terms, in the retail price of the Ordnance Survey map sheets for a comparable area on the scale of 1:1,250 from 1979 to 1989; what is the current cost of maps for the parliamentary division of Finchley; and what is his policy for the pricing of this map series.

Mr. Trippier: The retail price of Ordnance Survey 1:1,250 quality paper maps has increased by 83 per cent. in real terms over the 10-year period between 1979 and 1989. The main use of these maps is by local authorities, land developers and utilities.

The current cost of these maps to cover the parliamentary division of Finchley is £1,197.

These maps form part of Ordnance Survey's core activities and are priced to help achieve the cost recovery target set by the Secretary of State.

Nitrates

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the areas in which drinking water is contaminated with nitrates in excess of European Community limits; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Copies of the undertakings accepted by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State from the water service companies under section 20 of the Water Act 1989 are available in the Library, including the undertakings in respect of those areas where there is a breach of the standard for nitrate, or where there has been a past breach which is likely to recur.

As soon as my right hon. Friend has accepted undertakings from all the statutory water companies, which he is in the process of doing, copies of these will also be placed in the Library.

Nature Conservancy

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what organisations were consulted prior to his Department's announcing the changes to the Nature Conservancy Council and the Countryside Commission.

Mr. Trippier: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) —*Official Report* 4 December 1989, column *39*. The necessary legislation was put before the House on 20 December, and received a Second Reading on 15 January.

Hazardous Substances (Conference)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department was represented at the conference on the control of substances hazardous to health organised by Thames Events, held on 10 and 11 January.

Mr. Trippier: No.

Rates

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, further to table 4, "Changes in Rates Bills by Property Type", England and Wales, deposited paper NS5522, he will provide the changes in rates bills by property type for each economic area in England and Wales, both in percentage terms and money terms.

Mr. Chope: The information for which my hon. Friend asks is given in table 6 of the paper to which he refers.

HAT (Sunderland)

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress he is making towards the establishment of a housing action trust for Sunderland.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Following consultations with the tenants and after discussions with Sunderland borough council, my right hon. Friend has decided to proceed to a ballot of the tenants on the proposals to set up a housing action trust for the Downhill, Town End Farm, Hylton Castle and part of Red House estates in Sunderland. The ballot, which will be a postal ballot conducted by the Electoral Reform Society, will take place between 12 March and 4 April. The Electoral Reform Society will be writing shortly to the tenants of these estates, setting out the arrangements for the ballot.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Know-how Funds

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government have any plans to alter the timing or application of the know-how fund to eastern European states.

Mr. Waldegrave: The know-how fund for Poland is already in operation. That for Hungary starts in April. The fund will be extended to other east European countries once they are fully committed to reform. The principal aim of the fund will be the same in all cases: to provide advice and training to help with the transition to democracy and a market economy.

Rain Forests

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his assessment of the extent to which the Brazilian Government are providing the resources and manpower needed to protect the rain forests and their inhabitants.

Mr. Maude: The Brazilian Government have made considerable efforts to protect the rain forest and its inhabitants. The hon. Member will be aware of the creation of IBAMA—the environmental umbrella organisation—in 1988, which has levied heavy fines on a number of enterprises convicted of polluting the rainforest. He will also be aware of the decision on 24 January to relocate gold prospectors outside the Yanomami area.

In July 1989, the then Minister for Overseas Development signed a memorandum of understanding with the Brazilian authorities, under which a number of environmental co-operation projects are being agreed. We hope thereby to contribute to a solution of these problems.

South Africa

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn), *Official Report*, 16 January, columns *167-8*, how many representations he has received concerning the Upington 14 in South Africa; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have received approximately 500 representations about the Upington 14. The 14 have been granted leave to appeal by the South African Appeal Court. While legal processes continue, it would be wrong for the Government to intervene.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has made any representations to the South African Government concerning the treatment of their political prisoners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: We are concerned at the plight of political prisoners in South Africa. We have called repeatedly on the South African Government to release all political prisoners.

Creches

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list by location where creche facilities are provided for working mothers employed in his Department; and if they have to make any payment for this service.

Mr. Maude: There is no creche facility in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Cambodia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will be issuing a statement on the outcome of the Paris meeting on Cambodia on 15 and 16 January; and when the report of the British mission to Cambodia in 1989 will be published.

Mr. Waldegrave: The informal discussions in Paris on 15-16 January were between the Asia directors of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. They agreed a set of principles to guide them in working for a resolution of the Cambodia problem, including an enhanced role for the United Nations. This has been made public, and I am arranging for a copy to be placed in the Library of the House.

There are no plans to publish a written report on the visit to Cambodia by two British officials in December. The Overseas Development Administration briefed leading NGOs on 5 January, and will make available information of specific programme/project opportunities.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whom the Minister of State is meeting during his visit to the refugee camps on the Thai-Cambodian border; which camps he is visiting; whether he is meeting representatives of British non-governmental organisations in private; and if he will be making a statement on this visit.

Mr. Waldegrave: During his visit to Thailand, my noble Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs visited site 2, near Aranyaprathet, on 20 January. He was briefed by the displaced persons protection unit and the United Nations Border Relief Operation, toured the encampment and handed over a donation of British humanitarian assistance. He visited projects run by Christian Outreach and Concern, and met representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross. In the evening, he gave a private dinner for representatives of British NGOs and the British staff of other organisations.

Chemical Weapons

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his Department's assessment as to the implications for the chemical weapon convention talks of the United States' policy to continue production of binary chemical weapons after a chemical weapon convention has been signed.

Mr. Waldegrave: We are aware of the press speculation last year about United States policy. However, the United States has made no proposal to amend the provision in the draft chemical weapons convention under negotiation in Geneva that would prohibit the production of chemical weapons immediately upon the convention's entry into force.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Business Innovation Grant

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will estimate the amount of expenditure on the business innovation grant scheme to be paid out in each of the standard English regions and Wales for each year 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92;

(2) if he will estimate the amount of expenditure on the business investment grant to be paid out in each of the standard English regions and Wales for each year 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92;

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The estimated expenditure for the two elements of the regional enterprise grant scheme for 1989-90 are £4·78 million for investment grants and £2·25 million for innovation grants for England as a whole. Information about planned expenditure on regional assistance in 1990-91 and 1991-92 was published in the public expenditure White Paper on 30 January.

Current year figures and estimates for future expenditure in England are not broken down by regions. Questions about the operation of regional enterprise grants in Wales are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he was consulted by Sir Leon Brittan about the proposal to launch a European Commission inquiry into price fixing, monopoly practices, market shares and fee levels of the quality of audits into the accountancy profession.

Mr. Redwood: No. I understand that the Commission is asking outside consultants to conduct a study into the general implications for competition of the increasing concentration of the major accountancy firms. This is not a formal investigation under the competition rules of the EC treaty.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will be providing evidence for or contributing to the inquiry by the European Community Commission into price fixing and monopoly abuse in the accountancy profession; and whether he has any proposals for a similar inquiry in Britain.

Mr. Redwood: The United Kingdom authorities will of course give any assistance they can to those conducting the study. Neither I nor the Director General of Fair Trading have proposals for a similar inquiry in Britain.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what new rules he proposes to deal with the concentration of audit business and the attendant inside information about mergers in a few large firms.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has available to him the merger control provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973 to scrutinise mergers of major economic significance between accountancy firms. Auditors have a professional duty of confidence. If the hon. Member has any evidence of a breach of that confidence he should draw it to the attention of the relevant professional body; but if he has reason to believe that there might have been an insider dealing offence he should provide my Department with full details.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what powers he has to vet or investigate mergers of accountancy firms to prevent the concentration of power in a few firms in this area; and how many mergers or takeovers in this field he has referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has the normal merger control powers available to him under the provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973. In accordance with the advice of the Director General of Fair Trading, he has not so far decided to refer any mergers between accountancy firms to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Cambodia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on Cambodia and export credit guarantees; and if he will list all instances in the last 10 years in which export credit guarantees have been granted for trade with Cambodia.

Mr. Redwood: Since June 1975, ECGD cover for exports to Cambodia has been limited to business on maximum terms of 180 days where payment is secured by means of an irrevocable letter of credit confirmed, before shipment, by a bank in the United Kingdom.

On this basis, business insured in each of the past 10 years, with the exception of 1983, was less than £1,000. In 1983, exports totalling £200,000 were covered.

No relaxation of ECGD's terms of cover is envisaged in the foreseeable future.

Insider Dealing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to develop new proposals for dealing with insider trading; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The Government will continue to pursue all insider dealing cases where prosecution is justified under the code of conduct for Crown prosecutors. Convictions have been obtained in 10 out of 19 cases brought under the legislation. Inspections are being carried out in a further 16 potential cases.

In the latest two cases the outcome turned on factors which have nothing to do with the law on insider dealing, namely the law on public interest immunity, and procedural matters relating to the conduct of criminal trials.

As I told the House on 8 December (OR column 407) the Government that day published a consultative document on proposals for changes to the insider dealing law, and a copy is in the Library. The proposals reflect the requirements of the EEC insider dealing directive and experience of the present law. The Government will consider carefully any constructive proposals that may emerge from the consultation.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many cases of insider dealing have been brought since the introduction of the legislation; how many cases are outstanding; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Insider dealing became a criminal offence since July 1980. Since then there have been 19 prosecutions for insider dealing offences, involving 26 defendants. Ten cases produced convictions. At present there are three cases where prosecutions have begun but not concluded. The Government will continue to pursue all insider dealing cases where prosecution is justified under the code of conduct for Crown prosecutors.

Barlow Clowes

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether all investors in Barlow Clowes should now have received the offer letter promised in his statement to the House on 19 December; and by what date his Department requires their response.

Mr. Redwood: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave on 30 January to my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson).

Single Market

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the nature of the help provided by his Department to the organisation of conferences and seminars on the 1992 proposals; and if he will make a statement on the organisation of 1992 clubs.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 30 January]:* Since the launch of its campaign "Europe Open for Business", the Department has provided speakers (both Ministers and officials) at 1,445 single market conferences and seminars. Organisers of these events can obtain, free of charge, copies of our wide range of single market literature for distribution to delegates plus free publicity for the events in the campaign's quarterly newsletter "Single Market News" (distributed to over 200,000 organisations). A range of videos produced by the Department, suitable for showing at single market events, can also be bought or hired. In 1988, the Department itself organised 20 regional breakfast conferences and more recently ran a major conference on "Europe Open for Professions" in London.

The Department has no role in the organisation of 1992 clubs though officials have spoken at events put on by individual clubs. I understand that the 1992 club national co-ordinator is Mr. Edward McMillan-Scott MEP.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish a list of the various publications and briefing notes which his Department makes available on the 1992 proposals.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 30 January]:* A list of all the single market publications and video material provided under my Department's "Europe Open for Business" campaign is included in our single market information pack. A copy of the information pack has been placed in the Library. Further copies can be obtained through our 1992 hotline 01-200 1992.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the measures so far adopted by the Council of Ministers on 1992 which will assist the development of industry and commerce in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 30 January]:* Progress continues to be made on the single market programme. One hundred and sixty-four out of the 279 measures in the Commission's white paper, "Completing the Internal

Market", have now reached a common position in the Council of Ministers, or been agreed in principle. This means that almost 60 per cent. of the single market programme is now complete.

For information in greater detail, I have placed in the Library of the House a summary table setting out for the measures in the Commission's white paper those which have been adopted by the Council of Ministers, those which have been proposed by the Commission and those which are projected. Clearly not all these measures are of equal importance, but taken as a whole programme, the Government believe they represent good progress, and will bring benefits to industry and commerce in the United Kingdom, especially where they succeed in opening continental markets to British businesses.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Postgraduate Degrees

Dr. Hampson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many postgraduate degrees, and in what subjects, were awarded in the last year for which figures are available; and what were the comparable numbers in 1979.

Mr. Jackson: Information is given in the table. A new classification was introduced in 1985-86 for the recording of university students' subject of study. For broad comparison purposes additional information has been given for the last year of the previous subject classification (1984) and the first year of the new classification (1985).

Universities Great Britain—Higher Degrees[1] awarded

	Calendar year	
	1979	*1984*
Education	1,999	2,673
Medicine, dentistry and health	1,206	1,521
Engineering and technology	3,090	3,226
Agriculture, forestry and veterinary science	501	643
Science	4,374	4,654
Social, administrative and business studies	4,145	5,327
Architecture and other professional and vocational subjects	588	648
Language, literature and area studies	1,292	1,358
Arts other than languages	885	1,018
All subjects	18,080	21,068

	Calendar year	
	1985	*1988*
Medicine and dentistry	803	1,264
Studies allied to medicine	729	800
Biological sciences	1,554	1,784
Veterinary science, agriculture and related studies	602	764
Physical sciences	2,239	2,557
Mathematical sciences	1,197	1,495
Engineering and technology	3,526	3,760
Architecture and related studies	480	610
Social sciences	3,477	3,992
Business and financial studies	2,033	2,841
Librarianship and information science	297	364
Languages and related studies	1,446	1,635
Humanities	1,061	1,238
Creative arts	195	235
Education	2,860	2,986
Multi-disciplinary studies	513	678
All subjects	23,012	27,003

Note: Higher degrees comprise MSC's, PHD's Higher doctorates (DSc, DLitt etc.)
Source: Universities statistical record volume 1 university statistics: students and staff.

Examination Boards

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) for how long the examination board is required to keep papers in an examination the result of which is in dispute;

(2) how many schools queried the Midland examining group's assessment of the marks to be awarded for the English examination of GCSE *(a)* in 1988 and *(b)* in 1989;

(3) whether an examination board is under any obligation to notify a school when its pupils' exam papers are to be destroyed.

Mrs. Rumbold: The groups are indepedent bodies, wholly responsible for the administration of their own examinations. Queries concerning grading decisions are entirely a matter for the group and the school concerned, and the Department does not collect information about the number of queries or appeals at group level.

I understand that, where results are in dispute, examination scripts are kept for as long as a formal appeal is under consideration. Once the appeals procedures have been exhausted, or it has become apparent that a school intends to take no further formal action, the examining group normally destroys the scripts, but it is under no obligation to notify a school that it has done so.

Kuru Disease and Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what research h as been conducted to establish the cause or causes of *(a)* Kuru and *(b)* Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease; what results have so far been forthcoming; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease and Kuru belong to a family of diseases thought to be caused by "slow viruses" which include scrapie in sheep and bovine spongiform encephalopathy in cattle.

As a result of recommendation 8.5.2 (viii) of the Tyrell report (report of the working party on bovine spongiform encephalopathy), the Department of Health has commissioned a research project to review the incidence, prevalence and trends of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease in order to help determine whether there is a link with bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

From 1979 until 1987, the Medical Research Council funded an epidemiological study of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease. No consistent risk factors were identified. The neuropathogenesis unit in Edinburgh is undertaking a programme of research on scrapie which is also relevant; the unit is jointly funded by the Agricultural and Food Research Council and Medical Research Council.

Research on Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease and Kuru may be being pursued by university departments and medical schools with support from the University Funding Council block grants and by health authorities; but information on this is not collected centrally.

TRANSPORT

Motor Cycles

Mr. Waller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the number of casualties among pillion passengers carried on motor cycles driven by learner riders, indicating the number who were holders of full motor cycle driving licences and the number carried illegally without a full licence in each of the last five years in repect of which information is available.

Mr. Atkins: Information is not available on the type of driving licence held by drivers of vehicles, or their passengers, involved in road injury accidents. Therefore, it is not possible to estimate the number of pillion passengers carried on motor cycles being driven by learner drivers, nor to tell whether these passengers were being carried illegally.

Creches

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by location where creche facilities are provided for working mothers employed in his Department; and if they have to make any payment for this service.

Mr. Atkins: No creche facilities are provided by my Department at present, although possibilities are being investigated.

Severn Bridge Signal Box

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will take steps to save the Severn bridge signal box at Shrewsbury, Shropshire for the nation as a national heritage; whether he has discussed the matter with the National Railway museum at York; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: These are matters for British Rail. I understand from BR that, under current plans, the signal box is likely to continue to be required for railway operational purposes until late 1991. BR and other interested parties will therefore have ample time to consider these issues, including possible arrangements for preservation.

Heathrow Airport

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to resist all proposals from airlines to increase night flights or to reduce the period covered by night flight restrictions at Heathrow airport.

Mr. McLoughlin: The present night restrictions regime at Heathrow was introduced in 1988 and runs until 1992-3. We have no plans to alter it.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to resist all proposals to end the daily runway alternation at Heathrow airport.

Mr. McLoughlin: Government policy on aircraft noise is as set out in the White Paper "Airport Policy", published in June 1985 (Cmnd. 9542). Runway alternation at Heathrow is cited as an example of a noise abatement measure that the Government will continue to encourage (para 8.8).

Airline Punctuality

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library on a regular basis a copy of the Civil Aviation Authority's report on airline punctuality records; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: These reports are published monthly by the Civil Aviation Authority, on the basis of information provided by certain airports and by the relevant scheduling committees (comprising representatives of airlines using the airports). I have told the authority of my hon. Friend's request.

Transport (London)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what are his Department's estimates for the number of cars entering London on a regular basis for each of the next five years;

(2) what is his Department's estimate for the number of commuters using all forms of transport with a London destination for each of the next five years.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 26 January 1990]:* Figures are not available in the form requested. Estimates for commuters entering central London show that between 1983 and 1988, commuting by each of the modes changed as follows:

	Per cent.
Cars	−11
BR Rail	+22
Underground	+27
Bus	−18

Large-scale investment is taking place to increase the capacity of the rail systems to accommodate increasing demand. It is not the Government's policy to encourage commuting by car into central London. The report of the central London rail study, published in January 1989, forecast that, between 1987 and 2001, BR trips would increase by some 20 per cent. and Underground trips by about 13 per cent.

HEALTH

Hospital and Community Health Services

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will show in the *Official Report* the increase in purchasing power made available for hospital and community health services, excluding the cost improvement programme and income generation, for the years 1986, 1987, 1988 and 1989, estimated, using an index which would show 1980 as 100.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is given in the table:

Year	
1980-81	100·0
1986-87	104·7
1987-88	109·9
1988-89	113·2
1989-90	[1]114·1

[1] Estimate.

Notes:

1. Based on health authorities' total revenue cash limits, inclusive of all in-year adjustments, carry forward from previous financial year, and in year transfers between revenue and capital.
2. Increase in purchasing power measured by GDP deflator.

Homes for the Elderly

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will make it his policy to ensure that elderly people resident in homes for the elderly are provided with equivalent support from public funds irrespective of whether the homes are publicly or privately run.

Mr. Freeman: The White Paper "Caring for People" explained that we intend to bring the local authority rules for working out how much people in homes can afford to contribute towards their care and support into line with those used for income support purposes. Under our community care proposals local authorities will have to contribute more to the support of people in homes under their own management than to that of people in private homes but the personal financial position of residents will be the same.

Creutzfeld-Jakob Disease

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has carried out into a connection between Creutzfeld-Jakob disease and bovine spongiform encephalopathy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: As a result of recommendation 8.5.2 (viii), of the Tyrrell report (report of the working party on bovine spongiform encephalopathy) the Department of Health has commissioned a research project to review the incidence, prevalence and trends of Creutzfeld-Jakob disease in order to help determine whether there is a link with bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Area Health Authorities

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will instruct area health authorities to pay due heed to local authorities and public opinion when they decide to construct buildings such as incinerators which can have an adverse effect on the environment.

Mr. Freeman: Health authorities are already instructed to consult local planning authorities where a proposed development is one for which planning permission would normally be required.

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will request the South Warwickshire health authority to refrain from proceeding with the building of a large incinerator and chimney at the South Warwickshire hospital until the powers of control and licence for such a project have passed to the local authority.

Mr. Freeman: The responsibility for strategic planning and operational policy of waste disposal rests locally with the West Midlands regional health authority. South Warwickshire health authority has acted throughout in a responsible way. For further information my hon. Friend may like to consult the authority concerned.

Abortion

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the places approved by him under section 1(3) of the Abortion Act 1967.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The following places have been approved for the period 1 February 1990 to 31 January 1992:

Acland Nuffield, Hospital, Oxford
AMI Alexandra Hospital, Cheadle, Cheshire
BUPA Alexandra Hospital, Walderslade, Kent
Avenue Clinic, Hove, Sussex
Bath Clinic, Combe Down, Bath
AMI Beechwood Hospital, Norton, Sheffield
BUPA Belvedere Hospital, Scarborough
Blackdown Nursing Home, Blackdown, Leamington Spa
AMI Blackheath Hospital, London SE3
Bromhead Hospital, Lincoln
BUPA Hospital, Bushey, Watford, Hertfordshire
BUPA Murrayfield Hospital, Thingwall, Wirral, Merseyside
BUPA Hospital, Norwich, Colney, Norwich
BUPA Hospital, Portsmouth
Calthorpe Nursing Home, Edgbaston, Birmingham
BUPA Chalybeate Hospital, Southampton, Hampshire
Chatsworth Clinic, New Barnet, Hertfordshire
AMI Chaucer Hospital, Canterbury
Chesterfield Nuffield Hospital, Bristol
Christchurch Park Hospital, Ipswich, Suffolk
BUPA Hospital Clare Park, Farnham, Surrey
Clementine Churchill Hospital, Harrow
Cleveland Nuffield Hospital, Stockton-on-Tees
Danum Lodge Nursing Home, Doncaster
Dean Park Nursing Home, Bournemouth, Dorset
Doncaster Independent Hospital, Doncaster
Droitwich Private Hospital, Droitwich, Worcestershire
Duchy Hospital, Truro, Treliske, Truro
Duchy House Nuffield Hospital, Harrogate
Evelyn Hospital, Cambridge
Exeter Nuffield Hospital, Exeter
Fairfield Nursing Home, Buckhurst Hill, Essex
Fallodon Private Nursing Home, Leeds
Fitzwilliam Hospital, South Bretton, Peterborough
Foscote Private Hospital, Banbury, Oxfordshire
Fulford Grange Hospital, Rawdon, Leeds
Garden Hospital, London NW4
Gisburne Park Hospital, Clitheroe, Lancashire
BUPA Glen Hospital, Bristol
Hampshire Clinic, Basingstoke
Highfield Private Hospital, Rochdale
HRH Princess Christian's Hospital, Windsor, Berkshire
BUPA Hospital Hull and East Riding, Hull
Hull Nuffield Hospital, Hull
Humana Hospital, London NW8
King Edward VII Hospital, Midhurst
Leicester Nuffield Hospital, Leicester
Leigham Private Clinic, London SW16
Marie Stopes Nursing Home, London NW2
Merseyside Nursing Home, Liverpool
Newcastle Nuffield Hospital, Jesmond, Newcastle-upon-Tyne
New Hall Hospital, Salisbury, Wiltshire
New Victoria Hospital, Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey
BUPA North Cheshire Hospital, Warrington, Cheshire
AMI Park Hospital, Arnold, Nottingham
Parkfield Private Hospital, Rotherham, South Yorkshire
Parkview Clinic, London W5
Plymouth Nuffield Hospital, Derrifold, Plymouth
AMI Portland Hospital for Women and Children, London W1
Raleigh Nursing Home, London SW2
Robert Nursing Home, Kings Norton, Birmingham
Rosslyn Nursing Home, East Twickenham, Middlesex
Royal Masonic Hospital, London W6
Salop Nuffield Hospital, Shrewsbury
Sarum Road Private Hospital, Winchester, Hampshire
Somerset Nuffield Hospital, Taunton, Somerset
BUPA South Bank Hospital, Worcester
South Manchester Private Clinic, Stockport
BUPA Wellesley Hospital, Southend-on-Sea
Wessex Nuffield Hospital, Eastleigh, Hampshire

Winterbourne Hospital, Dorchester, Dorset
Wistons Nursing Home, Brighton
Woking Nuffield Hospital, Woking
Wye Valley Nuffield Hospital, Hereford
Yorkshire Clinic, Bingley, West Yorkshire

As part of the Department's control of the private sector all these places have been subject to unannounced visits of inspection during the previous approval period. Those places specialising in abortion have been visited more frequently by both medical/nursing and investigative officers. During these visits the operation of approved places is closely observed to ensure they meet the condition required in respect of medical and nursing practice, administrative and financial arrangements and facilities and equipment provided.

Haemophiliacs

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the extent to which the production of safe and efficient factor 8 concentrates from United Kingdom national fractionation centres meets the need of haemophiliacs in the United Kingdom;

(2) when he expects the United Kingdom to achieve self-sufficiency in blood products;

(3) at what date United Kingdom haemophiliacs will be able to receive factor 8 made solely from the plasma of unpaid donors to the national blood transfusion service.

Mr. Freeman: At present in England and Wales approximately 70 per cent. of the factor 8 used to treat haemophiliacs is produced at the blood products laboratory from the plasma of unpaid donors to the national blood transfusion service. The remainder is commercially produced factor 8 which is imported into the United Kingdom. The imported products are being prescribed as a result of the preference of individual clinicians. The blood products laboratory is, therefore, meeting in full the demand for its factor 8, as it is for virtually all other blood products. It is making efforts to increase its share of the blood products market in this country, but the choice of product remains with the clinician.

The information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Organ Donations (Payment)

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to prohibit payment for donations of human organs, blood and plasma in the United Kingdom; and if he has any plans to restrict the processing and distribution of such donations to a publicly controlled agency within the National Health Service.

Mr. Freeman: Our donors give blood and plasma freely, and have always done so. The Government are committed to maintaining this principle of voluntary and unpaid donation. There are certainly no plans to privatise blood collection and supply of blood products in this country.

The Human Organ Transplants Act 1989 prohibits commercial dealings in human organs intended for transplant. Donations of human organs will be carefully monitored under the Act and its regulations. The Act introduced controls to ensure that human organs are donated freely and according to certain conditions.

Organ donations from live donors are subject to particular regulations which have been approved by Parliament and will come into effect on 1 April 1990. The Unrelated Live Transplant Regulatory Authority (ULTRA), which is being set up under this Act, will have to be satisfied that certain conditions are met in cases of donation of organs between persons who are genetically unrelated before the proposed transplant will be able to take place.

The information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mentally Ill People (Basingstoke and North Hampshire)

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many beds for long-term mentally ill patients provided by the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority are currently occupied by patients from other health districts;

(2) how many long-term beds for mentally ill patients are provided by the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority other than those provided by the psychiatric division, Park Prewett;

(3) how many long-term beds for mentally ill patients are provided by the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority at the psychiatric division, Park Prewett;

(4) how many National Health Service-funded mentally ill patients from the Basingstoke and North Hampshire district are currently accommodated in National Health Service hospitals or private nursing homes in other districts;

(5) if he will list the private nursing homes in the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health district which are registered for the mentally ill; how many mentally ill patients each can accommodate; how many each is currently accommodating; and how many of these are National Health Service funded.

Mr. Freeman: During the year 1 April 1988 to 31 March 1989 there were on average 318 beds available daily in NHS wards for long-stay mental illness patients in Basingstoke and North Hampshire health district. All these beds were at Park Prewett hospital. The number of beds occupied by patients from other districts is not available centrally.

Figures for the numbers of patients with a mental illness, from the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health district, who are accommodated in hospital and units outside the district are not available centrally.

As at 31 March 1988, none of the private institutions in the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health district, registered under section 23 of the Registered Homes Act 1984, contained beds specifically for mental illness patients. Information is not available centrally on mentally ill patients that may be resident in these institutions.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the level of the provision of care for mentally ill patients in the Basingstoke and North Hampshire district.

Mr. Freeman: It is for the Basingstoke and North Hampshire health authority to decide the level of provision of care for mentally ill patients in its district, taking account of local needs and priorities.

Acute Services

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the decision of the East Anglian regional health authority that its future planning should be based on the assumption that hospitals providing acute services for East Anglia must have a minimum of 550 to 600 beds for long-term viability; what is Government policy on this matter; how many existing acute hospitals in all parts of the country have fewer than 550 to 600 beds; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The appropriate size of an acute hospital is a matter for local decision, in the light of particular needs and circumstances including the 24-hour provision of equipment and skilled staff. I understand that at its January meeting the East Anglian regional health authority endorsed, for planning purposes, the principle of a minimum size for future general acute hospitals.

At the beginning of 1987 there were in England 431 acute hospitals[1] (not necessarily all offering district general hospital facilities) with less than 600 beds in total. Departmental policies require authorities to consider the financial, manpower and interdependent service consequences of their planning options.

[1] This is based on the definition that such hospitals should have at least 85 per cent. of their beds in the acute specialties.

Budgets and Forecasts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are his Department's procedures for producing budgets and forecasts; what guidance is issued on the use of those procedures; what criteria are applied when judging cost effectiveness; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 19 January 1990]:* It is for district health authorities to draw up their own budgets in the light of the resource allocations they receive from the regional health authority.

The setting of budgets is part of the planning cycle. Regional health authorities submit annually to the NHS management executive their programmes for the next financial year. These programmes provide the basis from which budgets are drawn up. The management executive issues guidance on what programmes should cover including quantified information on planned levels of activity, finance and manpower.

Health authorities' cost improvement programmes deliver a fundamental and continuing challenge to their cost base. Health authorities decide the level of cost improvements they can achieve. The management executive, where necessary, challenges the adequacy of the level proposed and monitors its delivery, as it does other key aspects of programmes.

Leeds Health Authorities (Merger)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the possible merger of Leeds Eastern and Leeds Western health authorities.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* I understand that regional and district officers are currently considering the possibility of such a merger. However, merger proposals will be considered only where there is a compelling case for change. Before any case for a merger could be accepted it would need to be considered by the regional health authority and then submitted to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for final decision. The case would be subject to full public consultation and the Secretary of State would need to be sure of its merits before approving it. The Health Service reforms are not about widescale restructuring but are designed to concentrate management on improving health care for patients.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Forestry (Nottinghamshire)

65. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has to develop forestry in Nottinghamshire.

Mr. Maclean: The Government are actively promoting both the woodland grant scheme and the farm woodland scheme, and 37 applications have been submitted under these schemes in Nottinghamshire, covering an area of over 100 hectares of new planting. The Forestry Commission is currently developing proposals with British Coal for further tree planting on colliery spoil tips. I have also seen a copy of the Countryside Commission's consultation document on its proposal to create a new forest in the English midlands, in which Sherwood forest in Nottinghamshire is identified as one of the possible sites.

Creches

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list by location where creche facilities are provided for working mothers employed in his Department; and if they have to make any payment for this service.

Mr. Curry: All office managers have been encouraged to consider carefully the provision of nursery facilities. A feasibility study is currently being undertaken on the setting up of a day nursery at Guildford where there is already a successful holiday play scheme. The study will include all aspects of the matter, including costs to parents. The possibility of providing nursery facilities is also being investigated by regional management at Cambridge who are taking the lead for all Departments in the town. Similar investigations are being carried out in the Tolworth-Chessington area. The Department is also participating in the project to determine the feasibility of providing child care facilities in and around London for the employees of all Departments.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will make a further statement on whether bovine spongiform encephalopathy can be communicated to humans in the light of the comments of the Government's Chief Veterinary Officer.

Mr. Maclean: All Ministers in this Department and the Chief Veterinary Officer have continually emphasised that there is no evidence of a risk to human health from BSE

and that the Southwood working party regarded such a risk as remote. None the less, precautionary measures, including the slaughter and destruction of affected cattle and the banning of certain offals for human consumption from all others, has been taken to counter even that remote and theoretical risk.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many bovine spongiform encephalopathy-infected cattle have so far been destroyed with farmers receiving Ministry compensation; and how much this compensation has cost so far.

Mr. Maclean: From 8 August 1988, when the compulsory slaughter policy was introduced, to 31 December 1989, a total of 9,884 suspected BSE cases were slaughtered in Great Britain and £3,353,928 paid in compensation.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much it would cost to pay *(a)* 100 per cent. for cattle affected by bovine spongiform encephalopathy and *(b)* for the slaughter of female offspring from cows affected by bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Mr. Maclean: It is not possible to estimate such costs in the future, as these would depend on the number of animals slaughtered, and the market price of cattle on which the maximum level of compensation payable depends. But if compensation for all the infected animals compulsorily slaughtered up to the end of 1989 had been at 100 per cent. of their value, subject to existing ceiling arrangements, the cost would have exceeded £6 million.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the possibility of the passing of the infective agent associated with bovine spongiform encephalopathy from one generation of cattle to the next.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) on 18 December 1989, *Official Report*, column *30*.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the number of bovine spongiform encephalopathy-infected cattle reaching market and being sold for human consumption.

Mr. Maclean: Since BSE became a notifiable disease on 21 June 1988, up to 30 September 1989, the end of the last quarter for which figures are currently available, 81 suspected cases of BSE were identified at markets. Of these, 56 were subsequently confirmed as having BSE. All animals concerned were slaughtered and their carcases destroyed. Of course the removal of specified offals from all cattle more than six months old ensures that there is no risk to human health.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from the National Farmers Union in respect of *(a)* the ban on the sale of bovine offal for human consumption, *(b)* the exclusion to the above ban granted to calves under six months, *(c)* the compensation levels set for bovine spongiform encephalopathy-infected cattle, *(d)* the level of research into the causes of bovine spongiform encephalopathy and *(e)* the ban on imports by West German Government.

Mr. Maclean: I have received representations from the National Farmers Union expressing support for the ban on the use of certain bovine offal for human consumption and for the research being conducted into BSE; expressing concern at the West German restrictions on beef imported from Britain, and disagreeing with the level of compensation payable for cattle infected with BSE.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to prevent the sale of bovine spongiform encephalopathy-affected cattle through non-European countries' slaughterhouses.

Mr. Maclean: All cattle suspected of being infected with BSE are compulsorily slaughtered and their carcases burned or buried. In addition to checks carried out by environmental health officers, cattle at non-EC approved slaughterhouses are subject to random ante-mortem inspections by veterinary inspectors.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has made an assessment of the implications *(a)* for the spread of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, *(b)* for the farming community and *(c)* for the level of exports of British beef, of his policy not to compensate farmers in full for cattle infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Mr. Maclean: I do not believe that existing levels of compensation have any effect on the spread of BSE or on British beef exports. Compensation is intended to provide farmers with a fair recompense for cattle slaughtered as BSE suspects at the Ministry's behest.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will implement the recommendations of the Tyrell committee that random sampling of the brains of cattle routinely sent for slaughter should be carried out to test for the presence of subclinical bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 23 January at column *645*.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he has received any representations from Proten in connection with its product Papain; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when he last met representatives from Proten; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Maclean: The company that owns the patent rights to Proten has expressed disappointment with our decision not to seek provision for the continued use of this pre-slaughter treatment under the rules which are to be adopted for the single market. My right hon. Friend the Minister last met representatives of the organisation concerned on 22 November 1989 to discuss a range of issues relating to their slaughter interests.

I have nothing to add to the full statement I made on this matter during the Adjournment debate on 7 November 1989.

Slaughterhouses

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the visits made in 1989 to slaughterhouses in East Sussex by officers of the state veterinary service.

Mr. Maclean: In 1989 the following visits were made by officers of the state veterinary service to red meat slaughterhouses and licensed poultry premises in East Sussex to advise on standards:

	Dates
Tottingworth Farms Ltd.	
Little Tottingworth Farm	
Broad Oak, Heathfield	22 February 1989
T. Borthwick & Sons (UK) Ltd.	
The Abattoir	
Norlington Lane, Ringmer	23 June 1989
Mr. M. Vine	
Slaughterhouse	
Garfield Lane, Hailsham	20 June 1989
Mayhew's Chicken plc	
Five Ash Down, Uckfield	25 January 1989
	25 April 1989
	19 July 1989
	21 November 1989
Sovereign Chicken plc	
Burwash Common, Etchingham	21 February 1989
	31 October 1989
Bridge Poultry Supplies Ltd.	
Horam, Heathfield	10 February 1989

In addition, some 30 visits were made by state veterinary service officers to undertake ante-mortem inspections and to carry out duties associated with the collection of samples for testing for the presence of drug residues.

Organic Production

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the European Community draft regulation relating to organic standards in respect of the length of the proposed conversion period from conventional to organic production.

Mr. Curry: The European Community proposals on organic foodstuffs, as currently drafted, provide for a conversion period of at least one calendar year. In line with the standards set by the United Kingdom register of organic food standards, the United Kingdom and a number of other member states have suggested that conversion should be for a minimum of two years.

Organic Livestock

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the formulation of organic livestock standards.

Mr. Curry: Voluntary national standards for the production and processing of organic foods, including livestock standards, were launched by the United Kingdom register of organic food standards in May last year. A copy was placed at that time in the Library of the House. In addition, the EC Commission issued proposals for a regulation on organic foodstuffs covering crops and products of plant origin in December. It has indicated that if the regulation is adopted it will submit parallel proposals for statutory organic livestock standards in due course.

Beef Exports

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the partial ban on imports of British beef by West Germany.

Mr. Maclean: There is no scientific justification for the West German restrictions on imports of beef from this country. This view was endorsed at the meeting of Agriculture Ministers which my right hon. Friend the Minister attended last week where the Commissioner confirmed that expert scientific advice was that British beef did not pose a risk to human health and that any interference with trade would be contrary to Community law. The German authorities will be reflecting on this and I hope they will soon remove their restrictions.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance

Mr. Hume: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement regarding the hill livestock compensatory allowance for the coming year, indicating whether there is to be any increase in the allowance.

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Member to the statement that my right hon. Friend the Minister made to the House on 30 January 1990 at columns 159-70.

Storm Damage

Mr. Speller: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what help he proposes to give to those in horticulture and agriculture who have sustained heavy losses through the recent severe storms.

Mr. Curry: I have the greatest sympathy for farmers and growers who have been badly affected by the recent severe weather. My officials will operate the farm capital grant schemes as flexibly as possible within the rules of those schemes in order to take account of the effects of the storm. But it has been the longstanding policy of successive Governments not to pay compensation to farmers for the effects of severe weather, particularly where risks are insurable.

North-East Drift Net Fishery

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what estimate his Department has formed of the value of the catch of salmon from the north-east drift net fishery in the last year for which figures are available and in the corresponding period 10, 20 and 30 years ago;

(2) what estimate his Department has made of the number of *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time jobs created by the north-east drift net fishery salmon catch in the latest year for which figures are available and in the corresponding period 10, 20 and 30 years ago;

(3) what socio-economic studies his Department has undertaken in anticipation of the publication of the report of the inquiry into the north-east drift net fishery to establish the likely impact of phasing out this fishery.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 30 January 1990]:* My Department has information on the numbers of salmon drift net licence holders (and endorsees), and catch statistics which are published regularly.

We do not have data on the values of catches of salmon taken by drift nets in the north-east England fishery—nor information on the jobs dependent upon salmon drift net fishing—for the years in question. We have no plans to mount a socio-economic study in anticipation of the report to Parliament on the north-east coast salmon net fishery. Section 39 of the Salmon Act 1986 requires Ministers to "prepare a report which, in the context of the need to ensure—

(a) that sufficient salmon return to spawn in the rivers wholly or partly situated in the areas and districts specified in subsection (3) below; and

(b) that fishing for salmon by means of nets is properly managed in those areas and districts,

reviews the nature and extent of all such fishing in those areas and districts."

Pesticides

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will outline the procedures undertaken for *(a)* a partial review and *(b)* a full review of pesticide active ingredients; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* A full review covers all aspects of consumer, operator, and environmental safety. A partial review addresses only those aspects that may suggest a cause for concern. In both cases experimental data will be requested and evaluated and a recommendation made to Ministers by the Advisory Committee on Pesticides.

Cattle Offal

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the countries which have been importing cattle offal from the United Kingdom since 8 November 1989.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* The available information relates to the calendar month of November 1989 and shows that the United Kingdom exported edible offal of bovine animals to the following countries:

France
Belgium/Luxembourg
Netherlands
Italy
Irish Republic
Portugal
Spain
Finland
Japan
United States of America

Information for later months is not yet available.

Veterinary Manpower

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he will make a decision on the Page report on veterinary manpower.

Mr. Gummer *[pursuant to the reply, 22 January 1990, c. 572]:* I would like to thank Dr. Ewan Page, vice-chancellor of Reading University and his committee for their careful and thorough examination of the issues put to them and for producing well-argued recommendations. Dr. Ewan Page and his committee were asked by the Government to chair a committee to assess the need for veterinary manpower and demand for veterinary education and in the light of this to make recommendations on how increased manpower requirements might be met having regard to funding constraints. The committee was also asked to consider future arrangements for assessing the demand for veterinary manpower and determining the number of student places. Dr. Page's report has been published and copies are being placed in the Library of the House. The report concludes that there is likely to be a significant shortfall over the next decade and makes a number of recommendations directed at the Government, the Universities Funding Council, veterinary schools and the veterinary profession to rectify this situation.

The Government have considered the report carefully. They have decided to lift the restrictions on the freedom of veterinary schools to increase student intake in response to demand from the market by removing the ceiling on intakes to veterinary schools. The Government also accept the recommendation that they discontinue five-yearly manpower reviews and let student demand have a greater role in determining the intake of veterinary schools. However, as it is important to maintain a core of veterinarians trained to help ensure that animal health and public health requirements are met, the Government will review the position if it appears that these needs are in jeopardy.

The Government recognise that any expansion of veterinary schools will not have an immediate effect on supply of veterinarians. They therefore accept the Page committee's recommendation that in the short term increasing immigration of foreign veterinarians could be an important means of meeting any shortfall. The Government are currently considering a number of measures that would reduce the burden on employers making work permit applications and enable veterinarians' applications to be processed more quickly, as suggested by the Page committee.

I am asking the veterinary profession to consider carefully those recommendations that the Page committee asked it to examine. These include the question of immigration of foreign veterinarians, exploring effective ways of encouraging part-time working and later retirement and monitoring of manpower supply and demand data. My Department will also be consulting interested organisations about the Page committee's proposals to review the role of veterinary nurses and make greater use of lay persons.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science is asking the Universities Funding Council and veterinary schools to consider carefully those recommendations in the Page report that relate to the funding and teaching of an increased student intake at veterinary schools.

The Universities Funding Council postponed consideration of the Riley report, which recommended reducing the number of veterinary schools, pending the results of the Page review. These recommendations will now need to be reassessed and the UFC has been asked to resolve this matter as soon as possible.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 1 February 1990

ENVIRONMENT

Contracts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby on 14 December 1989, *Official Report*, column *751*, if he will list separately the contracts that have been extended rather than re-let by *(a)* the Property Services Agency, *(b)* the Crown Suppliers and *(c)* the Department of the Environment.

Mr. Chope: Thirty of the 47 contracts reported in column *751* of the *Official Report* for 14 December 1989 as exempt from advertising were extended, all by the Crown Suppliers. The contracts extended were as follows:

Furniture (office, kitchen and storage)—12 extensions at £5,375,964
Fitted bedroom furniture (Benbow range)—2 extensions at £3,002,000
Office and display equipment—5 extensions at £2,651,923
Cleaning materials and equipment—6 extensions at £1,641,240
Clothing uniforms—3 extensions at £583,000
Electrical equipment—1 extension at £850,000
Paint—1 extension at £197,000.

Lullingstone Roman Villa

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment why Lullingstone Roman villa is closed.

Mr. Trippier: Lullingstone Roman villa was reopened to the public on 10 January 1990. It had been closed since March 1988 to enable essential health and safety work to be carried out, including the removal of asbestos cladding from the cover building. English Heritage is currently developing proposals for improvements in the presentation of the villa to the public.

Hospital Incinerators

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take into account the anxieties of people living near to hospital incinerators when he undertakes consultations on standards of incineration.

Mr. Trippier: The local authority unit of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution is currently drawing up guidance on standards for clinical waste incinerators which we propose to schedule for air pollution control under the Environmental Protection Bill. A wide range of bodies have been consulted, including the National Society for Clean Air, the Institution of Environmental Health Officers, and individual local authorities. The Bill will give the public an opportunity to comment on applications for authorisation of individual incinerators and will substantially improve public access to information on scheduled plant.

Pollution Control

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the broad estimates of the amounts spent on pollution control and environmental improvement as a proportion of gross domestic product by the United Kingdom and other industrial countries.

Mr. Trippier: International comparisons of expenditure on environmental protection have been made by the OECD, which will shortly be publishing a report of its findings. The estimation of such expenditure involves many problems of definition, measurement and collection of data. Figures for the United Kingdom indicate that between 1 per cent. and 2 per cent. of GNP is dedicated to environmental protection. Other OECD countries appear to spend a similar proportion, and there are no reliable indications that this has varied greatly over the past two decades.

Wasteman 90 Conference

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department will be represented at the conference Wasteman 90 to be held in Birmingham between 20 and 22 February.

Mr. Trippier: We are aware of this conference, but there are no current plans for the Department to be represented. I have, however, provided a statement for the organisers to incorporate in the conference literature.

Blue Circle Industries

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had in the last year with Blue Circle Industries plc over environmental protection matters.

Mr. Trippier: None.

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list any planning appeals submitted by Blue Circle Industries plc or its subsidiaries which his Department is currently considering.

Mr. Moynihan: An appeal by Blue Circle Industries plc against an enforcement notice issued on 19 July 1989 by the Nottinghamshire county council is currently before the Secretary of State. Subsidiary companies are not identified as such in the Department's records.

Community Care

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to review the formulae for calculating standard spending assessments for personal social services to take account of the proposed new responsibilities for community care services from April 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Changes to the standard spending assessment formula for personal social services for the elderly will be needed to take account of new responsibilities for community care. We will be discussing proposals for the change with the local authority associations in due course.

Social Services

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, showing each figure in total and expressed as an amount per adult or relevant population *(a)* the standard spending assessments for 1990-91 for (i) personal social services, (ii) social services for children, (iii) social services for the elderly and (iv) other social services, *(b)* the actual spending for 1989-90 on (i) personal social services, (ii) social services for children, (iii) social services for the elderly and (iv) other social services and *(c)* the grant-related expenditure for 1989-90 on (i) personal social services, (ii) social services for children, (iii) social services for the elderly and (iv) other social services, for each social services authority in England; and if he will give in each case the information aggregated in respect of (1) shires, (2) metropolitan districts and (3) inner and outer London boroughs.

Mr. David Hunt: I have today placed two tables in the Library. One shows the 1990-91 personal social services standard spending assessments for each social services authority in England and for each class of authority; the other shows comparable information on the 1989-90 personal social service, grant-related expenditure assessments. Comparable information on personal social services spending for 1989-90 is not yet available.

Nature Conservancy Council

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many current members of the Nature Conservancy Council were appointed primarily on account of their commitment to or interest in *(a)* agriculture, *(b)* forestry, *(c)* country sports and *(d)* nature conservation.

Mr. Trippier: Members of the Nature Conservancy Council are appointed for the personal contribution they can make to the council's work. They are not appointed to represent a particular interest.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many members of the council of the Nature Conservancy Council there were at the date of the publication of the Nature Conservancy Council's annual report covering each of the years: 1981-82, 1982-83, 1983-84, 1984-85, 1985-86, 1986-87, 1987-88 and 1988-89; and why he decided to increase by five the number of members of the council of the Nature Conservancy Council on 1 April 1989.

Mr. Trippier: The information is as follows:

Number of members of the Nature Conservancy Council on the date of publication and year covered in annual report

Year and Date	*Number*
1981-82 29 April 1983	14
1982-83 1 December 1983	14
1983-84 1 October 1984	14
1984-85 20 November 1985	12
1985-86 20 October 1986	15
1986-87 26 October 1987	14
1987-88 14 November 1988	15
1988-89 14 November 1989	18

In making appointments to the council, account is taken of the range of expertise of its current members and the personal contributions which others can offer.

Dogs

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the measures the Government have introduced over the last five years, including their geographical application, concerning the control of dog nuisance; and if he will set out the Government's future proposals and the time scale for their implementation.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: As to measures introduced over the last five years, these are as follows:

(i) In 1987 revised model byelaws for dog control and the control of dog fouling in England and Wales were issued by the Home Office, including a new model byelaw requiring dog owners to clear up after their dogs in certain areas ("poop-scoop byelaws").

(ii) Section 39 of the Local Government Act 1988 gave duly authorised officers of local authorities in England and Wales powers to seize, detain and dispose of stray dogs.

(iii) The Dangerous Dogs Act 1989 includes provisions which strengthen the existing legislation relating to the control of dangerous dogs in England, Scotland and Wales.

As to future proposals, the Environmental Protection Bill includes a new duty on local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales to keep public land clear of litter and refuse—the term "refuse" for this part of the Bill can, by order of the Secretary of State, include canine faeces. In 1989 consultation papers entitled "Action on Dogs" were issued both for Scotland and for England and Wales. These set out various proposals for the control of dogs including in particular a new duty on local authorities to collect up and deal with stray dogs.

Copies of both these consultation papers have been placed in the House of Commons Library. We are considering how to take forward the proposals contained in them.

Municipal Water Treatment

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will make it his policy not to block the European Community directive No. 10139/89 when it is discussed by the Council of Ministers;

(2) whether he will make it his policy to support European Community directive No. 10139/89 on municipal water treatment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: Details of the draft directive were set out in the explanatory memorandum (10139/89) which was placed in the Vote Office on 27 December. The Government support the objective of the proposal, which is to prevent the environment from being adversely affected by municipal waste water discharges, and expect to play a constructive part in the discussion of the proposal by the Council of Ministers.

Waste (Duty of Care)

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals he has for a code of practice under clause 26 of the Environmental Protection Bill on the duty of care as respects waste.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My Department and the Welsh Office have today published a draft code of practice for public consultation under clause 26 of the Environmental Protection Bill. Clause 26 puts a new legal duty of care on

anyone who has waste, from producers through carriers to disposers. The code gives advice and examples on the practical measures that those under the new duty should take.

Examples of what is recommended in the code include:

Waste left out for collection or being transported should not be allowed to blow around or fall off, it should be put in containers or covered up securely;

All firms which produce waste should know what it is composed of, or should commission an analysis;

Firms should check up on the bona fides of anyone they give their waste to; they should see and check their certificate of registration as a carrier or their waste management licence;

If firms see or suspect that someone is fly-tipping their waste, they should stop handing any waste to that person and warn the local authority;

If anyone knows that their waste requires special treatment, for example, clinical waste from hospitals —the National Health Service will not be exempt— then they must take action to ensure that it receives that treatment.

The code of practice will be admissible as evidence in court in prosecutions for breach of the duty of care. Anyone convicted of breaching the duty of care will face the possibility of an unlimited fine.

Private householders will not be affected by the new duty as far as their own household waste is concerned.

The Bill's new duty of care and this accompanying code of practice are the most radical step ever taken to ensure that waste is legally dealt with.

Housing Corporation

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any announcement to make about the chairmanship of the Housing Corporation.

Mr. Chris Patten: I am pleased to inform the House that I have appointed Sir Christopher Benson to succeed Sir Hugh Cubitt as chairman of the Housing Corporation with effect from 1 May 1990. The appointment will be for three years. In the meantime, Sir Christopher will become a member of the board with effect from today. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Sir Hugh Cubitt for the outstanding contribution he has made to the work of the corporation and the housing association movement over the past 10 years.

Private Homes (Casual Use)

Mr. Neale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide for the casual use of private homes for bed and breakfast purposes to be exempt from the new business rate.

Mr. David Hunt: We intend to provide that bed and breakfast accommodation offered in someone's own home which is available for fewer than 100 days in a year will not be subject to the new business rate. This fulfils the commitment given by my noble Friend the then Minister of State during the passage of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 through Parliament that limited use of domestic property to provide bed and breakfast accommodation should not lead to the property being assessed for non-domestic rating. An order will be laid before Parliament shortly.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the effect of his decision to bring forward payments of revenue support grant on the average community charge in 1990-91.

Mr. David Hunt *[holding answer 16 January 1990]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 26 January, at column 923. The total cash flow advantage to local authorities is about £180 million compared with the profiles originally proposed for 1990-91, which would have enabled authorities to achieve a profile of income through the year from grant, business rates and community charges equal to expenditure.

Water Meters

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total cost so far for the water meter trials approved by his Department; and if he will give the cost of each trial area.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It is estimated that the total cost of the metering trials will be about £20 million. The latest estimated cost of each trial is as follows:

	£
Isle of Wight (Southern Water)	16,134,000
Chandlers Ford (Southern Water)	125,000
Chorleywood (Rickmansworth Water Company)	220,000
Bristol-Hotwells (Bristol Waterworks Company)	332,000
Haling Park (Thames Water)	756,000
Bromsgrove (East Worcestershire Waterworks Company)	383,000
Brookmans Park (Lee Valley Water Company)	695,000
Turlin Moor (Wessex Water)	197,000
Broadstone (Wessex Water)	300,000
Camberley (Mid Southern Water Company)	346,000
Hutton Rudby (Northumbrian Water)	251,000
South Normanton (Yorkshire Water)	480,000

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many of the 12 meter trials for domestic water charges have had the meters installed and are now being charged for water and sewage treatment by meter; and if he will list those which are completed.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The installation of meters is complete and the customers are being charged by measure in 10 of the 12 trials. The installation of 52,000 meters in the Isle of Wight trial is not expected to be completed until the late summer but Southern Water has phased the introduction of metered billing in different areas of the island as meters are installed. Charging by measure in the South Normanton trial is due to start on 1 April 1991. The trials are due to end in 1993.

TRANSPORT

Night Sleeper Rail Service

52. **Mr. Clifford Forsythe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultations he has had regarding the night sleeper rail service from Belfast to London via Larne-Stranraer.

Mr. Portillo: British Rail has kept this Department informed about plans to withdraw sleeper services from

the Stranraer-Glasgow part of this route. I understand that BR intends to provide connecting services between Stranraer and the Glasgow-London sleeper services.

53. **Mr. Stott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has made to British Rail regarding withdrawal of the London-Stranraer night service.

Mr. Portillo: We are aware of British Rail's plans to withdraw the sleeper service between Stranraer and Glasgow and to provide a connecting service from Stranraer to the Glasgow-London sleeper service. This is a commercial matter for BR.

Severn Bridge

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much was collected in tolls last year on the Severn bridge.

Mr. Atkins: Tolls collected in 1988-89 amounted to £10·1 million.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the estimated completion date for the current renovation and maintenance work on the Severn bridge.

Mr. Atkins: Strengthening work on the Severn crossing will be completed in March 1990. The resurfacing work is due to be completed by late 1990/early 1991. Routine maintenance work on the bridge will continue.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what items of repair and renovation have been completed on the Severn bridge in the last 12 months.

Mr. Atkins: The last 12 months have seen the replacement of cables and the rocker bearings on the Wye bridge and completion of hanger replacement on the Severn bridge. The Wye bridge towers have been extended in height, the Severn bridge towers strengthened and pier protection works undertaken. Strengthening of the steel decks on both structures has been substantially completed.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what work is currently under way on the Severn bridge.

Mr. Atkins: Current work includes the jacking of supports in the Severn bridge towers, the resurfacing of the entire crossing and replacement and improvement of safety barriers and expansion joints.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how much is the accumulated debt on the Severn bridge at the latest available date;

(2) how much the debt on the Severn bridge was last year.

Mr. Atkins: The unaudited accounts show a debt to the Consolidated Fund of £113·4 million at 31 March 1989.

London Assessment Studies

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what resources have been set aside by his Department for publicity and consultation on stage 2B of the London assessment studies and its document "Traffic in London".

Mr. Atkins: No separate provision has been made for costs incurred by the Department and its consultants on the current consultation exercise on stage 2B of the London assessment studies and on the document "Traffic in London", which fall within the appropriate departmental budgets.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether his Department will reimburse the full costs to local authorities in London of undertaking publicity and consultation on stage 2B of the London assessment studies.

Mr. Atkins: No. Expenditure incurred by local authorities in producing their own leaflets and holding public meetings on these subjects is entirely a matter for them.

Body Searches

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many body contact searches are conducted under the Aviation Security Act 1982 for any given year;

(2) how many complaints have been received about the conduct of searches of persons carried out under the Aviation Security Act 1982; what form the complaints procedure on searches takes; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what monitoring procedures are in place to ensure that the standards and code of conduct set out in the aviation security handbook are followed by security personnel conducting searches of persons under the Aviation Security Act 1982.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. Friend has used his powers under the Act to give directions to aerodrome managers and aircraft operators requiring them to ensure that, apart from a limited range of exceptions, all passengers are screened before being permitted to board aircraft at airports covered by the national aviation security programme, and that staff and other personnel are screened before being permitted to enter restricted areas at the major airports. In many cases the persons concerned are required to pass through metal detection equipment and will not necessarily be searched by hand. No record is kept of the number who are hand searched.

The directions require the screening to be carried out, and lay down the standards to be achieved. The aviation security inspectorate makes regular inspections to ensure that these requirements are met.

The directions do not, however, set out the detailed procedures to be followed or the facilities to be provided to minimise any embarrassment to those selected for hand searching. A certain amount of general guidance on this is included in the aviation security handbook issued by the Department, but essentially these matters are management ones and therefore the responsibility of the airports and airlines.

The Department receives a small number of complaints each year about the procedures adopted, or the facilities provided, by individual airports. The number of such complaints is not recorded.

Aviation Security Act

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how often the power contained in section 15(5) of the Aviation Security Act 1982 has been used by him and

airport authorities; what is the average duration of an order or licence granted under the power; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: None of the directions given under the Act to date has included the provisions mentioned in section 15(5).

Humber Bridge Authority

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about his discussions with the Humber Bridge Authority concerning the settlement of its debt.

Mr. Atkins: Officials of my Department and officers of the Humber Bridge Board have been working together to produce financial projections with a view to the bridge board presenting a reasoned case for special Government financial assistance.

Mersey Tunnel

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current debt on the Mersey tunnel.

Mr. Atkins: The debts of the Mersey tunnels amounted to £117 million at 31 March 1989.

British Rail (Investment)

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how much of British Rail's investment programme of £3·75 billion will be financed from its own internally generated cash flow, excluding payments from passenger transport executives under section 20 of the Transport Act 1968 in respect of services operated by British Rail in metropolitan areas;

(2) how much of British Rail's investment programme of £3·75 billion will be financed by passenger transport executives under section 20 of the Transport Act 1968 in respect of services operated by British Rail in metropolitan areas;

(3) how much of British Rail's investment programme of £3·75 billion will be financed externally; and whether the external finance will have to meet the Treasury's criteria of an 8 per cent. rate of return.

Mr. Portillo: Over the next three years, British Rail plans to finance net operating losses of some £0·7 billion and investment of £3·75 billion. Internal resources from depreciation, working capital reductions and asset sales will provide £2 billion. External finance from borrowing and PSO grant will provide £2·2 billion. PTE payments will total £0·25 billion. We do not specifically apportion particular forms of finance between investment and other expenditure. The appraisal criteria for BR investment depend on the nature of the project, not on how it is financed.

Mr. Snape: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what cash resources he plans to allocate to British Rail to invest in advanced train protection, resignalling, and other safety measures recommended by the Hidden report.

Mr. Portillo: I refer the hon. Member to the reply to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 4 December 1989, at column 88. As my right hon. Friend has told the House, finance will not stand in the way of implementing the report.

Cash Limits

Mr. Ground: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes he proposes to make to the cash limits on his votes.

Mr. Parkinson: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates, the cash limits for my votes are to be changed as follows:

Class and Vote	*Current cash limit*	*Changes*	*£ thousands Revised cash limit*
1	1,370,744	[1] −2,000	1,368,744
2	238,869	[2] −3,115	235,754
VIII 4	131,398	[3] 4,744	136,142
5	218,707	[4] 621	219,328
	Total	[5] 250	

[1] The cash limit has been reduced by £2 million to offset in part increased expenditure required on the Department's other cash limits. Authority for additional expenditure of £17,892,000 which will be met by increased appropriations in aid, will, however, be sought in a spring supplementary estimate, to meet faster than expected progress with schemes included in the roads programme.

[2] Mainly in respect of running costs provision transferred to class VIII, 4. The overall running costs limit of the Department remains unchanged.

[3] Mainly increased requirement for running costs provision transferred from class VIII, 2.

[4] Mainly increased requirement for demand-determined rural bus grants.

[5] Transfer from the Department of the Environment cash limit UA1 in respect of that Department's contribution towards the £500,000 grant to Thamesline announced on 23 February 1989, at column 729, and included in vote 2.

The changes do not add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Horne Report

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he intends to bring forward legislation to implement the findings of the Horne report.

Mr. Atkins: It remains our intention to introduce legislation to reform the Public Utilities Street Works Act 1950 along the lines of the proposals contained in the consultation paper issued in May, a copy of which is in the Library. A Bill will be introduced as soon as a suitable opportunity can be found.

Litter

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps are taken to ensure the removal of litter from motorway verges and central reservations.

Mr. Atkins: The Department's code of practice for routine maintenance prescribes the frequency with which its agents are required to clear litter from motorways. Frequencies vary according to local circumstances and are currently being reviewed with the aim of improving sections of road with the worst litter problems.

The Government propose to amend the Environmental Protection Bill so as to place a specific duty on the Crown to keep its land, including motorways, clear of litter.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Churches

Mr. Leigh: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby as representing the Church Commissioners, how many churches have become redundant, or ceased to hold religious services, over the last six months.

Mr. Alison: Ten churches were declared redundant, and therefore ceased to be available for public worship, during the six months to 31 December 1989. Over 16,000 churches remain open for public worship.

EMPLOYMENT

Income Statistics

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish in the *Official Report*, a table showing the percentage increase in real incomes since 1979 of (i) median full-time adult male hospital porters, (ii) male and female primary school teachers, (iii) male locomotive drivers and motormen, (iv) footplate staff, (v) NHS male ancillary staff, (vi) NHS male maintenance staff, (vii) female hospital ward orderlies, (viii) female welfare workers, and (ix) local authority male manual workers in England and Wales.

Mr. Nicholls: Estimates of the increases in real earnings since 1979 are provided in the table:

	Percentage increase 1979-89
Median of Gross Weekly Earnings by Occupation	
Full-time males on adult rates	
Primary teachers	38
Hospital porters	3
Locomotive drivers and motormen	24
Full-time females on adult rates	
Primary teachers	42
Welfare workers	35
Hospital ward orderlies	−2
Median of Gross Weekly Earnings by Agreement	
Full-time males on adult rates	
Footplate staff	33
NHS ancillary staff	1
NHS maintenance staff	16
Local authority manual workers England and Wales	8

Note:
New earnings survey data deflated by RPI (all items) April of each year.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the percentage increase in real incomes since 1979 of median adult male manual employees in the (i) footwear, (ii) textile, clothing, (iii) mechanical engineering, (iv) motor vehicle industries, (v) study, etc. officers, (vi) accountants, (vii) journalists, (viii) estimators, etc. and (ix) finance, etc. specialists.

Mr. Nicholls: Estimates of the increases in real earnings since 1979 for manual males are provided in the table. Categories (v) to (ix) are non-manual occupations.

Median of gross weekly earnings by industry

	Percentage increase 1979-89
Full-time manual males on adult rates	
Footwear	13
Textiles	4
Clothing	2
Mechanical engineering	14
Motor vehicle industries	18

Note:
1. New earnings survey data deflated by RPI (all items) April of each year.

Supplementary Grants

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what changes have occurred in supplementary grants to large contractors in 1989-90.

Mr. Nicholls: In common with other contractors for employment training, each large contractor's supplementary grant levels were reviewed, and new levels agreed, in contracts for 1989-90.

Rochdale Borough

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will make a statement regarding the current level of unemployment in Rochdale borough; and how many people in the borough of Rochdale have been unemployed for more than a year.

Mr. Nicholls: The information is available from the Library. Unemployment by duration is analysed on a quarterly basis. The latest figures show that in October 1989 there were 2,520 unemployed claimants in the local authority area of Rochdale who had been unemployed for more than one year. The corresponding total number of unemployed claimants was 7,117.

Long-term unemployment continues to fall at a faster rate than total unemployment.

In December 1989 the total level of unemployment in the local authority area of Rochdale was 6,945.

Employment Training

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list those health authorities currently participating in ET as training agents, training managers or as placement providers; for the latter two groups what is the number of contracted and filled places at the latest date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: I am aware of 11 health authorities currently participating in ET as training managers. These are listed with details of contracted and filled places at 12 January 1990:

Health authority (HA)	*Contracted places*	*Filled places*
South Tees AHA	250	206
Hartlepool	100	84
South West Durham	80	67
Mid Staffs	50	9
North Staffs	100	67
Hull	50	27
West Glamorgan	200	93
East Dyfed	70	37
South Sefton	440	398

Health authority (HA)	Contracted places	Filled places
Liverpool	166	170
Southport and Formby	85	88

I am not aware of any health authorities acting as training agents. Information is not available on health authorities acting as ET placement providers.

Home Workers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many employers have been prosecuted for not registering their home workers with the environmental health department; whether he has any plans to introduce measures to strengthen the law; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost from individual local authorities.

The Government have no plans to extend the law which was originally part of the Factory and Workshop Act 1901 —now section 133 of the Factories Act 1961—and was introduced to prevent the spread of infectious disease and infestations from the home. Home workers have the same legal protection for health and safety as other employees and self-employed workers under the provisions of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many home workers' projects are in existence in England and Wales; what are their main tasks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: The Department is aware of a number of groups which promote the interests of home workers but does not systematically collect information about their numbers and activities.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many home workers the wages inspectorate visited in the past year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: In 1989 the wages inspectorate checked the pay of 874 home workers by means of visits to establishments putting out work. These checks involved subsequent visits to a sample of home workers concerned, but records are not kept of the number so visited.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many industrial tribunal cases have been adjudicated in favour of home workers in the last year.

Mr. Nicholls: This information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many visits he or his predecessor made to home working projects in England and Wales in the past five years.

Mr. Nicholls: None.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what industries in England and Wales employ the largest percentage of home workers; what are their main tasks; and what are the rates of pay in each of these industries.

Mr. Nicholls: Figures showing those industries which employ the largest percentage of home workers and their occupations are not available for England and Wales. National estimates and occupational distributions can be found in tables 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.7 and 3.8 of Department of Employment research paper No. 60 by Dr. Catherine Hakim entitled "Home-based Work in Britain: A report on the 1981 National Homeworking Survey and the DE research programme on homework". Tables 6.4 to 6.8 in that report provide information on earnings of home workers at the time the research was carried out. A copy of the paper has been placed in the Library. General earnings data for these industries can be found in tables 8 and 9 of part A of the 1989 new earnings survey, a copy of which is in the Library, but these data do not distinguish home workers' earnings from the earnings of other workers.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures he intends to take to ensure that employers supplying work to home workers adhere to the Noise at Work Regulations 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: The Noise at Work Regulations apply to home workers in just the same way as to any other employee or self-employed person. When inspectors of health and safety visit employers, including those who employ home workers, they consider compliance with these regulations and take enforcement action where necessary.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of home workers the wages council found illegally underpaid for each of the past 10 years, by year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested is shown as follows:

Year	Per Cent.
1980	6·23
1981	5·46
1982	8·32
1983	2·98
1984	6·47
1985	1·30
1986	0·58
1987	1·63
1988	1·03
1989	0·91

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he has any plans to require employers to provide proper handling guidelines for any potentially dangerous glues and solvents that home workers may be required to use; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 provides a framework of legislative controls to protect all those at work including home workers.

In addition, the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988 require all employers to assess risk, identify the precautions that employees have to take when handling hazardous substances and provide the employees with information about the risk and the precautions. These provisions extend to glues and solvents where these may be a hazard to health.

Where home workers are self-employed, those supplying them with substances are required under section 6 of HSWA to provide adequate information about any risks to health and safety.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether his Department has formulated any definition of home working with regard to its present policies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: The Department regards home workers as those working at home rather than using home as a base. No more precise definition is currently in use.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Fontainebleau Agreement

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total rebate received by Britain under the terms of the Fontainebleau agreement for the last year for which figures are available; what is the total amount received since the agreement was signed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: The United Kingdom's abatement was 1,780 million ecu—£1,150 million—in 1989, bringing to 8,630 million ecu—£5,770 million—the cumulative total under the Fontainebleau mechanism. The 1990 EC budget, as adopted, provides for an abatement of 2,430 million ecu—£1,800 million.

Mr. G. A. Johnson

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth will receive a reply to his letter dated 21 December 1989 referring to Mr. G. A. Johnson.

Mr. Lilley: I replied to my hon. Friend's letter on 30 January.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer who will represent the Treasury at the economic and finance meetings of the Council of Ministers on 12 February, 12 March, 23 April, 11 June and 31 March; and what the agenda will be for each meeting.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 30 January 1990]:* I or one of my fellow Treasury Ministers will be attending each of the meetings of the Economic and Finance Council. Agenda for these meetings are not fixed until shortly before they take place, but I would expect major topics of discussion over the coming months to include:

economic and monetary union;
the European bank for reconstruction and development;
abolition of fiscal frontiers;
revision of the financial perspectives for 1991 and 1992;
and issues of budget discipline and management.

Personal Allowances

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the cost to the Treasury would be if personal allowances were raised in line with the inflation rate.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 31 January 1990]:* At 1990-91 levels of income, the cost of indexing personal allowances is estimated to be about £1,465 million in 1990-91 and £2,040 million in 1991-92. The additional cost of indexing the basic rate limit is £205 million in 1990-91 and £380 million in 1991-92.

Estimates are based on a projection of the 1987-88 survey of personal incomes and are provisional.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Mark Woodward

Mr. Speller: To ask the Attorney-General if he will instruct the coroner to reopen the inquest relating to the drowning of Mark Woodward on 16 August 1989 and instruct him to pay attention specifically to the tape recordings to and from Milford Haven recently released by Her Majesty's Coastguard.

The Attorney-General: If my hon. Friend will write to me with his reasons for believing that an application to the High Court is appropriate, I will consider the matter.

PRIME MINISTER

Edmonton

Q16. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to visit Edmonton.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Stevenage

Q22. **Mr. Wood:** To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to visit Stevenage.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Local Government Finance

Q69. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the implementation of the Government's programme for reforming local government finance.

The Prime Minister: Good progress continues to be made on all aspects of the new arrangements. Comprehensive community charge registers have been compiled and charge payers notified of their entries. A £4 million information campaign has been launched to ensure maximum take-up of rebates and relief. The poundage for the uniform business rate has been set and new rating lists are available for public inspection. A circular has been issued with details of the new capital finance system and authorities have received their basic credit approvals. It is now for all local authorities to budget prudently in the light of the revenue support grant settlement approved by the House on 18 January, in the knowledge that they will be held to account by charge payers for excessive expenditure.

Shipbuilding

Q86. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Prime Minister if Her Majesty's Government have any proposals for changes in the European Community's sixth directive on aid to the shipbuilding industry; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is considering the revised levels of support that the Commission notified to member states on 18 January and will make a statement shortly.

Leith

Q99. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Prime Minister when she next expects to pay an official visit to the port of Leith.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Disabled People

Q132. **Mr. Hannam:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the Government's latest proposals to help the disabled.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security recently announced major proposals to improve social security help for people with disabilities. Our strategy is to improve the balance and structure of benefits for disabled people who are unable to work, and in particular to do more for those disabled from birth or early in life, and to improve the help given to those disabled people who can and want to work. The changes we propose to make include a new disability allowance for people of working age and below to extend help with the extra costs of being disabled; a new disability employment credit to make it easier for disabled people to take up jobs, and an increase of up to £10 a week in severe disablement allowance. Our proposals will give extra help to some 850,000 people and their net effect will be to add by 1993-94 some £300 million to the total cost of the benefits we pay to long-term sick and disabled people and their carers.

North-east England

Q145. **Mr. Trotter:** To ask the Prime Minister when she next plans to pay an official visit to the north-east.

The Prime Minister: I hope to visit the north-east during the course of the year.

Jobs

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister if she will raise at the next meeting of the European Council the latest assessments prepared by the EEC Commission on the impact of 1992 on jobs.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave him on Tuesday 30 January.

Pay Review Bodies

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the latest reports of the pay review bodies.

The Prime Minister: The 1990 reports of the review bodies on the pay of nursing staff, midwives and health visitors, the professions allied to medicine, the doctors and dentists, and the armed forces, and of the Top Salaries Review Body, have been published today. Copies are now available in the Vote Office. The Government are grateful to members of the review bodies for these reports and the time and care which they put into their preparation.

The table shows the overall increases recommended by the review bodies for each group, and their cost:

	Pay bill increase in 1990-91	*Range of increase*	*[1] United Kingdom public expenditure cost*
	per cent	*per cent*	*£ million*
Armed forces	10·9	4·1—23·0	458
Doctors and dentists[2]	10·9	9·5—15·2	423
Professions allied to medicine	10·1	8·7—14·7	61
Nursing staff, midwives and health visitors	9·6	[3] 8·9—16·0	630
Top salaries[4]	11·0	7·0—18·7	10

[1] The figures for public expenditure cost differ from those in the Review Bodies' reports. Their figures do not include some costs which count as public expenditure.

[2] Payments to GPs for achieving higher targets for immunisation and cervical screening are recommended by the Review Body as outside intended average remuneration. The payments would add some 0·3 per cent. to the total pay bill and are included in the £423 million.

[3] A very few young staff would receive higher increases of up to 19·7 per cent.

[4] These figures assume that the additional increase of 10 per cent. recommended for Groups 5—7 of the judiciary is phased over two years, with 5 per cent. paid on 1 April 1990.

The Government consider that the overall pay cost in the year 1990-91 implied by these recommendations if implemented in full immediately would be too high. They have therefore decided that the general approach should be to implement the recommendations in full during the year but to stage them so that most groups receive an increase of 7 per cent. from 1 April 1990 with the balance from 1 January 1991.

In the case of the review body on armed forces the Government have decided to accept the recommendations but their implementation will be staged so that 7 per cent. is paid from 1 April 1990 and the remaining 1·7 to 2·5 per cent. of the basic increase together with additional payments is paid from 1 January 1991.

The Government have decided to accept with two exceptions the recommendations of the review body on doctors and dentists, but to stage their implementation so that 7 per cent. is payable in all cases from 1 April 1990 and the remainder of the increases of between 2·5 and 4·5 per cent. plus other payments, depending on the group, from 1 January 1991. The exceptions are the recommendations that the Government rejected last year for extra increases at the top of the consultants' scale and in the size of consultants' distinction awards. It is still the Government's view that the additional 100 permanent consultant posts which are now being created will best achieve the objective of improving the long-term career structure for hospital doctors.

The Government have decided to accept the recommendations of the review body on nursing staff, midwives and health visitors but to stage their implementation so that from 1 April 1990, 7 per cent. is payable to all and in addition the recommendation for changes in London pay and some extra increases in the pay of student nurses take effect from that date. The remaining 2 per cent. of the basic increase and other additional payments will be paid from 1 January 1991.

The Government have decided to accept the recommendations of the review body on professions allied to medicine but to stage their implementation so that from 1 April 1990, 7 per cent. is payable to all and in addition the recommendation for changes in London pay takes effect. The remaining increase of 2·75 per cent. and other additional payments will be paid from 1 January 1991.

The Government have decided to accept the recommendations of the Top Salaries Review Body but to stage their implementation. The basic increase of 7 per cent. recommended for all groups will be payable as to 6 per cent. from 1 April 1990 and 1 per cent. from 1 January 1991. In addition, for senior civil servants the abolition of the fixed scale increments for grades 2 and 3 will take effect from 1 April 1990; the increases in the London allowance for grade 3, and the consequential increases for grade 2, will take effect from 1 January 1991; and the new performance pay scheme for grades 2 and 3 will be introduced from 1 April 1991. For two and three-star officers, the additional increases of 2·75 per cent. will take effect from 1 January 1991. For judges, the extra increase of 10 per cent. recommended for those in groups 5 to 7 will be staged with payments on 1 January 1991, 1 August 1991 and 1 April 1992.

The cost of implementing all the recommendations on this basis will be met from within the public expenditure planning totals published in the Autumn Statement. In the case of the health services, the Government recognise that the full costs could not be accommodated within present health provision without adversely affecting services to patients. The Government have therefore decided to provide an extra £205 million from the reserve for next year. This payment will bring the increase in the total resources available for the National Health Service in 1990-91 over 1989-90 to nearly £3 billion.

The pay rates and scales resulting from the decisions will be promulgated as soon as possible for all the groups concerned. Pensions will follow the rates of salary in payment.

Engagements

Mr. McFall: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 1 February.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 1 February.

Mr. John P. Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 1 February.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 1 February.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 1 February.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 1 February.

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 1 February.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 1 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

ENERGY

Electricity Supply Industry

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many tonnes of *(a)* sulphur dioxide, *(b)* nitrogen oxides and *(c)* particulate carbon are discharged into the atmosphere as a result of electricity generation each year.

Mr. Baldry: In 1987 a total of 2,830,000 tonnes of sulphur dioxide and 809,000 tonnes of nitrogen oxides were emitted in the United Kingdom as a result of electricity generation. The reference to particulate carbon in the question is taken as meaning black smoke; coal-fired power stations employ a high-temperature combustion process which avoids the emission of black smoke during electricity generation.

These figures have been taken from the "Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics", a copy of which is in the Library of the House. Figures for 1988 will be available in the next edition of the digest which will be published soon.

Non-fossil Fuel Levy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what studies he has commissioned of the effect of a non-fossil fuel levy on electricity prices on *(a)* price and

sale prospects of area boards, *(b)* incentives for larger users to generate their own electricity, *(c)* fuel prices in the United Kingdom compared to the EEC countries and *(d)* substitution of gas.

Mr. Baldry: The fossil fuel levy is designed to ensure that the costs of the non-fossil fuel obligation are shared out amongst all electricity suppliers. Otherwise, the public electricity suppliers would be put at a competitive disadvantage and proceeds affected. The levy does not add to the total cost of electricity, it identifies a cost that is already there. In general, therefore, the introduction of the levy will not have a significant impact.

Research Establishments

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what recent visit he has paid to the atomic energy research establishments at *(a)* Harwell, *(b)* Windscale laboratories and *(c)* Dounreay; what matters were discussed; and whether he plans to make further visits.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State visited Harwell on 20 October 1989. He discussed a variety of matters including the R and D work of the laboratory and the progress being made in meeting the AEA's commercial objectives. He has not yet visited the Windscale laboratories or Dounreay.

Offshore Installations

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many offshore installations in the United Kingdom continental shelf are classified as not normally manned installations; what criteria are applied to determine whether an installation is so classified; and what requirements are in force for safety and evacuation of workers on such installations.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Forty installations have been registered with my Department as not normally manned. There are a number of criteria that are taken into account in determining whether an installation is so classified, including the number of visits necessary to maintain normal operations, the number of persons likely to be on the installation at any one time, the hazards likely to be present and the logistical support provided.

There is a duty on every employer under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 to ensure the safety at work of all his employees, and this would apply whenever people are present on installations which are not normally manned. In addition, there are specific statutory requirements under the Mineral Workings (Offshore Installations) Act 1971 for there to be lifebuoys, lifejackets, suitable and sufficient means of descent to the water, automatic fire and flammable gas detection systems, remote control safety equipment, fire extinguishers and fireman's equipment on every offshore installation. A standby vessel must be in attendance at all times when there are persons present on a not normally manned installation and in addition operating companies have agreed that a helicopter will be available so that in the event of an emergency all persons can be evacuated with the minimum delay.

Emergency Shutdown Valves

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy which pipelines on the United Kingdom continental shelf have subsea emergency shutdown valves installed; which pipelines have been identified as requiring subsea emergency shutdown valves; which companies operate these pipelines; and when he proposes to introduce regulations making such valves mandatory.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Subsea isolation systems are fitted to the following pipelines:

Murchison 6″ Northern Leg gas gathering line
Esmond to shore 24″ gas pipeline
Claymore to Piper Wye 16″ oil pipeline
Claymore to Tartan 24″ oil pipeline
Claymore to AH 001 14″ oil pipeline
Claymore to shore 30″ oil pipeline
2 × Claymore to Scapa 10″ oil pipelines
2 × Claymore to Scapa 6″ test pipelines
6 × Claymore to Scapa 3″ gas lift pipelines
Brent A 20″ Northern Leg gas gathering line
Fulmar to shore 20″ gas pipeline
Tartan to Piper Wye 18″ gas pipeline
Tartan to AH 001 8″ gas pipeline
Tartan to Claymore 24″ oil pipeline
Tartan to Highlander 12″ oil pipeline
Tartan to Highlander 8″ test pipeline
Tartan to Highlander 8″ gas lift pipeline
Tartan to Petronella 8″oil pipeline
MCP-01 to Piper Wye 18″ oil pipeline.

Subsea isolation systems have also been fitted to the oil and gas pipeline risers of the following floating production installations:

Transworld 58
Deepsea Pioneer
Northsea Pioneer
AH 001
Balmoral 16/21
Buchan "A".

After continuing our consultations on requirements for subsea isolation systems I hope to make regulations early in 1991. In the meantime pipeline-operating companies, in discussion with my Department, have identified at least a further 25 pipelines for which they propose to fit subsea isolation systems. Other pipelines are under consideration.

Fuel Exports and Imports

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, further to his answer of 9 November 1989, *Official Report*, columns *767-68*, if he will now give the equivalent fuel table figures for 1989 on the same basis.

Mr. Wakeham: I refer the hon. Member to the note to my reply given on 12 January 1990, *Official Report*, columns *768-69*, which stated that provisional data for the whole of 1989 should be available in mid-February.

Electricity

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he will make it his policy to prepare a national emergency plan to provide a rapid response capability within the electricity supply industry subsequent to vesting day to restore power rapidly to storm-affected areas;

(2) what arrangements he proposes to make to enable electricity distribution linesmen to be transferred on a good will basis to areas with badly disrupted power supplies subsequent to vesting day in the electricity supply industry;

(3) what consultations he has had on the best means of achieving a rapid restoration of power to storm-affected areas subsequent to vesting day in the electricity supply industry;

(4) what is his most up-to-date evaluation of the speed of response of the electricity supply industry to the storms of *(a)* Thursday 25 January and *(b)* October 1987;

(5) what powers he will have to ensure that emergency repair staff of the electricity distribution boards can be switched to power cut-afflicted regions subsequent to vesting day in the electricity supply industry; and if he will make a statement;

(6) whether he will carry out a full analysis of the costs and benefits of instituting a rapid response team of electricity linesmen to restore power to power-cut areas subsequent to vesting day in the electricity supply industry.

Mr. Baldry: As in October 1987, the boards in the electricity industry that were badly affected by the recent storm set about restoring supplies rapidly and energetically. Other area boards, the Scottish electricity boards, Northern Ireland Electricity, the electricity supply board of the Republic of Ireland and outside contractors provided prompt and substantial assistance.

I am confident that, after vesting and after flotation, the new companies will continue to give priority to the restoration of supplies to customers and will continue to come to each other's help as occasions require.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Nursery Costs

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to the average cost of a place in *(a)* nursery school, *(b)* nursery class and *(c)* reception class for four-year-olds.

Mrs. Rumbold: Local authority returns of expenditure to the Department of the Environment do not separately identify spending on provision for four-year-olds in nursery schools, nursery classes or reception classes. Expenditure on such provision is included within the primary sector. However, for the purpose of the public expenditure White Paper, my Department does make assumptions about the division of spending between under-fives and over-fives in the primary sector, taking account of the latest projections of pupil numbers. The unit cost implied by the provisional outturn spending attributed to under-fives in 1989-90 is some £1,350. This includes spending on under-fives in nursery schools, nursery classes, and reception classes in primary schools.

Capital Allocations

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table giving for the financial year 1990-91 *(a)* capital allocations per pupil in county and voluntary controlled schools and *(b)* capital grant per pupil in grant-maintained schools.

Mr. MacGregor: It is not possible to provide figures on a comparable basis. For 1990-91 local education authorities have received annual capital guidelines for education. It is open to authorities to use the resources avaiable to them for capital purposes as they wish and they are free, within the flexibilities of the local government Acts, to spend above the level of their annual capital guideline from capital receipts and other bources. The annual capital guideline is not split between primary and secondary schools whereas all except one of the existing grant-maintained schools are secondary schools. Nor is information yet available about the distribution of pupils between the two sectors in 1990-91.

Denominational Schools

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will list by name for each local education authority, and by faith, the denominational schools that have opened since 1985;

(2) if he will list by name for each local education authority, and by faith, the denominational schools that have closed since 1985.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The names of the maintained and non-maintained denominational schools that have opened or closed in 1985 and onwards are given in the table. The list includes maintained schools that have been opened or closed following the approval of statutory proposals; in some cases for the purpose of amalgamation.

The list is not fully up to date, as some replies from local education authorities are still awaited confirming closures in 1989.

Independent schools are shown in the education authority in which they are situated.

Denominational schools opened since 1985

Local education authority	*Denomination*	*School details*
Barnet	Jewish	Independent Jewish Day School
Croydon	Church of England	St. Andrews C.E. Secondary School
Ealing	Roman Catholic	Cardinal Wiseman R.C. High
Enfield	Church of England	All Saints C.E. Primary School
	Church of England	Newriver Christian School
	Roman Catholic	St. Ignatius College School
Harrow	Roman Catholic	St. Georges R.C. First & Middle
Redbridge	Roman Catholic	S.S. Peter & Paul R.C. Primary
Richmond upon Thames	Church of England	The Queen's C.E. Primary School
Sutton	Church of England	St. Dunstans C.E. Primary School
	Church of England	Wilson's School

Local education authority	Denomination	School details
Waltham Forest	Roman Catholic	Holy Family College
Coventry	Roman Catholic	Cardinal Wiseman R.C. Secondary School
Dudley	Church of England	Netherton C.E. Primary School
Walsall	Church of England	Birchills C.E. Primary
Wolverhampton	Church of England	St. Martins C.E. Primary
	Church of England	St. Martins Primary
Knowsley	Roman Catholic	Knowsley St. Edmund of Canterbury R.C.
	Roman Catholic	Knowsley St. Thomas Becket R.C.
	Roman Catholic	Knowsley All Saints R.C. Comprehensive
St. Helens	Roman Catholic	St. Augustine of Canterbury R.C. High
	Roman Catholic	De La Salle R.C. High
	Roman Catholic	Carmel R.C. Sixth Form College
Sefton	Church of England	Bishop David Sheppard C.E. Primary School
Wirral	Roman Catholic	St. Benedicts R.C. High School
Bolton	Roman Catholic	Mount St. Josephs R.C. School
	Roman Catholic	Thornleigh Salesian College
Bury	Roman Catholic	St. Monicas R.C. High School
	Jewish	Bury & Whitfield Jewish Primary
Manchester	Church of England	St. Johns C.E. Primary
	Roman Catholic	Ancoats St. Annes R.C. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	St. Vincent De Paul R.C. High
	Roman Catholic	Barlow R.C. High
	Roman Catholic	St. Gregorys R.C. High
Oldham	Roman Catholic	St. Augustine of Canterbury R.C. Comprehensive
	Roman Catholic	Our Lady R.C. Comprehensive
Rochdale	Roman Catholic	Cardinal Langley R.C. High
Salford	Church of England	Wardley C.E. Primary School
	Church of England	St. Pauls Peel C.E. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	Pope John Paul II R.C. High School
	Roman Catholic	Our Lady of Mount Carmel R.C. High
Stockport	Church of England	St. Stephen's C.E. Primary
Trafford	Roman Catholic	Christ the King School
Wigan	Methodist	Bedford Hall Methodist Primary
Bradford	Church of England	St. Philip's C.E. First School
Kirklees	Church of England	Almondbury C.E. V.C. Infants
Leeds	Roman Catholic	St. Anthony's R.C. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	St. Augustine R.C. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	Christ the King R.C. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	Corpus Christi R.C. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	St. Francis R.C. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	Holy Family R.C. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	Our Lady R.C. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	St. Joseph's R.C. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	St. Nicholas R.C. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	Our Lady of Good Council R.C. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	Sacred Heart R.C. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	St. Paul's R.C. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	St. Philip's R.C. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	Holy Name R.C. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	St. Andrew's R.C. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	St. Brigid's R.C. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	St. Dominic's R.C. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	Immaculate Heart of Mary R.C. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	St. Patrick's R.C. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	Cardinal Heenan High School
	Roman Catholic	Corpus Christi High School
	Roman Catholic	Mount St. Mary High School
	Roman Catholic	St. Michael's High School

Local education authority	Denomination	School details
	Roman Catholic	Notre Dame Sixth Form College
Wakefield	Church of England	St. Thomas C.E. Junior
	Church of England	St. Thomas C.E. Junior
Gateshead	Roman Catholic	St. Edmund Campion R.C. Comprehensive
	Roman Catholic	St. Thomas More R.C. Comprehensive
North Tyneside	Roman Catholic	Wallsend C.E. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	St. Thomas More R.C. Comprehensive School
Inner London	Church of England	Bishop John Robinson School
	Roman Catholic	Wandsworth, John Paul II
	Roman Catholic	Lambeth, Bishop Thomas Grant R.C.
	Roman Catholic	Camberwell, Sacred Heart R.C.
	Roman Catholic	Bermondsey, St. Michael's R.C. Secondary
	Church of England	The Dolphin School
	Roman Catholic	St. Francis Xavier Sixth Form College
	Roman Catholic	London Oratory School
	Methodist	Hornsby House School
	Jewish	Talmud Torah Chaim Meirim School
Avon	Church of England	Crockerne Pill VC Infant
	Church of England	All Saints C.E. Primary School
	Church of England	St. Michaels C.E. Primary School
Berkshire	Church of England	The Queen Anne Royal Free C.E. First School
	Church of England	Eton Porny C.E. First
	Church of England	Binfield C.E. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	Slough St. Ethelberts R.C. Combined
	Roman Catholic	Slough St. Anthonys Combined
	Roman Catholic	The Holy Family Combined
	Roman Catholic	St. Edwards Royal Free (Aided) Middle
	Roman Catholic	Faith Christian School
Buckinghamshire	Roman Catholic	St. Pauls R.C. Secondary School
Cambridgeshire	Church of England	William Law C.E. Primary School
Cheshire	Roman Catholic	St. Philips Church & Community School
	Roman Catholic	Winsford St. Josephs R.C. Primary School
	Jewish	Robert Raikes Tutorial School
Cleveland	Church of England	William Cassidi C.E. (Aided) Stillington
	Church of England	St. Christophers C.E./R.C. Primary School
Cornwall	Church of England	Tremore Christian School
	Church of England	Tamar Christian School
Cumbria	Roman Catholic	St. Monica's Preparatory School
Derbyshire	Church of England	Holbrook C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Belper St. Johns C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Calow C.E. Primary
	Roman Catholic	St. Benedict R.C. V.A. School
Devon	Church of England	Exmouth Littleham C. of E.
	Church of England	St. Michaels C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Bickleigh Down C.E. Primary School
	Church of England	Pinhoe St. Michaels C.E. Combined School
	Church of England	Chelfham Senior School
	Church of England	Blyth School
	Church of England	Stonelands School of Dance & Drama
Dorset	Church of England	Poole Baden Powell & St. Peters C.E. Middle School
	Church of England	The Abbey C.E. First
	Roman Catholic	Muscliffe Epiphany Primary
	Roman Catholic	Verwood Emmanuel Middle School
Durham	Church of England	Shildon St. Johns C.E. Junior & Infant
	Roman Catholic	Blessed John Duckett R.C. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	St. Bedes R.C. Primary
East Sussex	Jewish	Torah Academy
Essex	Church of England	Bishop Wilson Springfield C. of E. Primary

Local education authority	Denomination	School details
Hampshire	Church of England	Portsea C.E. First & Middle School
	Church of England	Basingstoke St. John's C.E. Primary
	Roman Catholic	Winchester St. Peters R.C. Primary School
Hereford and Worcester	Church of England	The River School
Hertfordshire	Church of England	Leverstock Green V.C. Primary
	Church of England	The John Henry Newman R.C. School
	Church of England	The Thomas Coram C.E. Middle School
Humberside	Church of England	Alderman Cogan C.E. Primary School
	Church of England	Archbishop Thurstan C.E. School
	Roman Catholic	St. Oswalds/St. Annes R.C. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	St. Richards R.C. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	St. Thomas More R.C. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	St. Marys R.C. College
Isle of Wight	Roman Catholic	Newport C.E. Primary School
	Church of England	Maidstone St. Johns C. of E.
	Church of England	Maidstone St. Johns C. of E.
	Church of England	The Junior Kings School
	Roman Catholic	Gillingham St. Marys R.C. Primary School
Lancashire	Church of England	Bacup Holy Trinity Stackstead C.E.
	Church of England	Maharishi School of the Age of Enlightenment
	Church of England	Kingsfold Christian School
	Roman Catholic	St. Josepha R.C. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	Barton Newhouse St. Marys/St. Andrews School
	Roman Catholic	Preston St. Bernards R.C. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	Walton-Le-Dale St. Marys and St. Benedicts R.C. Primary
	Roman Catholic	Preston Our Ladys R.C. High School
	Roman Catholic	Preston Corpus Christi R.C. High School
	Roman Catholic	Preston Christ the King R.C. High School
	Roman Catholic	Our Lady and St. John R.C. High School
	Roman Catholic	St. Bedes R.C. High School
Leicestershire	Church of England	Ashby C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Townlands C.E. Primary School
	Church of England	St. Marys School
Lincolnshire	Church of England	The Ellison Baxters C.E. Primary School
North Yorkshire	Church of England	Forest of Galtries Anglican/Methodist Shipton
	Church of England	Askrigg Primary School
	Roman Catholic	All Saints R.C. School
Nottinghamshire	Church of England	Djanogly City Technology College
Oxfordshire	Church of England	St. Swithuns C.E. Primary Kennington
	Church of England	Milton C.E. Primary School
	Church of England	Bruern Abbey School
	Church of England	St. Clare's School
	Roman Catholic	Emmanuel Christian School
Somerset	Church of England	Chilton Cantelo School
Staffordshire	Church of England	Essington St. Johns C.E. Primary
	Church of England	The Lonsdale Primary School
	Church of England	St. Johns C.E. Primary School
	Church of England	St. Andrews C.E. Primary School
	Church of England	St. Pauls C.E. Primary School
	Church of England	Woodseaves C.E. Primary School
	Church of England	Haughton C.E. Primary School
	Church of England	All Saints C.E. Infant School
	Church of England	St. Lawrence C.E. Primary School
	Church of England	St. Peters C.E. Primary School
	Church of England	Manifold C.E. Primary School
	Church of England	Waterhouses C.E. Primary School
	Church of England	Flash C.E. Primary School
	Church of England	Newborough Needwood C.E. Primary
	Church of England	The Anson C.E. Primary School
Suffolk	Church of England	Potters Gate C of E First and Middle
	Church of England	The Redlands C.E. First School
	Church of England	Trinity C.E. School
	Church of England	St. Margarets School
	Church of England	Kenry School

Local education authority	Denomination	School details
	Church of England	Moon Hall School
	Roman Catholic	St. Josephs R.C. First and Middle
	Roman Catholic	St. Matthews C.E. First and Middle
	Roman Catholic	St. Charles R.C. First School
	Roman Catholic	St. Pauls R.C. Secondary School
Warwickshire	Church of England	New Bilton St. Oswalds C.E. First
	Church of England	Shustoke C.E. First School
West Sussex	Church of England	Harting St. Mary and St. Paul C.E. Cont. First School
	Church of England	New Life School
Wiltshire	Church of England	Netheravon All Saints Primary School
	Church of England	Cheverell Academy

Denominational schools closed since 1985

Local education authority	Denomination	School details
Barnet	Roman Catholic	St. Antonys School
	Roman Catholic	St. Albans Prep School
	Jewish	Independent Jewish Day School
	Jewish	Yavneh Prep School
Bexley	Roman Catholic	St. Joseph's Convent
Bromley	Church of England	Bromley St. Marys C.E.
	Roman Catholic	Beckenham Convent School
Croydon	Church of England	St. Andrews C.E. High School
Ealing	Roman Catholic	Cardinal Newman R.C. High
	Roman Catholic	Cardinal Wiseman R.C. High
	Roman Catholic	St. Annes Convent School
Enfield	Church of England	Latymer All Saints Junior
	Church of England	Latymer All Saints Infants
	Roman Catholic	St. Ignatius College
	Roman Catholic	St. Ignatius College Lower School
Harrow	Roman Catholic	St. Georges R.C. First
	Roman Catholic	St. Georges R.C. Middle
Newham	Roman Catholic	St. Mary and St. Edward R.C. Junior and Infant
Redbridge	Roman Catholic	St. Peter and St. Paul R.C. Junior
	Roman Catholic	St. Peter and St. Paul R.C. Infant
Richmond-upon-Thames	Church of England	Queens C.E. Junior
	Church of England	Queens C.E. Infant School
Sutton	Church of England	Cheam C.E. Junior Boys
	Church of England	St. Dunstans C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Wilsons School
Waltham Forest	Roman Catholic	Cardinal Wiseman Senior High School
	Roman Catholic	Corpus Christi High School
Birmingham	Roman Catholic	St. Stephens R.C. Junior and Infants
	Roman Catholic	Rosary R.C. School
	Roman Catholic	Archbishop Masterson R.C. School
	Roman Catholic	Archbishop Williams R.C. School
Coventry	Church of England	St. Michaels C. of E. Primary School
	Roman Catholic	Cardinal Wiseman R.C. Secondary School for Boys
	Roman Catholic	Cardinal Wiseman R.C. Secondary School for Girls
Dudley	Church of England	Jessons C.E. First
	Church of England	Netherton C.E. Middle
	Church of England	St. Marys C.E. Primary
	Church of England	The Blue Coat School
Walsall	Church of England	Birchills C.E. Infants
	Church of England	Birchills C.E. Junior
	Roman Catholic	St. Marys R.C. Willenhall
Wolverhampton	Church of England	Bilston Bradley St. Martins Junior

Local education authority	Denomination	School details
Knowsley	Roman Catholic	Holy Angels R.C. Infant School
	Roman Catholic	St. Marks R.C. Infants
	Roman Catholic	Knowsley St. Gregorys R.C. Girls Comprehensive
	Roman Catholic	Knowsley St. Kevins R.C. Boys Comprehensive
	Roman Catholic	Knowsley St. Augustine of Canterbury R.C. Comprehensive
	Roman Catholic	St. Pauls R.C. Comprehensive School
	Roman Catholic	Knowsley The Gonzaga R.C. Comprehensive
	Roman Catholic	Knowsley St. Columbas R.C. Comprehensive
	Roman Catholic	Knowsley St. Dominics R.C. Comprehensive
Liverpool	Church of England	Allerton Priory
	Roman Catholic	St. Hughs R.C. Infants
	Roman Catholic	St. Teresas R.C. Junior Girls
	Roman Catholic	Holy Cross and St. Marys R.C. Infants
	Roman Catholic	Convent of Mercy Preparatory School
St. Helens	Church of England	Marshalls Cross C.E. Infants
	Roman Catholic	Lowe House R.C. Junior
	Roman catholic	Lowe House R.C. Infants Department
	Roman Catholic	Sacred Heart R.C. Primary
	Roman Catholic	Mount Carmel R.C. High School
	Roman Catholic	Campion R.C. High School
	Roman Catholic	St. Albans R.C. High School
	Roman Catholic	West Park R.C. High School
	Roman Catholic	Notre Dame R.C. High
	Roman Catholic	St. Anselms R.C. High School
Sefton	Church of England	Christ Church C.E. Primary School
	Church of England	All Saints C.E. Primary
	Church of England	St. Simon and St. Jude's C.E. Primary
	Roman Catholic	St. Monicas R.C. Infant
	Roman Catholic	Lydiate R.C. Primary
	Roman Catholic	St. Augustines R.C. High
Wirral	Roman Catholic	Bishop Challoner R.C. High
	Roman Catholic	The Marian R.C. High
Bolton	Roman Catholic	Thornleigh Salesian College
	Roman Catholic	St. Cuthberts R.C. School
	Roman Catholic	Mount St. Josephs R.C. School
	Roman Catholic	St. Augustines R.C. School
	Methodist	Harwood Methodist Infant
Bury	Roman Catholic	St. Peters R.C. High
	Roman Catholic	St. Josephs R.C. High
Manchester	Church of England	St. Johns C.E. Primary
	Roman Catholic	St. Annes R.C. Junior Ancoats
	Roman Catholic	St. Annes R.C. Infants Ancoats
	Roman catholic	The Hollies R.C. High School for Girls
	Roman Catholic	St. Marks R.C. High School for Boys
	Roman Catholic	St. Josephs R.C. High School for Girls
	Roman catholic	St. Pius R.C. High School for Boys
	Roman Catholic	St. Gregorys R.C. High Street
	Roman Catholic	St. Thomas More R.C. High School
	Roman Catholic	De La Salle College of Education
Oldham	Roman Catholic	St. Albans R.C. Comprehensive
	Roman Catholic	Our Ladys R.C. Comprehensive
	Roman Catholic	St. Anselms R.C. Comprehensive
Rochdale	Roman Catholic	St. Marys R.C. Infant
	Roman Catholic	St. Wilfrids R.C. Middle
	Roman Catholic	Bishop Henshaw Memorial R.C. Upper
	Roman Catholic	St. Dominic Savio R.C. High
	Roman Catholic	Cardinal Langley R.C. High
	Roman Catholic	St. Josephs R.C. Middle
Salford	Church of England	St. Pauls Peel C.E. Infant
	Church of England	Stowell Memorial C.E.
	Church of England	St. Pauls Peel C.E. Junior
	Church of England	St. Johns Ellesmere School
	Church of England	All Saints C.E. Primary
	Roman Catholic	St. Bonifaces R.C. Infant Department of
	Roman Catholic	St. Josephs R.C. Infant
	Roman Catholic	Cathedral R.C. High
	Roman Catholic	St. Albert R.C. High

Local education authority	Denomination	School details
	Roman Catholic	St. Andrews R.C. High
	Roman Catholic	St. Lawrence R.C. High
Stockport	Church of England	Offerton C. of E. Primary
	Church of England	Parish C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Christ Church C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Norbury C. of E. Primary
Tameside	Roman Catholic	Audenshaw St. Annes R.C. Infants
Wigan	Methodist	Leigh Bedford Methodist Primary
	Methodist	Leigh Plank Lane Methodist Primary
Barnsley	Church of England	Thurgoland Crane Moor C. of E. Junior and Infants
Rotherham	Church of England	Brampton Ellis C. of E. Secondary
Sheffield	Roman Catholic	St. Vincents R.C. Junior and Infant
	Roman Catholic	St. Peters R.C.
Bradford	Church of England	St. Philips C.E. First School
	Roman Catholic	St. Patricks R.C. First School
Calderdale	Roman Catholic	St. Marys R.C. Infants Department of
Kirklees	Church of England	West Slaithwaite C.E. Junior and Infant
	Church of England	Almondbury C. of E. Infants
	Church of England	Whitley Lower C. of E. First and Middle
	Roman Catholic	Huddersfield St. Josephs R.C. Infant
Leeds	Roman Catholic	Beeston St. Anthonys R.C. Primary
	Roman Catholic	Bramley Christ The King R.C. Primary
	Roman Catholic	Harehills St. Augustines R.C. Primary
	Roman Catholic	Hunslet St. Josephs Primary
	Roman Catholic	Middleton St. Philips R.C. Primary
	Roman Catholic	New Wortley Holy Family R.C. Primary
	Roman Catholic	Our Ladys R.C. Primary
	Roman Catholic	Corpus Christi R.C. Primary
	Roman Catholic	Our Lady of Good Counsel R.C. Primary
	Roman Catholic	St. Francis of Assisi R.C. Primary
	Roman Catholic	St. Nicholas R.C. Primary
	Roman Catholic	St. Pauls R.C. Primary
	Roman Catholic	Sacred Heart R.C. Primary
	Roman Catholic	St. Gregorys R.C. Primary
	Roman Catholic	Corpus Christi R.C. High
	Roman Catholic	St. Brigids R.C. Middle
	Roman Catholic	Cardinal Heenan R.C. High
	Roman Catholic	St. Andrews R.C. Middle
	Roman Catholic	Mount St. Mary R.C. High
	Roman Catholic	St. Michaels R.C. College
	Roman Catholic	Notre Dame High School
	Roman Catholic	St. Gregorys R.C. Middle
	Roman Catholic	St. Dominics R.C. Middle
	Roman Catholic	Holy Name R.C. Middle
	Roman Catholic	St. Kevins R.C. Middle
Wakefield	Church of England	St. Botolphs C.E. Middle (amalgamated with)
	Church of England	Ossett Holy Trinity C.E. Infant
	Church of England	Featherstone St. Thomas C.E. Middle
Gateshead	Roman Catholic	Blaydon St. Josephs R.C. Infants (amalgamated with)
	Roman Catholic	St. John Fisher R.C. Comprehensive
	Roman Catholic	St. Edmund Campion Comprehensive
	Roman Catholic	St. Thomas More R.C. Comprehensive
North Tyneside	Church of England	St. Peters C.E. First
	Church of England	Wallsend C.E. Middle
	Roman Catholic	St. Aidans R.C. High
	Roman Catholic	St. Anselms High School
Sunderland	Roman Catholic	St. Thomas Aquinas R.C.
	Jewish	Kol Yaatorah School
Inner London	Church of England	Lambeth Holy Trinity District C.E. J.M. & I.
	Church of England	Westminster St. James The Less C.E. Primary School
	Church of England	Battersea St. Marys C.E. J. M. & I.

Local education authority	Denomination	School details
	Church of England	Wandsworth Sir Walter St. Johns School
	Church of England	Newriver Christian School
	Roman Catholic	Hampstead Rosary R.C. Infants
	Roman Catholic	Wandsworth Clapham College
	Roman Catholic	St. Veronicas R.C. Secondary
	Roman Catholic	Hammersmith London Oratory R.C. Opted out
	Roman Catholic	Battersea Notre Dame High School
	Roman Catholic	Wandsworth Convent of the Holy Family
	Roman Catholic	Wandsworth John Griffiths R.C. Secondary
Inner London	Roman Catholic	Bermondsey St. Michaels R.C. Secondary
	Roman Catholic	Camberwell Sacred Heart R.C.
	Roman Catholic	Lambeth Bishop Thomas Grant R.C.
	Roman Catholic	St. Josephs Academy Pre-Prep School
	Roman Catholic	St. Aloysius Junior School
	Roman Catholic	Montfort House School
	Jewish	Beis Shammai Grammar School
Avon	Church of England	Weston All Saints C. of E. Junior
	Church of England	St. Michaels C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Compton Dando C. of E. Primary
	Church of England	Easton in Gordand Cofe
	Church of England	Failand C. of E. Primary
	Roman Catholic	Bristol Association of Catholic Youth Clubs
	Roman Catholic	St. Nicholas R.C. Infants Department of
Bedfordshire	Church of England	Old Warden C. of E. Lower
Berkshire	Church of England	All Saints C.E.
	Church of England	St. Marks C.E.
	Church of England	Padworth C.E.
	Church of England	Littlewick C.E. Infants
	Church of England	Royal Free C.E. First
	Church of England	Spital C.E. First
	Church of England	Eton Porny C.E. Combined
	Church of England	Royal Free C.E. Middle
	Roman Catholic	Slough St. Ethelberts R.C. First
	Roman Catholic	The Holy Family R.C. Middle
	Roman Catholic	Slough St. Ethelberts R.C. Middle
	Roman Catholic	The Holy Family R.C. First
	Roman Catholic	Slough St. Anthonys R.C. First
	Roman Catholic	Slough St. Anthonys R.C. Middle
	Roman Catholic	St. Edwards R.C. Middle
Buckinghamshire	Church of England	Stoke Hammond C.E. First School
	Church of England	Westbury C.E. First
	Church of England	Hambleden C.E. Combined
	Roman Catholic	Divine Mercy College
Cambridgeshire	Church of England	Burwell C.E. First
	Church of England	Coveney C.E.
Cheshire	Church of England	Marbury-with-Quoisley Primary School
	Roman Catholic	Warrington St. Stephens R.C. Infant Department of
	Roman Catholic	Winsford St. Josephs R.C. Junior
	Roman Catholic	Winsford St. Josephs R.C. Infant
Cleveland	Church of England	St. Hildas C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Wynyard Park C.E. Primary
	Roman Catholic	St. Marys Cathedral R.C. Primary
Cornwall	Church of England	Mabe Primary
	Church of England	Penryn C.E. Infant
	Church of England	Bude C. of E. Junior
Cumbria	Church of England	Hutton Marr Primary
	Church of England	Askham C.E. School
	Church of England	Garsdale C. of E. Primary
	Church of England	Underbarrow C. of E.
	Church of England	Whitehaven Crosthwaite Memorial C. of E. Primary
	Roman Catholic	St. Gabriels Junior School
Derbyshire	Church of England	Belper St. Johns C. of E. First
	Church of England	Birchover C.E. Infant
	Church of England	Calow C.E. Junior
	Church of England	Hazelwood C. of E. First
	Church of England	Holbrook C. of E. First

Local education authority	Denomination	School details
	Church of England	Idridgehay Parochial
	Church of England	Ticknall Parochial C.E.
	Church of England	Yeaveley C. of E.
	Church of England	Ashford C.E.
	Roman Catholic	Derby St. Thomas More R.C.
	Roman Catholic	St. Ralph Sherwin R.C.
Devon	Church of England	Exmouth Littleham C. of E. Junior
	Church of England	Kingsteignton C.E. Infant
	Church of England	Kingsteignton C. of. E. Cancelled
	Church of England	Pinhoe St. Michaels C.E. Middle
	Church of England	Bickleigh C.E. Roborough
	Church of England	Plymouth Charles C.E. Secondary
	Church of England	Morice School
	Roman Catholic	Rosary House First School
	Roman Catholic	Marist Convent School
	Methodist	Ward House School
Dorset	Church of England	Shaftesbury Enmore Green C.E.
	Church of England	Poole St. Peters C.E. Middle
	Church of England	Shaftesbury Alcester St. James C.E.
Durham	Church of England	Shildon All Saints C.E.
	Church of England	Shildon St. Johns C.E.
	Roman Catholic	St. Thomas Aquinas Infant
	Roman Catholic	St. Williams R.C.
	Roman Catholic	Low Westwood Sacred Heart R.C.
	Roman Catholic	Tow Law R.C.
	Roman Catholic	Wolsingham R.C.
East Sussex	Church of England	Abundant Life School
	Roman Catholic	St. Michaels Convent Girls School
	Methodist	Great Sanders School
	Methodist	Rotherfield Hall (not a school)
Essex	Church of England	Foulness Island C.E. School
	Church of England	Chelmsford Springfield C. of E.
	Church of England	Willingale C. of E.
	Roman Catholic	Ockendon St. Cedds R.C. School
Gloucestershire	Church of England	Broadwell C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Daglingworth C. of E.
	Church of England	Sandhurst C. of E.
	Church of England	Weston-Sub-Edge C. of E.
	Church of England	Coates C. of E.
	Church of England	Maisemore C. of E.
	Roman Catholic	Whitefriars School
	Methodist	Dowdeswell Court School
Hampshire	Church of England	East Boldre Primary
	Church of England	Froyle C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Old Alresford Primary
	Church of England	Upton Grey C.E. Primary
	Church of England	St. Judes C.E. First School
	Church of England	Beneficial Societys First
	Church of England	St. Georges C.E. Middle
	Church of England	Hinton Ampner Endowed Primary
	Church of England	Sherfield English C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Weyhill C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Basingstoke St. Johns C.E. Junior
	Church of England	The Kings School
	Church of England	Faith Christian School
	Roman Catholic	Winchester St. Peters R.C. Primary
	Roman Catholic	Yateley Hall Prep School
Hereford and Worcester	Church of England	Norton Lenchwick C.E. First
	Church of England	Tarrington C. of E.
	Church of England	North Malvern C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Norton Canon C.E.
Hertfordshire	Church of England	Westmill First School
	Church of England	Hemel Hempstead Leverstock Green C.E.
	Church of England	Berkhamsted Thomas Bourne C.E.
	Roman Catholic	Broxbourne Cardinal Bourne R.C.
	Roman Catholic	Welwey Garden City Holy Trinity R.C.
	Roman Catholic	St. Michaels R.C. Boys
	Roman Catholic	St. Angelas R.C. Girls
	Roman Catholic	Poles Convent F.C.J.

Local education authority	Denomination	School details
	Roman Catholic	Rosary Priory High School
	Roman Catholic	Rosary Priory Preparatory School
Humberside	Church of England	Bishop Burton C.E.
	Church of England	Archbishop William Temple C.E.
	Church of England	Sancton
	Church of England	St. Andrews C.E. Junior High
	Church of England	Alderman Cogans C.E. Junior High
	Roman Catholic	Sacred Heart R.C.
	Roman Catholic	St. Bedes R.C.
	Roman Catholic	St. Wilfrids R.C.
	Roman Catholic	St. Oswalds R.C.
	Roman Catholic	Marist College Boys School
	Roman Catholic	St. John Fisher R.C. Junior High
	Roman Catholic	St. Mary High
	Roman Catholic	St. Thomas More R.C. Junior High
	Roman Catholic	St. Annes R.C. Junior High
	Roman Catholic	St. Richards R.C. Junior High
	Roman Catholic	Rise Hall School
Isle of Wight	Church of England	Newport C.E. Primary School
Kent	Church of England	Brasted C.E. Primary School
	Church of England	Holy Trinity C.E.
	Church of England	Lower Hardres C.E.
	Church of England	Throwley C.E.
	Church of England	Margate St. Johns C.E. Secondary School for Boys
	Roman Catholic	Gillingham St. Marys R.C. Junior
	Roman Catholic	Gillingham St. Marys R.C. Infant
	Roman Catholic	Foxbush School
	Roman Catholic	Underwood School of Arts & Education
	Methodist	Deal Methodist Junior
Lancashire	Church of England	Bacup Tunstead C.E.
	Church of England	Downham C.E.
	Church of England	Blackburn Emmanuel C.E.
	Church of England	Upholland St. Thomas the Martyr C.E. Infant
	Church of England	Lindenhurst College
	Roman Catholic	Preston St. Josephs R.C. Junior
	Roman Catholic	Preston St. Bernards R.C. Junior
	Roman Catholic	Walton-le-Dale St. Benedicts R.C.
	Roman Catholic	Preston St. Josephs R.C. Infant
	Roman Catholic	Preston Talbot R.C.
	Roman Catholic	Preston St. Bernards R.C. Infant
	Roman Catholic	Preston St. Maria Goretti R.C. Infant
	Roman Catholic	Barton Newsham St. Marys R.C.
	Roman Catholic	Ribchester St. Peter & St. Pauls R.C.
	Roman Catholic	Walton-le-Dale Brownedge R.C. Junior & Infants
	Roman Catholic	Cottam St. Andrews R.C.
	Roman Catholic	St. Annes R.C. Junior
	Roman Catholic	St. Marys R.C. Infants School
	Roman Catholic	Preston St. John Fisher R.C. High
	Roman Catholic	Preston St. Thomas More R.C. High
	Roman Catholic	St. John Rigby R.C. High
	Roman Catholic	St. Edmund Arrowsmith R.C. High
	Roman Catholic	Fulwood St. Cuthbert Mayne R.C. High
	Roman Catholic	St. Thomas Aquinas R.C. High
	Roman Catholic	Notre Dame R.C. High
	Roman Catholic	Preston St. Edmund Campion R.C. High
	Roman Catholic	Preston St. John Southworth R.C High
	Roman Catholic	Upholland College
Leicestershire	Church of England	Ashby de la Zouch C.E. Junior
	Church of England	Ashby de la Zouch C.E. Infant
	Church of England	Bardon Hill C.E.
	Church of England	Earl Shilton C.E. Infant
	Church of England	Walcote C.E.
	Church of England	St. Peters C.E. Junior
	Roman Catholic	St. Alberts Convent School
Lincolnshire	Church of England	Folkingham C. of E.
	Church of England	Foston C.E.
	Church of England	Great Hale C.E.
	Church of England	Wilsford Myers C.E.
	Church of England	Leverton
Lincolnshire	Church of England	Langworth Boulters C.E.

Local education authority	Denomination	School details
	Church of England	St. Mary's C. of E.
	Church of England	Scothern C.E. School
	Church of England	East Barkwith C.E.
	Church of England	East Kirkby, Gregory Croft C.E.
	Church of England	Mumby C.E.
	Church of England	Exeter C.E. Secondary
	Roman Catholic	Grantham Blessed Hugh More R.C. Secondary
	Methodist	Lincoln District Education and Youth Committee
Norfolk	Church of England	Dilham School
	Church of England	Felthorpe C.E. First
	Church of England	Holme Hale
	Church of England	Honing
	Church of England	Pulham Pennoyers
	Church of England	Smallburgh C. of E.
	Church of England	Brancaster Deepdale C. of E.
	Church of England	Scoulton C. of E.
	Church of England	Great Ringstead C. of E.
	Church of England	Old Hunstanton C. of E. First
	Church of England	Abundant Life Christian School
	Roman Catholic	St. Edmunds R.C. Mixed Secondary
North Yorkshire	Church of England	Aldborough St. John C.E. School
	Church of England	Askrigg C. of E.
	Church of England	Bellerby C.E.
	Church of England	Constable Burton C.E.
	Church of England	Flaxton on the Moor C.E.
	Church of England	Newton Upon Ouse C. of E.
	Church of England	Shipton Middleton C. of E.
	Church of England	Silton and Kepwick C.E.
	Church of England	Folkton C.E. Primary School
	Church of England	Ganton C.E.
	Church of England	Sawley C.E. Primary School
	Church of England	Wighill C.E. Primary School
	Church of England	Redmire Bolton Cum Redmire C.E.
	Roman Catholic	St. Margaret Clitherow R.C. Secondary Modern
	Roman Catholic	St. Georges R.C. Secondary Modern
	Roman Catholic	The Bar Convent Grammar School
	Methodist	Tollerton Methodist School
Northamptonshire	Church of England	Aynho C. of E.
Nottinghamshire	Church of England	New Basford C.E.
	Church of England	St. Saviours C.E.
	Church of England	Warsop Vale Junior
	Church of England	Epperstone School
	Church of England	Upton C. of E.
	Roman Catholic	St. Marys R.C.
	Roman Catholic	St. Josephs R.C. Primary
	Roman Catholic	Arnold R.C. Infants
	Roman Catholic	St. Bernadettes R.C.
	Roman Catholic	St. Hughs College
Oxfordshire	Church of England	Ascott under Wychwood C. of E.
	Church of England	Kennington St. Swithuns Junior
	Church of England	Milton St. Blaise C.E.
	Church of England	Stoke Lyne St. Peter C. of E.
	Church of England	Goring Heath Endowed
	Church of England	Ipsden C.E. Primary
Salop	Church of England	Acton Burnell C.E
	Church of England	Chapel Lawn C.E.
	Church of England	Ightfield C.E.
	Church of England	Lyneal C.E. Primary
Staffordshire	Church of England	Bradley Endowed C.E. First
	Church of England	St. Lawrence C.E. First
	Church of England	Hanbury St. Werburghs C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Harlaston St. Matthews C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Haughton C.E. First
	Church of England	Christ Church C.E. First
	Church of England	Newborough All Saints C.E. First
	Church of England	Quarnford the Flash C.E. First
	Church of England	Ranton All Saints C.E. First
	Church of England	Stafford St. John's C.E. First
	Church of England	Stafford St. Paul's C.E. First
	Church of England	Weston St. Andrew's C.E. First
	Church of England	Hixon St. Peter's C.E. First

Local education authority	Denomination	School details
	Church of England	Waterhouses C.E. First
	Church of England	The Anson C.E. First School
	Church of England	Hoar Cross The Meynall C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Newcastle-under-Lyme Trinity C.E. High School
	Church of England	Eccleshall C.E. Middle
	Church of England	Stafford Riverway C.E. Middle
	Church of England	Heron Brook C.E. Middle
	Church of England	Broadacres C.E. Middle
	Church of England	Essington St. John's C.E. Middle
	Church of England	Waterhouses C.E. Middle
	Church of England	Warslow C.E. Middle
	Church of England	Cheddleton St. Edward's C.E. Middle
	Roman Catholic	Cotton College
	Roman Catholic	St. Joseph's Convent School
Suffolk	Church of England	Bradfield St. George C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Culford C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Drinkstone C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Hepworth C.E. Primary School
	Church of England	Ingham C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Stoke by Clare C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Wattisfield C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Bury St. Edmunds Eastgate C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Flixton C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Wetherden C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Icklingham C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Parham C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Butley C.E. Middle
Surrey	Church of England	Ash Common Heathcote Memorial C.E.
	Church of England	St. Pauls C.E. First
	Church of England	Farnham St. Andrews C.E. Middle
	Church of England	West Horsley St. Marys C.E. First
	Church of England	Dorking North Holmwood St. Johns C.E. First
	Church of England	Reigate St. Lukes C.E. Middle
	Church of England	Cobham St. Andrews C. of E.
	Roman Catholic	St. Edward the Confessor R.C. Middle
	Roman Catholic	Reigate Redhill St. Josephs R.C. First
	Roman Catholic	Walton & Weybridge St. Charles R.C. First
	Roman Catholic	Sunbury St. Teresas R.C.
	Roman Catholic	Sunbury Cardinal Godfrey R.C.
Warwickshire	Church of England	Ansley C.E. First
	Church of England	Whitacre C.E. Junior & Infants
	Church of England	Shustoke C.E. Junior & Infants
	Church of England	Stourton and Cherington C.E. Junior and Infants
	Church of England	Ullenhall C.E. Junior & Infants
	Church of England	Rugby St. Andrews C.E. First
West Sussex	Church of England	Cocking C. of E.
	Church of England	Elsted District
	Church of England	Harting Cofe
	Roman Catholic	Convent of the Family School
	Roman Catholic	Villa Maria Servite Convent
Wiltshire	Church of England	Enford C.E. Primary School
	Church of England	Netheravon with Fittleton C.E. Primary
	Church of England	Ebbesbourne Wake C. of E. First

Teachers' Pay and Conditions

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has yet received the report of the interim advisory committee on teachers' pay and conditions in 1990-91.

Mr. MacGregor: I have now received the third report of the interim advisory committee on school teachers' pay and conditions. Its main recommendations are:

—a new main scale for classroom teachers providing wide-ranging new local discretions, with increases for individual teachers ranging from 6·4 per cent. to 11·8 per cent. and an average increase of 8·3 per cent.;

—a new system of range pay for heads and deputies with increases ranging from 9·9 per cent. to 11·2 per cent. and an average increase of 10·4 per cent.;

—a 17 per cent. increase in the value of B, C, D and E incentive allowances and an 8 per cent. increase in the value of A allowances;

—an extra 14,400 incentive allowances for the 1990-91 academic year;

—an 8·8 per cent. increase in London allowances from 1 July 1989;

—a new discretionary inner London supplement of £750 a year.

The committee has now been in operation for three years. It has produced an outstanding report. Its recommendations address all the very important issues I asked it to consider when setting this year's remit. They should help substantially to ensure the recruitment, retention and motivation of sufficient teachers of the quality we need to meet the demands of delivering our education reforms. They target resources where they are most needed,

enhance flexibility and local discretion, improve career prospects, reward responsibility and good work, and make the profession more attractive to intending teachers. I propose to accept all the committee's recommendations, but as for groups covered by the review bodies, to stage their introduction over the period up to 1 January 1991.

I propose to increase all the pay scales by about 7 per cent. and all incentive allowances by about 8 per cent. as from 1 April 1990. I propose to implement from the same date the IAC's proposals for a new inner London pay supplement and backdated increases in London weighting allowances. The extra 14,400 incentive allowances proposed by the IAC would be introduced from 1 September 1990, as the committee has recommended. The committee's recommendations would be implemented in full with effect from 1 January 1991.

The IAC's report will be generally available next week, when I shall initiate the consultations required by section 3(1) of the Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act 1987 on my detailed proposals for implementing its recommendations.

Research Councils

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he will respond to the advice he has received from the Advisory Board for the Research Councils on the future structure of the research council system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor *[pursuant to his reply, 19 January 1990, c. 434]:* I wrote yesterday to Sir David Phillips, chairman of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils, giving the Government's response to the board's advice about improving co-ordination between the Agricultural and Food Research Council and the Natural Environment Research Council.

The text of my letter is as follows:

"Dear Sir David
Future Structure of the Research Council System

Thank you for your letter of 1 December, which supplemented the advice in your letter of 15 November about the structure of the Research Council System.

Your further letter asked for guidance on the suggestion that a small working group should be established under ABRC auspices to examine the practicalities of achieving a closer association of the AFRC and NERC, possibly leading to a merger of the AFRC and NERC as recommended by the House of Lords Select Committee. The purpose would be to achieve closer coordination of the research programmes of these Councils, in particular in terrestrial life sciences.

We have considered this proposal in the light of the decision that ABRC should be reconstituted from 1 April, and have concluded that we would prefer the 'new' ABRC to take forward the question of improving cooperation between *all* the Councils, within the existing Research Council structure. The need for greater cooperation was a major factor in our decision to reconstitute the Board and give it a new remit, and we would now expect the 'new' Board to give urgent attention to carrying this into effect.

As with our earlier exchange, I shall be placing copies of our letters before Parliament."

Copies of this letter and of Sir David Phillips' letter of 1 December are being placed in the Library.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

GATT

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement regarding the Uruguay round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

Mr. Redwood: The Government attach great importance to a successful conclusion to the Uruguay round of multilateral trade negotiations, which is likely to be crucial to the maintenance and strengthening of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. We want to see substantial reductions in trade barriers, the strengthening of the GATT system, and its extension to new areas of trade. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently set out the Government's attitude to the Uruguay round in some detail, in a speech at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, and I am arranging for copies of this to be placed in the Library of the House. Formal negotiations on behalf of the European Community are of course the responsibility of the European Commission.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from the British Footwear Manufacturers Federation about the Uruguay round of General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade negotiations.

Mr. Redwood: My Department has received a number of representations from the British Footwear Manufacturers Federation concerning the Uruguay round of multilateral trade negotiations, most recently relating to the tariffs and non-tariff barriers faced by our footwear exports.

Inward Investment

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give a breakdown of inward investment in Britain by standard English region and for Scotland and Wales for each year since 1979, showing the amount received in each region in cash terms and as a proportion of the total in each year.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The table gives details of the number of inward investment decisions known to the Invest in Britain Bureau for the calendar years 1979 to 1988 and the associated jobs for the United Kingdom by region. Comparable information on the total level of financial investment by inward investors is not available.

Scotland

	P		*NJ*		*SJ*		*Total Jobs (NJ and SJ)*	
1979	28	(15·3)	2,757	(19·3)	n/a	n/a	2,757	(19·3)
1980	31	(20·0)	4,474	(24·0)	n/a	n/a	4,474	(24·0)
1981	28	(21·0)	5,756	(35·1)	n/a	n/a	5,756	(35·1)
1982	28	(21·0)	2,258	(21·4)	n/a	n/a	2,258	(21·4)
1983	49	(20·8)	5,135	(33·0)	3,432	(22·5)	8,567	(27·8)
1984	74	(22·6)	8,761	(32·3)	1,463	(7·6)	10,224	(22·0)
1985	57	(15·2)	4,971	(19·4)	2,922	(15·6)	7,893	(17·8)
1986	36	(10·6)	1,881	(11·6)	607	(5·6)	2,488	(9·2)

	P		NJ		SJ		Total Jobs (NJ and SJ)	
1987	31	(10·2)	3,704	(18·6)	2,061	(12·1)	5,765	(15·6)
1988	58	(17·6)	5,392	(20·3)	1,978	(10·9)	7,370	(16·5)

Wales

	P		NJ		SJ		Total Jobs (NJ and SJ)	
1979	18	(9·8)	854	(6·0)	n/a	n/a	854	(6·0)
1980	16	(10·3)	3,332	(17·9)	n/a	n/a	3,332	(17·9)
1981	20	(15·0)	1,986	(12·1)	n/a	n/a	1,986	(12·1)
1982	17	(12·8)	901	(8·6)	n/a	n/a	901	(8·6)
1983	31	(13·1)	2,116	(13·6)	1,913	(12·5)	4,029	(13·1)
1984	42	(12·8)	3,958	(14·6)	5,015	(26·0)	8,973	(19·3)
1985	45	(12·0	2,416	(9·4)	1,350	(7·2)	3,766	(8·5)
1986	49	(14·5)	2,364	(14·5)	2,232	(20·7)	4,596	(17·0)
1987	57	(18·8)	3,954	(19·9)	877	(5·6)	4,831	(13·1)
1988	55	(16·7)	5,856	(22·1)	2,085	(11·5)	7,941	(17·8)

Northern Ireland

	P		NJ		SJ		Total Jobs (NJ and SJ)	
1979	18	(9·8)	2,794	(19·5)	n/a	n/a	2,794	(19·5)
1980	20	(12·9)	2,760	(14·8)	n/a	n/a	2,760	(14·8)
1981	15	(11·3)	2,429	(14·8)	n/a	n/a	2,429	(14·8)
1982	6	(4·5)	1,893	(18·0)	n/a	n/a	1,893	(18·0)
1983	11	(4·7)	548	(3·5)	1,192	(7·8)	1,740	(5·6)
1984	27	(8·2)	2,256	(8·3)	2,876	(14·9)	5,132	(11·1)
1985	22	(5·9)	771	(3·0)	1,424	(7·6)	2,195	(5·0)
1986	18	(5·3)	693	(4·3)	1,722	(16·0)	2,415	(8·9)
1987	17	(5·6)	946	(4·8)	1,341	(7·9)	2,287	(6·2)
1988	22	(6·7)	2,610	(9·8)	916	(5·1)	3,526	(7·9)

North East

	P		NJ		SJ		Total Jobs (NJ and SJ)	
1979	21	(11·5)	1,466	(10·2)	n/a	n/a	1,466	(10·2)
1980	19	(12·3)	2,923	(15·7)	n/a	n/a	2,923	(15·7)
1981	14	(10·5)	1,021	(6·2)	n/a	n/a	1,021	(6·2)
1982	15	(11·3)	539	(5·1)	n/a	n/a	539	(5·1)
1983	20	(8·5)	1,066	(6·9)	720	(4·7)	1,786	(5·8)
1984	29	(8·8)	4,589	(16·9)	230	(1·2)	4,819	(10·4)
1985	26	(6·9)	1,987	(7·8)	1,572	(8·4)	3,559	(8·0)
1986	30	(8·8)	1,581	(9·7)	1,158	(10·8)	2,739	(10·1)
1987	31	(10·2)	3,491	(17·5)	852	(5·0)	4,343	(11·8)
1988	22	(6·7)	2,041	(7·7)	31	(0·2)	2,072	(4·6)

North West

	P		NJ		SJ		Total Jobs (NJ and SJ)	
1979	9	(4·9)	379	(2·6)	n/a	n/a	379	(2·6)
1980	15	(9·7)	913	(4·9)	n/a	n/a	913	(4·9)
1981	12	(9·0)	1,177	(7·2)	n/a	n/a	1,177	(7·2)
1982	14	(10·5)	1,291	(12·3)	n/a	n/a	1,291	(12·3)
1983	22	(9·3)	709	(4·6)	1,114	(7·3)	1,823	(5·9)
1984	40	(12·2)	1,135	(4·2)	1,911	(9·9)	3,046	(6·6)
1985	28	(7·5)	2,271	(8·9)	1,378	(7·4)	3,649	(8·2)
1986	34	(10·0)	1,400	(8·6)	1,389	(12·9)	2,789	(10·3)
1987	22	(7·3)	356	(1·8)	1,946	(11·4)	2,302	(6·2)
1988	24	(7·3)	1,604	(6·0)	3,169	(17·5)	4,773	(10·7)

Yorkshire-Humberside

	P		NJ		SJ		Total Jobs (NJ and SJ)	
1979	27	(14·8)	1,176	(8·2)	n/a	n/a	1,176	(8·2)
1980	17	(11·0)	890	(4·8)	n/a	n/a	890	(4·8)
1981	6	(4·5)	167	(1·0)	n/a	n/a	167	(1·0)
1982	7	(5·3)	104	(0·9)	n/a	n/a	104	(1·0)
1983	10	(4·2)	345	(2·2)	502	(3·3)	847	(2·7)
1984	7	(2·1)	119	(0·4)	860	(4·5)	979	(2·1)

	P		NJ		SJ		Total Jobs (NJ and SJ)	
1985	16	(4·3)	2,263	(8·8)	2,969	(15·9)	5,232	(11·8)
1986	11	(3·2)	158	(0·9)	57	(0·5)	215	(0·7)
1987	22	(7·3)	938	(4·7)	961	(5·7)	1,899	(5·1)
1988	14	4·2)	1,507	(5·7)	250	(1·4)	1,757	(3·9)

West Midlands

	P		NJ		SJ		Total Jobs (NJ and SJ)	
1979	11	(6·0)	864	(6·0)	n/a	n/a	864	(6·0)
1980	3	(1·9)	1,040	(5·6)	n/a	n/a	1,040	(5·6)
1981	7	(5·3)	425	(2·6)	n/a	n/a	425	(2·6)
1982	1	(0·7)	100	(0·9)	n/a	n/a	100	(0·9)
1983	13	(5·5)	1,201	(7·7)	3,179	(20·8)	4,380	(14·2)
1984	14	(4·3)	1,531	(5·6)	5,240	(27·2)	6,771	(14·6)
1985	63	(16·8)	5,197	(20·3)	1,375	7·4)	6,572	(14·8)
1986	74	(21·8)	4,393	(27·0)	1,899	(17·7)	6,292	(23·3)
1987	50	(16·5)	3,002	(15·1)	1,952	(11·5)	4,954	(13·4)
1988	66	(20·0)	3,656	(13·8)	7,824	(43·2)	11,480	(25·7)

East Midlands

	P		NJ		SJ		Total Jobs (NJ and SJ)	
1979	15	(8·2)	1,174	(8·2)	n/a	n/a	1,174	(8·2)
1980	5	(3·2)	276	(1·5)	n/a	n/a	276	(1·5)
1981	8	(6·0)	290	(1·8)	n/a	n/a	290	(1·8)
1982	13	(9·8)	848	(8·1)	n/a	n/a	848	(8·1)
1983	12	(5·1)	939	(6·0)	80	(0·5)	1,019	(3·3)
1984	11	(3·4)	658	(2·4)	303	(1·6)	961	(2·1)
1985	19	(5·1)	778	(3·0)	0		778	(1·8)
1986	15	(4·4)	557	(3·4)	20	(0·1)	577	(2·1)
1987	11	(3·6)	456	(2·3)	398	(2·3)	854	(2·3)
1988	16	(4·8)	836	(3·1)	880	(4·9)	1,716	(3·8)

South East

	P		NJ		SJ		Total Jobs (NJ and SJ)	
1979	23	(12·6)	908	(6·3)	n/a	n/a	908	(6·3)
1980	23	(14·8)	1,046	(5·6)	n/a	n/a	1,046	(5·6)
1981	15	(11·3	967	(5·9)	n/a	n/a	967	(5·9)
1982	25	(18·8)	1,300	(12·4)	n/a	n/a	1,300	(12·4)
1983	59	(25·0	3,036	(19·5)	2,667	(17·5)	5,703	(18·5)
1984	70	(21·3)	2,731	(10·1)	810	(4·2)	3,541	(7·6)
1985	84	(22·4)	3,649	(14·3)	5,712	(30·5)	9,361	(21·1)
1986	60	(17·7)	2,118	(13·0)	1,148	(10·7)	3,266	(12·1)
1987	50	(16·5)	2,503	(12·6)	599	(3·5)	3,102	(8·4)
1988	45	(13·6)	2,240	(8·4)	983	(5·4)	3,223	(7·2)

South West

	P		NJ		SJ		Total Jobs (NJ and SJ)	
1979	13	(7·1)	1,938	(13·5)	n/a	n/a	1,938	(13·5)
1980	6	(3·9)	1,008	(5·4)	n/a	n/a	1,008	(5·4)
1981	8	(6·0)	2,199	(13·4)	n/a	n/a	2,199	(13·4)
1982	7	(5·3)	1,295	(12·3)	n/a	n/a	1,295	(12·3)
1983	9	(3·8)	451	(2·9)	458	(3·0)	909	(2·9)
1984	14	(4·3)	1,364	(5·0)	586	(3·0)	1,950	(4·2)
1985	15	(4·0)	1,281	(5·0)	19	(0·1)	1,300	(2·9)
1986	12	(3·5)	1,129	(6·9)	528	(4·9)	1,657	(6·1)
1987	11	(3·6)	564	(2·8)	328	(1·9)	892	(2·4)
1988	5	(1·5)	479	(1·8)	0	(0)	479	(1·1)

United Kingdom not specified

	P		NJ		SJ		Total Jobs (NJ and SJ)	
1979	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1980	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1981	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1982	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

	P		NJ		SJ		Total Jobs (NJ and SJ)	
1983	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1984	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1985	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1986	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1987	1	(0·3)	—	—	5,700	(33·5)	5,700	(15·4)
1988	3	(0·9)	325	(1·2)	0	(0)	325	(0·7)

Total United Kingdom

	P	NJ	SJ	Total Jobs (NJ and SJ)
1979	183	14,310	n/a	14,310
1980	155	18,662	n/a	18,662
1981	133	16,417	n/a	16,417
1982	133	10,529	n/a	10,529
1983	236	15,546	15,257	30,803
1984	328	27,102	19,294	46,396
1985	375	25,584	18,721	44,305
1986	339	16,274	10,760	27,034
1987	303	19,914	17,015	36,929
1988	330	26,546	18,116	44,662

n/a = Not available.
P = Number of projects—Figures in brackets apply to percentage of total for each region.
NJ = New Jobs—These figures refer to decisions known to the IBB, and are provided by the companies themselves.
SJ = Safeguarded Jobs—The jobs are those associated with the projects over the long term.

Regional Assistance

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish in the *Official Report* the amount of regional preferential assistance paid to each standard region of England, Scotland and Wales in 1988-89, identifying separately the main forms of assistance; and if he will publish equivalent data for each year since 1978-79.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The information requested is as follows:

Government expenditure on regional preferential assistance for industry[1]

Form of assistance—Region	Financial year 1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89
1. Regional Development Grant											
Northern	135·0	122·4	117·5	143·9	127·2	101·3	89·0	67·3	102·2	61·7	81·6
North West	64·3	58·7	105·7	143·4	97·3	83·0	80·0	62·1	101·3	45·7	46·7
Yorkshire and Humberside	30·2	21·5	38·7	47·1	36·4	23·5	26·8	24·2	27·1	17·8	19·3
South West	6·0	5·0	8·5	10·3	11·0	7·8	9·5	8·6	15·3	7·0	6·6
East Midlands	2·3	2·4	3·2	7·2	8·8	8·2	3·8	4·4	8·4	7·1	7·9
West Midlands	0·1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
England[2]	238·1	210·0	273·7	351·9	280·7	223·8	209·0	166·6	254·4	139·3	162·2
Scotland	107·3	70·2	113·3	142·7	287·3	143·0	109·2	107·5	170·2	78·0	76·6
Wales	71·5	50·7	103·5	122·2	121·5	72·1	92·7	84·4	88·8	53·4	58·6
Great Britain[2]	416·9	330·9	490·5	516·8	689·6	438·9	410·8	358·5	513·1	270·6	297·4
2. Selective Financial Assistance											
Northern	10·6	11·5	19·2	22·6	21·1	15·4	15·3	16·2	17·3	24·9	35·1
North West	40·2	23·3	22·5	14·7	18·3	13·6	13·7	12·7	18·3	19·6	20·3
Yorkshire and Humberside	5·2	6·8	6·6	7·1	10·6	8·8	9·7	8·3	10·1	14·1	21·0
South West	2·4	2·7	2·8	1·7	2·7	2·0	2·2	2·5	5·2	4·3	4·5
East Midlands	0·7	0·9	0·6	1·0	4·1	8·7	6·4	3·9	2·2	2·3	1·0
West Midlands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	5·5	9·8	18·3	24·6
England[2]	59·2	45·2	51·7	47·1	56·8	48·7	47·3	49·1	62·9	83·4	106·7
Scotland	14·9	18·7	23·5	19·6	20·1	24·7	31·7	48·1	35·4	38·3	38·0
Wales	30·4	18·8	11·8	10·2	14·5	15·9	19·4	22·5	27·5	28·3	36·1
Great Britain[2]	104·5	82·6	87·0	77·0	91·5	89·3	98·4	119·7	125·8	150·1	180·8
3. Regional Enterprise Grant											
Northern	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·3
North West	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·4
Yorkshire and Humberside	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·2
South West	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·1
East Midlands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Midlands	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
England[2]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·9

Form of assistance—Region	*Financial year*										
	1978-79	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*
Scotland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·3
Wales	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·2
Great Britain	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·4
4. Expenditure by English Estates on land and factories											
Northern	13·2	13·9	14·9	10·1	10·2	12·3	18·3	11·1	16·9	22·6	16·6
North West	[3]9·6	[3]7·4	9·3	[3]15·7	[3]8·2	[3]6·5	10·2	11·1	9·0	13·5	14·6
Yorkshire and Humberside	2·0	3·8	7·4	7·4	5·9	3·3	6·0	2·9	4·1	6·7	9·3
South West	1·2	2·6	1·3	2·8	2·7	2·1	2·5	0·9	2·2	3·4	3·4
East Midlands	0·4	0·8	0·9	0·4	0·7	—	—	—	—	—	—
West Midlands	0·1	0·1	—	—	—	—	—	0·9	0·2	0·5	1·0
England[2]	26·5	28·6	33·9	36·4	27·7	24·2	37·0	26·9	32·4	46·7	44·9
Expenditure by Scottish and Welsh Development Agencies on land and factories											
Scotland	27·8	37·8	47·3	58·4	46·4	43·6	23·3	23·8	20·2	20·5	18·2
Wales	30·2	43·4	60·0	65·9	46·2	28·4	30·1	25·4	27·6	44·2	45·8
5. Highlands and Islands Development Board											
Scotland	6·1	8·5	11·4	11·8	15·6	17·3	22·9	17·6	16·6	16·4	18·1
6. Development Board for Rural Wales											
Wales	—	—	—	—	—	4·1	5·3	6·1	6·8	6·5	7·4

[1] All figures are gross and include payments to nationalised industries.

[2] The England and Great Britain totals for individual forms of assistance may not always equal the sum of the component parts due to the inclusion of items which cannot be allocated to regions, and because of rounding.

[3] Includes expenditure in Cumbria; otherwise shown within the totals for the Northern Region.

The items included in the expenditure are: regional development grants, regional selective assistance and regional enterprise grants; expenditure on land and factories by the English Industrial Estates Corporation and the Scottish and Welsh Development Agencies; and expenditure on land and factories and grants by the Highlands and Islands Development Board and the Development Board for Rural Wales.

Red Telephone Boxes

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce a statutory duty on British Telecom to notify and consult the local authority when it intends to replace red telephone boxes in conservation areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Such a duty already exists under the terms of the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1988 (SI No. 1813).

NESL (Danish Order)

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make a statement as to the financial outcome of the Danish order for ferry boats which was placed with North East Shipbuilders Ltd.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The financial outturn on this contract at North East Shipbuilders Ltd remains subject to final audit and to the terms of sale of the last three ferries remaining from the order. Subject to that, the net losses on the contract are estimated to be of the order of £40 million. This includes the cost of cancellation of nine of the ships from the original order.

Wine

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he intends to introduce legislation to prescribe the quantities in which wine by the glass may be sold; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: I am pleased to announce that the Government propose to make an order prescribing the measures in which wine may be sold by the glass in licensed premises. The trade's voluntary code of practice on prescribed measures for wine has made a useful contribution in this field. Nevertheless, I believe that the increase in the amount of wine sold by the glass in licensed premises has now tipped the balance in favour of prescribing measures for wine.

We shall shortly be consulting interested parties about the proposal, in particular as to the volumes to be prescribed and the transitional period. We shall also be notifying the proposal to the EC Commission as we are required to do by directive 83/189. We would hope to be able to complete these steps in time to lay the order in Parliament before the summer under the affirmative resolution procedure. This order will have similar effect to that intended under Lord Mason's Weights and Measures (Sale of Wine) Bill which he has indicated he proposes to withdraw today.

Single Market

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish a list of the inquiries which have been authorised by the EEC Commission on the impact of the single market and indicate which of the reports of such inquiries have been published.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 30 January 1990]:* The Commission frequently undertakes inquiries in varying

degrees of detail on a wide range of European issues. On the single market, the most detailed of these is the Cecchini report, published in 1988, which forecasts the impact of the single market on different industrial sectors. No complete list of Commission inquiries exists.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Southend, East of 24 January, when his Department will complete its assessment of the EEC Commission-Louvain university study on the impact of the single market on regions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 30 January 1990]:* My Department is still studying this report, received last week, and will complete its assessment as soon as practicable.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what advice and assistance was sought from his Department by the university of Louvain in connection with its report on the impact of the single market on regions.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 30 January 1990]:* None.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what manpower in his Department is devoted to providing advice and briefing to industry, commerce and the general public on the 1992 proposals; and what expenditure is devoted to this area of policy.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 30 January 1990]:* My Department's "Europe Open for Business" campaign, which is dedicated to providing factual information to business on single market proposals, is run by a unit of 13 staff, supported as required by officials elsewhere in the Department, including regional offices. Expenditure on the campaign since its launch in March 1988 has been £4·7 million, plus £8·9 million on advertising.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the impact of the 1992 proposals on Strathclyde and south Yorkshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 30 January 1990]:* The impact of the single market on regions will depend on how successfully individual firms respond. It is therefore not possible to produce reliable assessments of the impact on particular regions as a whole. The single market will provide opportunities and challenges to firms in all parts of the United Kingdom, but the impact of 1992 is only one factor amongst many which will affect economic progress in particular regions.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the EEC Commission/Louvain university report on the impact of the single market on regions will be ready for publication; and if he will make copies available through the Vote Office.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 30 January 1990]:* The Commission has not yet decided when or if it will make the report prepared by Louvain university available for publication. I have today placed a copy of the draft report, made available to us by the Commission, in the Library of the House. It is available only in French at present.

RETI

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the formation and financing of the RETI organisation; and whether Her Majesty's Government were consulted on its formation.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 30 January 1990]:* We understand RETI to be one of many umbrella organisations concerned with lobbying on European issues. It does not receive Government funding. Her Majesty's Government would not expect to be consulted on the formation of such bodies, and were not consulted in this case.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Creches

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list by location where creche facilities are provided for working mothers employed in his Department; and if they have to make any payment for this service.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: No nursery facilities are available to staff in my Department but they have access to the Westminster holiday playscheme which is financed by both parental and departmental contribution.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Probation Service

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to privatise parts of the probation service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The Government intend to publish shortly a Green Paper setting out a number of options for the organisation and management of probation service work. This will include an examination of the contribution that the voluntary and private sectors might make to the service's work. No changes will be made without full consultation. There are no plans to privatise the service.

Correspondence

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to correspondence from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen, dated 5 December 1989, regarding Sean Agatha, deceased.

Mr. Mellor: I wrote to the hon. Member on 30 January.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth will receive a reply to his letter dated 30 December 1989 referring to Mr. J. R. Green.

Mr. John Patten: I will write shortly to my hon. Friend.

Prisoners (Suicide)

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will institute an investigation into the suicide of inmates in prison.

Mr. Mellor: We continue to be deeply concerned about the increased incidence of suicide in prison.

A number of initiatives have been taken in recent years to improve the prison service's suicide prevention strategy, including improved screening arrangements, better training and guidance for staff, establishing suicide prevention management groups and encouraging the involvement of the Samaritans. We also intend to examine whether closed circuit television may be a useful aid in some circumstances.

In the longer term we shall have the benefit of research which has been commissioned from the University of Cambridge Institute of Criminology which will focus primarily on incidents of attempted suicide and self-injury in prison and their relationship with completed suicide.

All of this work is valuable and will continue. But, in a shorter time scale, my right hon. and learned Friend has decided that it would be helpful to ask Her Majesty's chief inspector of prions, Judge Stephen Tumim, to undertake a review, under section 5A of the Prison Act 1952, as amended, of our present policies and procedures in the light of information gained from his regular inspections of prison establishments. He will also look at the particular problems presented in this context by mentally disturbed inmates.

Judge Tumim's terms of reference will be:

> To review the effectiveness of the current policy and procedures for the prevention of suicide and self-harm in prison service establishments in England and Wales, with particular reference to the risks posed by mentally disturbed prisoners; and to make recommendations.

Judge Tumim will begin the review as soon as his inspection programme permits and he expects to be able to report to my right hon. and learned Friend in the autumn.

Recidivism

246. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for the last available year what are the figures for those sentenced to a custodial sentence serving a second or subsequent sentence.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is not recorded centrally. The readily available statistics relate to all previous convictions and are published annually in "Prison Statistics, England and Wales" (tables 3.5, 4.2 and 5.2 of the latest issue, for 1988 (Cmnd. 825)), copies of which are in the Library.

Drugs

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many new *(a)* cocaine and *(b)* heroin addicts were reported to the Home Office in each of the last five years.

Mr. Mellor: The information for the five years to 1988 is published in table 2 of the Home Office Statistical Bulletin Issue No. 1389, "Statistics of Drug Addicts Notified to the Home Office, United Kingdom, 1988", a copy of which is in the Library. Provisional information for 1989 indicates that in comparison with 1988 new notifications for cocaine increased by 13 per cent.—from 462—and for heroin by 5 per cent.—from 4,630.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what have been the yearly totals of money confiscated since the passing of the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986.

Mr. John Patten: Information on the amounts ordered to be confiscated in 1987 and 1988 is given in table 7.25 of "Criminal Statistics England and Wales 1988", a copy of which is in the Library. The current estimate by the national drugs intelligence unit of the cumulative total of confiscation orders made since the Drug Trafficking Offences Act came into force in January 1987, is in excess of £16 million.

Passports

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long it takes on average to process an application form for a new passport; and what are the reasons why a passport is not issued immediately the application form is presented to the Passport Office.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The processing of a passport application involves a number of stages, including examination of the application and accompanying documents, accounting for the fee, and preparing and issuing the passport. The precise time taken at each stage varies according to the type of application and other factors, and details are not recorded. Passports cannot normally be issued immediately because of the number and variety of the applications received, but priority is given to urgent cases.

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will simplify the application forms for passports; and if he will appoint a qualified work study engineer to analyse the relevance of the current questions asked on the application form.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Passport application forms were considerably revised and simplified in 1988 in connection with computerisation of the passport service, in the light of advice from forms design experts and the results of user trials. The design and content of the forms are kept under constant review for ease of completion and to ensure that the information requested is kept to a necessary minimum.

Litter

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average fine for dropping litter in 1988.

Mr. John Patten: In 1988 the average fine imposed in England and Wales under the Litter Act 1983 was £40.

Outside Experts

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement as to his Department's policy on the employment by the police of outside experts, including scientists, able to assist in the investigation and detection of crime.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The use of outside experts to assist in the investigation and detection of crime is a matter for the operational judgment of chief constables.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board has any special procedures to deal with cases which are urgent;

(2) if he will take steps to ensure that the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board gives greater publicity to the possibility of interim payments;

(3) if he will take steps to ensure that the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board gives a guarantee that an interim payment will be made within three months on application where the case is obviously urgent or there are circumstances of special hardship.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 31 January 1990]:* The board deals with each application on its own merits. Priority is given to cases of severe injury and cases of claims from the bereaved and the elderly.

The criminal injuries compensation scheme, which the board is responsible for administering, enables the board to make interim payments as soon as an applicant's eligibility for compensation has been established. This may take longer than three months. A copy of the scheme is made available to every applicant. Interim payments are made at the board's discretion and are normally called for where the information to assess a final award is not available, for example where only a provisional medical assessment can be given.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff have been employed by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board in each of the past five years; what is the current number; and what is the estimated shortage.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 31 January 1990]:* On 29 January 1990, the board was at its full complement of 330 staff. We understand that it is preparing a detailed request for 50 more staff, which we expect to receive shortly. The other information requested is as follows:

Year ended 31 March	*Average number of staff in post*
1985	189
1986	204
1987	215
1988	267
1989	312

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the backlog of cases facing the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 31 January 1990]:* On 31 December 1989, 96,177 applications were awaiting resolution by the board.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the estimated number of months it takes before an application to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board receives a final payment.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 31 January 1990]:* Information on this point is not available. The percentage of cases resolved by the board within certain periods of registration is shown in paragraph 6 of its latest annual report (Cm 900), copies of which are in the Library.

The figures for 1988-89 are:

	Per cent.
Up to three months	1·0
Three to six months	2·1
Six to nine months	4·8
Nine to 12 months	19·0
Over 12 months	73·1

Telephone Equipment

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the value to crime prevention generally of the use of telephone equipment which displays the caller's number on the recipient's phone.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 31 January 1990]:* None. We are aware, however, of newspaper reports claiming success for equipment of this kind operated by Bell Telephone Incorporated of New Jersey, United States. We also understand that research of this system is to be published in the near future in the United States and we shall study it with interest.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has about the effect on the number of obscene phone calls made in America of the introduction of telephone equipment which identified the caller's number; and whether there are any implications for the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 31 January 1990]:* We understand that a report will be published shortly by the school of criminal justice at the State University of New Jersey assessing the effect of introduction of telephone equipment which identifies the caller's number. We shall study this report to see whether introduction of similar equipment here would be beneficial. We are also considering a proposal from the Hull Safer Cities project for an assessment of the preventive effect of a call-tracing system to be operated by Kingston Communications in collaboration with the universities of Hull and Manchester.

West Midlands Police

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has anything to add to his answers of Thursday 25 January in the light of his answers of 5 July 1989 and 14 December 1989, about West Midlands police officers.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* I regret that the answer given on 25 January was based on incorrect information. I now understand from the chief constable of the West Midlands that one of the officers involved in interviewing those convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings, Detective Superintendent Kelly, was subsequently reprimanded for matters unconnected with his normal police duties.

In providing the answer of 25 January I did not refer to Inspector Matthews because he was not dismissed but, as I informed the hon. Member on 14 December, at column 789, was required to resign.

Homosexuals

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will bring forward legislation to protect lesbians and gay men from discrimination in employment, housing and the provision of other public and private services;

(2) what action the Government are taking to monitor discrimination against lesbians and gay men;

(3) what extra-legal steps the Government are taking to ameliorate discrimination against lesbians and gay men;

(4) what proposals he has to bring British law into line with best practice in other countries of the European Community with respect to the protection of male and female homosexuals;

(5) what research he has commissioned into discrimination against homosexuals;

(6) whether he has any plans to bring forward legislation to remedy discrimination against lesbians and gay men within the legal system;

(7) whether the Government have any plans to introduce legislation to outlaw incitement to hatred on the grounds of sexual orientation along the lines of the legislation being introduced by the Irish Government.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 25 January 1990]:* We have no plans to change the criminal law insofar as it affects homosexual relations or to introduce legislation to prohibit differences in treatment on the grounds of homosexuality. I shall write to the hon. Member about the other matters he has raised.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in each of the years 1988 and 1989, how many men were given custodial sentences in the United Kingdom for consenting homosexual acts with males between the ages of 16 and 21 years; and what were the durations of those sentences in each individual case.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 25 January 1990]:* Information for 1989 will not be available until autumn 1990.

In England and Wales in 1988, 10 males of, or over, 21 were sentenced to immediate imprisonment for buggery or attempted buggery of a male of, or over, 16 but under 21, with his consent. Thirteen males of, or over, the age of 21 were sentenced to immediate imprisonment for an act of gross indecency with a male under the age of 21. The durations of the sentences imposed are given in the table.

Similar information is not readily available for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Males aged 21 and over sentenced to immediate custody for selected sexual offences with other males aged between 16 and 21 by sentence length, 1988

England and Wales

	Length of sentence							
	4 months and under	*over 4 months up to 6 months*	*over 6 months up to 1 year*	*over 1 year up to 18 months*	*over 18 months up to 2 years*	*over 2 years up to 3 years*	*over 3 years up to 4 years*	*over 4 years*
Buggery	—	1	—	1	1	3	—	—
Attempted buggery	—	—	1	—	1	—	2	—
Indecency between males	1	2	3	3	1	3	—	—

Emergency Planning

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the local authorities that have a statutory obligation to undertake peacetime emergency planning of major industrial sites;

(2) if he will list the major industrial sites by location where local authorities have a statutory obligation to undertake peacetime emergency planning.

Mr. Nicholls: I have been asked to reply.

This information is not collected centrally in this form and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Nicaragua

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the ambassador of the United States of America regarding the forthcoming elections in Nicaragua; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: None. We are continuing to monitor the election closely and we await the report of our official observer, Dr. David Browning. Like others, including ONUVEN and the OAS observers, we have been concerned by reports of harassment of the opposition, of misuse of state resources by the Sandinista Front and of continuing inequality of access to the media and to funding. In particular, there was a long delay in releasing the $1·5 million which the National Endowment for Democracy paid into the Central bank for UNO's use in December.

India

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will pay an official visit to the Indian sub-continent.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs looks forward to visiting the Indian sub-continent but has no specific plans to do so at present.

Hong Kong

162. **Mr. O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he intends to amend the proposals for allowing the number of people from Hong Kong into the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: No.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many officials there are in the present Hong Kong administration at the levels which would be excepted from holding office under the terms of article 74 of the joint declaration.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 31 January 1990]:* Exclusion from office after 1997 of specific individuals under section IV of annex I to the joint declaration would depend on whether those individuals were considered

Chinese nationals or foreign nationals under the terms of the Chinese nationality law. This is a matter for the Chinese Government.

Spain

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the agenda for his proposed meeting with the Spanish Foreign Minister, Señor Ordonez, on 26 February.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will be meeting the Spanish Foreign Minister in Madrid on 26 February as part of the process of talks on Gibraltar foreseen in the Brussels communiqué of 27 November 1984. In addition, my right hon. Friend hopes to discuss other matters of mutual interest.

Know-how Funds

Dr. Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the enlargement and extension of the know-how funds for central and eastern Europe.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs announced on 22 January that we will establish a single know-how fund for eastern Europe. This will include our existing commitments to Poland and Hungary, but we shall also make available a substantial sum of money to finance help to other eastern European countries once they are firmly committed to reform. Help, as with that we are giving Poland and Hungary, will take the form of advice, expertise and training in the skills needed to manage democratic and free market systems. We do not propose at this stage to put a figure on the size of the overall fund. Money will become available as we identify projects in the different reforming countries. This will give us the flexibility to respond to the different needs of the different countries as they arise.

Eastern Europe

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on his recent visit to eastern Europe.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs visited east Berlin and the GDR from 22-24 January. He had meetings with the Prime Minister, the Foreign and External Economy Ministers, and called on the acting Head of State. He urged them to ensure that the forthcoming elections in the GDR are truly free and democratic. He also met leading opposition and Church representatives. He put forward a package of measures designed to help the people of the GDR.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the help offered by Her Majesty's Government to countries of eastern Europe in respect of democratic voting systems and parliamentary democracy.

Mr. Maude: We are actively considering ways in which we can help the countries of eastern Europe in this field. Groups of Hungarian and Polish politicians have already participated in successful seminars on the United Kingdom parliamentary system organised by the Great Britain/East Europe Centre. Budding politicians from Bulgaria, Romania, Czechoslovakia and the GDR will attend similar seminars in the coming months to look at our political and parliamentary system in order to help them organise their parties and electoral campaigns.

In addition, the IPU is sending fact-finding missions to these four countries to determine how the IPU could be of assistance in the parliamentary field.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his latest assessment of the impact of the new political situation in eastern Europe on the conduct of United Kingdom foreign policy.

Mr. Maude: We warmly welcome the recent historic changes in eastern Europe and we shall continue to support the political and economic reforms which are now occuring. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs was glad to announce on 22 January that our know-how funds for Poland and Hungary will now be expanded to include the remaining countries of the region, as they move decisively toward democracy and the adoption of market-based economic systems.

El Salvador

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether any representations have been made to the Government of the United States of America concerning their policies in El Salvador.

Mr. Maude: We have regular discussions with the Government of the United States on a wide variety of topics including El Salvador.

Ivory

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on which countries have entered reservations to the CITES ban on world ivory trade.

Mr. Maude: Seven countries have entered reservations against the CITES appendix I listing of the African elephant. They are Botswana, China, Malawi, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe and the United Kingdom on behalf of Hong Kong.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much elephant ivory has been exported from Hong Kong since he announced the six-month exemption.

Mr. Maude: None.

Globe 90 Conference

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department will be represented at the Globe 90 conference on economic development and environmental protection, to be held in Vancouver between 19 and 23 March.

Mr. Maude: Yes; and the Department of the Environment will also be represented at the conference.

Overseas Aid

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in ranked order, expressed in terms of expenditure in £ sterling per head of population, the amount allocated to direct overseas aid in *(a)* the European Community countries and *(b)* the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries for each of the last three years for which statistics are available.

Mr. Maude: The information is given in the table. Figures are available only for those countries which are members of the development assistance committee of the OECD.

Net Official Development Assistance (oda) per capita for 1986-88 from EEC and DAC countries in ranked order

£ actual

	Net oda/per capita
1986	
EEC Countries	
Denmark	92·56
Netherlands	81·44
France	62·85
Germany	42·79
Belgium	37·83
Italy	28·65
United Kingdom	20·88
Ireland	11·94
DAC Countries	
Norway	130·54
Denmark	92·56
Sweden	88·81
Netherlands	81·44
France	62·85
Canada	45·02
Switzerland	43·79
Finland	43·41
Germany	42·79
Belgium	37·83
Australia	32·02
Japan	31·63
Italy	28·65
United States of America	27·00
United Kingdom	20·88
Austria	17·85
New Zealand	15·60
Ireland	11·94
1987	
EEC Countries	
Denmark	102·18
Netherlands	87·09
France	71·58
Germany	43·86
Belgium	42·48
Italy	27·83
United Kingdom	20·38
Ireland	8·79
DAC Countries	
Norway	129·80
Denmark	102·18
Sweden	99·90
Netherlands	87·09
France	71·58
Finland	53·57
Switzerland	50·43
Canada	44·84
Germany	43·86
Belgium	42·48
Japan	36·69
Italy	27·83
Australia	23·53
United States of America	22·38
United Kingdom	20·38
Austria	16·19
New Zealand	16·04
Ireland	8·79
1988	
EEC Countries	
Denmark	100·70
Netherlands	84·83
France	68·98
Germany	43·27
Belgium	33·91
Italy	31·11
United Kingdom	26·01
Ireland	9·04
DAC Countries	
Norway	131·32
Sweden	101·73
Denmark	100·70
Netherlands	84·83
Finland	69·01
France	68·98
Switzerland	52·02
Canada	50·67
Germany	43·27
Japan	41·82
Australia	37·37
Belgium	33·91
Italy	31·11
United Kingdom	26·01
United States of America	23·11
Austria	22·32
New Zealand	17·72
Ireland	9·04

Source: DAC Chairman's Report 1989.

Jammu and Kashmir

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on restrictions placed on British journalists reporting on affairs in Jammu and Kashmir; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: We understand the Indian Government have advised foreign journalists to leave Jammu and Kashmir for their own safety. We believe firmly in the freedom of the press, but in the last resort it is up to the local authorities to decide on whether to allow the continued presence of foreign nationals in an area of tension.

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the United Kingdom continues to support the resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir problem by the United Nations proposal for a plebiscite; what representations he is making to both the Government of India and the United Nations to uphold this proposal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: Britain voted in favour of the various United Nations resolutions on Kashmir. Much has happened since, including the 1972 Simla agreement on bilateral relations between India and Pakistan. We believe the status of Kashmir can be settled only by agreement between the two sides.

Council of Ministers (Business)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a statement of forthcoming business in the European Community Council of Ministers.

Mr. Maude: The information is as follows:

Forecast of Council of Ministers' business for February 1990

Council meetings

1. The following meetings are planned:
   5 February — Foreign Affairs Council.
   12 February — Economic and Finance Council.
   12-13 February — Agriculture Council
   22 February — Internal Market Council.
   26 February — Research Council.
2. The following subjects are likely to be discussed:

A. Foreign Affairs Council
   Trade relations with United States: progress report by Commission
   Cars
   Relations with East/Central Europe
   CSCE: preparation of Bonn Conference
   European Training Foundation
   Youth Exchange Schemes for Eastern Europe
   Mediterranean Countries: Policy Debate
   Turkey
   (Poss) Lome IV Transitional Measures
   EMU (Procedure)

B. Economic and Finance Council
   EC Loan to Hungary (10788/89)
   Financial [illegible]ation: Conciliation with European Parliament
   EMU Stage 1: Presidency Paper on Revised Procedures

C. Agriculture Council
   Price Fixing (4090/90)
   Bovine Semen (9729/89)
   Brucellosis in Sheep and Goats (9710/89)
   (Poss) Proof of Export (Annex II Documents)
   (Poss) Monitoring of Export Refunds (7548/89)
   (Poss) BST (8975/89)
   (Poss) African Swine Fever in Sardinia (9727/89)
   (Poss) Food Aid for Poland/Romania

D. Internal Market Council
   Rights of Residence (7706/89)
   Public Purchasing:
      Excluded Sectors
      Compliance in the Excluded Sectors Presentation
   Pharmeceutical Proposals:
      Wholesalers;
      Packaging and Labelling;
      Non-Prescribed Retail Sales: Presentation
   Insurance: Block Exemption: Presentation

E. Research Council
   Adoption of 3rd Framework Programme
   Adoption of following programmes under 2nd Framework Programme:
      (Poss) Human Genome Research
      (Poss) Agricultural Research
   Co-operation Agreement with EFTA Countries on Science and (possibly) Medical and Health Research
   Common Positions on:
      (Poss) EURET (Transport)
      (Poss) EUROTRA (Revision)
   Conciliation with EP on Framework Programme

3. *The Foreign Affairs Council* will meet on 5 February. Ministers will take stock of recent developments in EC/US trade relations including EC acceptance of the GATT panel report on the EC's oilseeds regime and the present position of the hormones dispute. The Council is expected to discuss relations with Eastern and central Europe, and preparations for the Bonn CSCE conference. There will also be preliminary discussions on youth exchange schemes for Eastern Europe (TEMPUS) and the European training foundation. Ministers are expected to discuss proposals from the Commission on European Community policy on Japanese car imports, and the Commission's paper on future EC/Mediterrranean relations, as well as the Commission's *avis* on Turkey's application for EC membership. Ministers will also be asked to agree transitional measures to cover the period between the expiry of the Lome III convention and the implementation, after ratification, of Lome IV. Ministers will discuss preparations for the inter governmental conference on economic and monetary union.

4. *The Economic and Finance Council* will meet on 12 February to consider a medium term loan for Hungary. The Financial Regulation will be taken with an aim to reach agreement on a revision in March. The Council will also discuss the implementation of surveillance procedures during stage one of economic and monetary union.

5. *The Agriculture Council* will meet on 12 and 13 February to discuss the annual price fixing, bovine semen and brucellosis in sheep and goats. It may also discuss the proof of export relating to Annexe II documents, the monitoring of export refunds, bovine somatotrophin, African swine fever in Sardinia and food aid for Poland and Romania.

6. *At the Internal Market Council* on 22 February Ministers will discuss a number of measures relevant to the completion of the single market. Political agreement on the substance of the proposals for the three rights of residence directives was reached at the IMC meeting on 21 December. The question of the appropriate legal bases for the directives remains outstanding and is due to be discussed at the meeting on 22 February.

7. *The Research Council* will meet on 26 February. The agenda anticipates the adoption of two Research and Development programme proposals, human genome research and agricultural research, and the adoption of co-operation agreements withe EFTA countries on the SCIENCE (Stimulation of the cooperation and interchange of European scientists) and medical and public health research programmes. It is expected that common positions will be agreed on the EURET (Transport) and EUROTA (Machine translation) research programmes. The Research Council will also undertake the conciliation procedure with the European Parliament on the third framework programme for research and technological development, 1990-[illegible] and may consequently be in a position to adopt the third framework programme.

SCOTLAND

Scottish Development Agency

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state, by grade, the number of employees of the Scottish Development Agency who have resigned from the agency in each of the past 10 years, and the number of employees at a convenient date in each year.

Mr. Lang: The readily available information is set out in the table herewith:

	Number Employed (whole-time equivalents)			*Resignations*		
Year (1 April to 31 March)	*Managerial staff*	*Support staff*	*Total*	*Managerial staff*	*Support staff*	*Total*
1979-80	—	—	723	—	—	58
1980-81	—	—	721	—	—	48
1981-82	—	—	717	—	—	32
1982-83	—	—	732	—	—	35

Year (1 April to 31 March)	Number Employed (whole-time equivalents) Managerial staff	Support staff	Total	Resignations Managerial* staff	Support staff	Total
1983-84	—	—	711	—	—	44
1984-85	221	430	651	26	37	63
1985-86	315	377·5	692·5	23	21	44
1986-87	329	354	683	19	29	48
1987-88	349	345·5	694·5	34	24	58
1988-89	398	286·5	684·5	38	37	75

Prior to 1984-85, most staff fell within Whitley council grades, with others coming into certain industrial and miscellaneous categories. Information on resignations by individual grades before 1984-85 can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

In 1984-85 a performance-related pay scheme was introduced for managerial staff under which staff were no longer positioned in grades. Each post is given a "job score" based on evaluation of the duties involved, for the purpose of determining salary level.

I shall write to the hon. Member with the information by grade for the support staff from 1984-85.

North-East River Purification Board

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the rivers for which the north-east river purification board is responsible and which are used as part of the Grampian water supply;

(2) if he will make a statement on the current situation in the north-east river purification board with particular regard to the cancelled appointment of the post of general manager;

(3) what are the current duties and structure of the north-east river purification board; and whether there have been any recent changes in these duties and the structure of the board.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answers which I gave to him on 31 January 1990.

Govan Initiative

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if any of his Departments or the Scottish Development Agency has received from Govan Initiative its secure communities project report on Teucharhill; and what responses they have made.

Mr. Lang: The secure communities project report on Teucharhill has not been formally submitted to any Scottish Office Department nor to the Scottish Development Agency.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what contribution the Scottish Development Agency made to the Govan Initiative secure communities project; and what proportion of the total it represented.

Mr. Lang: The Scottish Development Agency has made no direct contribution to this project, although it does contribute towards the funding of Govan Initiative Limited. The project has received Government support through the urban programme.

Labour Clubs (Dundee)

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Tayside indicating *(a)* how many police officers have been involved in investigating alleged irregularities in the running of the Labour clubs in Ardler, Menzieshill and Whitfield, Dundee, *(b)* how many police hours have been spent on their investigating, *(c)* what is the estimated cost so far and *(d)* how many reports have been made to the Crown Office and the procurator fiscal by the investigating officers.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I understand from the chief constable that six police officers have spent about 3,500 man hours investigating these matters at a cost of approximately £36,000. The investigating officers have made several reports to the procurator fiscal during this investigation, which is not yet concluded.

Erskine Bridge

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the latest accumulated debt on the Erskine bridge.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The accumulated debt at 31 March 1988 was £73·68 million. Accounts for 1988-89 will be laid before Parliament later this spring.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he plans to take concerning the finances of the Erskine bridge.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No decision has yet been taken on the financing of the bridge beyond the end of the tolling period in 1991.

Mr Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the latest figure for the overall operating deficit on the Erskine bridge.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The latest account for 1987-88 shows an operating surplus for the year of £784,763.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to write off the accumulated debt on the Erskine bridge.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Future financing arrangements for the Erskine bridge are under consideration.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to *(a)* end or *(b)* increase tolls on the Erskine bridge.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No decisions have yet been taken.

Secondary Schools

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for East Lothian on 14 December 1989, *Official Report*, column *807*, in which he undertook to write to the hon. Member about the review of the staffing formula for secondary schools, if he will now write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Lang: I have written to the hon. Member.

Public Land Sales

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what rules govern the advertising for sale of public land in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 24 January 1990]:* Advertising the sale of public land is carried out in accordance with instructions issued by the owning body and is general practice except in special circumstances where it is judged that the best overall benefit to the public interest is achieved without advertising. In these circumstances, it is usual for an open market value to be assessed.

Sport 2000

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to respond to the report of the Scottish Sports Council, Sport 2000; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 25 January 1990]:* I discussed the Sport 2000 report with Professor Raymond Miquel, chairman of the Scottish Sports Council, on 20 October 1989. As the document points out, sport has an important contribution to make to the health, social fabric and economy of Scotland.

Hospital Spending

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report*, hospital expenditure per head for each of the regional health authorities in Scotland for each of the last five years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 30 January 1990]:* The information is as follows:

Health board	*1984-85* £	*1985-86* £	*1986-87* £	*1987-88* £	*1988-89* £
Argyll and Clyde	171	181	194	215	240
Ayrshire and Arran	149	159	173	191	212
Borders	150	161	173	197	233
Dumfries and Galloway	197	206	208	236	259
Fife	151	165	180	194	214
Forth Valley	185	200	215	235	259
Grampian	199	210	222	243	276
Greater Glasgow	318	336	355	382	429
Highland	205	213	231	250	278
Lanarkshire	160	169	179	192	216
Lothian	247	260	282	302	337
Orkney	126	129	141	158	171
Shetland	129	137	145	169	194
Tayside	282	292	312	332	370
Western Isles	151	161	170	190	203

DEFENCE

Military Nuclear Materials

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the United Kingdom chiefs of defence staff revealed any details to their counterparts from the Warsaw pact of United Kingdom production capacity and stockpile of unsafeguarded military nuclear materials in the meeting in Vienna that began on 16 January.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Lost Property

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the 112 vehicles and 25 items of plant lost over a four-year period at an Army unit outlined in the "Losses Statement of the Appropriations Account 1988-89, Class I, Vote 1"; and what action he is taking in respect of the likely fraud or misappropriation.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The circumstances of this loss are that the vehicles and plant were written off throughout the whole of the Falklands in the four-year period 1982 to 1986, in the immediate aftermath of Operation Corporate when operational needs were of the highest priority and proper accounting systems had not been installed.

The lack of accounting controls at that time meant that, although there was no evidence either way, the possibility of fraud or misappropriation could not be entirely discounted. However, full stores accounting procedures and systems are now in operation and all vehicles and plant in theatre are, therefore, properly controlled and documented.

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the estimated sum lost by failure to make adequate charges for the use of support elements at a military establishment outlined in the "Losses Statement of the Appropriations Account 1988-89, Class I, Vote 1".

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The sum noted in the appropriation account 1988-89 is in respect of estimated losses in revenue arising from low charges levied on non-Ministry of Defence students attending courses at the Royal Military College of Science, Shrivenham in the period August 1984 to July 1988. The sum represents a proportion of the military overheads of the establishment in that period, provision for which was omitted from

course price calculations following the contracting out of the academic and academic support task to Cranfield institute of technology in August 1984. A staged increase in course prices has been carried out in order to bring them up to the correct levels and this has been reached in the majority of cases. We anticipate that the remaining courses will reach correct price levels in the next two to three years.

Sellafield (Decommissioning)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what payments have been made by his Department to British Nuclear Fuels plc over the past five years in regard to post-operational decommissioning work on facilities at Sellafield used to carry out contracts for his Department; what proportion of the work required arose from the pre-1971 period; and over what period of time negotiations were entered into over the payments for the work.

Mr. Alan Clark: My Department has paid £12·5 million to British Nuclear Fuels plc in respect of decommissioning work carried out on facilities at Sellafield. All the payments made so far relate to pre-1971 liabilities.

Formal discussions concerning the basis on which payments for pre-1971 liabilities would be made to the company took place in the period 1986 to 1988. Those discussions involved not only the MOD but other bodies concerned with work at Sellafield. The MOD made its first payments for decommissioning work in early 1989.

Defence Procurement

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next expects to review the level of defence procurement.

Mr. Alan Clark: As normal, plans for all aspects of defence expenditure, including procurement, will be reviewed in the 1990 public expenditure survey.

European Fighter Aircraft

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the radar order for the European fighter aircraft.

Mr. Alan Clark: I have nothing to add to my reply to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, East (Mr. Strang) on 23 January 1990, at columns 869-72.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many countries have made purchase inquiries about the European fighter aircraft.

Mr. Alan Clark: My Department has already received several inquiries relating to potential future sales of the European fighter aircraft, and we expect many more closer to the aircraft's date of completion. My hon. Friend will, of course, be aware that it has been the consistent policy of successive Administrations not to comment on individual applications for defence exports.

Service Personnel (Benefits)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what figures he has for the number of services personnel and their families receiving (i) social security benefits and (ii) housing benefit.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: This information is not held by the Ministry of Defence. Any social security benefit or local authority housing benefit which a service man may receive is a private matter concerning himself and the Department of Social Security or the local authority, and does not have to be reported to the Ministry of Defence.

Defence Contracts

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those contracts his Department has with Blue Circle Industries plc and its subsidiaries.

Mr. Neubert: We have no current headquarters contracts with Blue Circle Industries plc. Information on subsidiary companies could be provided only at disproportionate costs and, in any event, it is not our custom to release details of individual contracts for reasons of commercial confidentiality.

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the contracts between his Department and Armitage Shanks.

Mr. Neubert: Following the holding reply I gave on 16 November 1989, at column *417*, I wrote to my hon. Friend informing him that we were considering, with Armitage Shanks, the precise implications of the proposed closure of its Barrhead factory, and that the extent to which alternative sources of supply would be needed was not yet clear. That remains the position.

Piers Helps

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth will receive a reply to his letter dated 4 December 1989 referring to Piers Helps.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces wrote to my hon. Friend on 29 January 1990.

HMS Conqueror

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *62*, on what grounds he has decided not to declassify the captain's narrative of HMS Conqueror's Falklands deployment.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The captain's narrative contains information of current operational and technical significance.

Common Land

Mr. Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all the cases when the Land Clauses Consolidation Act 1845 has been used in combination with the Defence Acts 1842 and 1854 to extinguish commoners' rights over any common land in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 25 January 1990]:* The Land Clauses Consolidation Act 1845 has been used in combination with the Defence Acts 1842 and 1854 to extinguish rights of common on at least three occasions: at RAF Fylingdales in 1960, at RAF Lakenheath in 1961, and at RAF Woodbridge in 1964. There may have been other instances, but a comprehensive list could not be provided without disproportionate cost.

WALES

Surgery

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list, in order of frequency and with the estimated number of operations, the 10 most common forms of surgery for which patients are admitted to hospitals in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* each health authority in Wales.

Mr. Grist: The available figures for 1987 are shown in the table. However, the information may understate the true position in that not all hospitals provide complete clinical details relating to patient discharges and deaths.

OPCS operation codes[1]	*Type of operation*	*Number*
Wales		
703-706	Dilation, curettage, biopsy, and excision of lesion of cervix	9,937
420, 421, 425-433, 439	Operation of stomach—other	9,291
607, 608	Cystoscopy (with destruction of lesion)	8,369
770-779	Post-natal or post-abortion operations	7,646
752, 753, 758-762	Delivery operations—excluding normal, Caesarian section and forceps	7,411
780-789	Treatment of fracture by operations	7,393
912-914	Excision of superficial lesion	7,219
941-959	Vascular procedures and operations with ill-defined site	5,610
742	Termination of pregnancy (excluding hysterotomy)	4,732
230-239	Tonsillectomy and adenoidectomy	4,646
Clwyd		
420, 421, 425-433, 439	Operation on stomach—other	1,587
607, 608	Cystoscopy (with destruction of lesion)	1,135
780-789	Treatment of fracture by operations	1,113
703-706	Dilation, curettage, biopsy, and excision of lesion of cervix	1,074
468	Sigmoidoscopy	1,052
230-239	Tonsillectomy and adenoidectomy	1,018
912-914	Excision of superficial lesion	954
170-179	Operations on lens	927
941-959	Vascular procedures and operations with ill-defined site	849
770-779	Post-natal or post-abortion operations	762
East Dyfed		
420, 421, 425-433, 439	Operations on stomach—other	1,184
607, 608	Cystoscopy (with destruction of lesion)	745
703-706	Dilation, curettage, biopsy, and excision of lesion of cervix	664
780-789	Treatment of fracture by operations	624
170-179	Operations on lens	583
752, 753, 758-762	Delivery operations—excluding normal, Caesarian section and forceps	576
230-239	Tonsillectomy and adenoidectomy	543
912-914	Excision of superficial lesion	542
941-959	Vascular procedures and operations with ill-defined site	532
210, 211, 215-224	Operations on nose (excluding nasal septum)	505
Pembrokeshire		
752, 753, 758-762	Delivery operations—excluding normal, Caesarian section and forceps	450
607, 608	Cystoscopy (with destruction of lesion)	420
770-779	Post-natal or post-abortion operations	401
780-789	Treatment of fracture by operations	393
703-706	Dilation, curettage, biopsy, and excision of lesion of cervix	343
400-409	Operation on abdominal wall, peritoneum, and mesentery	323
941-959	Vascular procedures and operations with ill-defined site	317
912-914	Excision of superficial lesion	286
742	Other termination of pregnancy (excluding hysterotomy)	241
440-445	Operations on appendix	226
Gwent		
912-914	Excision of superficial lesion	2,067
770-779	Post-natal or post-abortion operations	1,905
607-608	Cystoscopy (with destruction of lesion)	1,635
703-706	Dilatation, curettage, biospy, and excision of lesion of cervix	1,588
420, 421, 425-433, 439	Operations on stomach—other	1,331
752, 753, 758-762	Delivery operations—excluding normal, Caesarian section and forceps	1,189
780-789	Treatment of fracture by operations	1,058
764-769	Caesarian section	742
410, 411	Inguinal hernia operations	632
210, 211, 215-224	Operations on nose (excluding nasal septum)	616
Gwynedd		
420, 421, 425-433, 439	Operations on stomach—other	1,091
703-706	Dilatation, curettage, biopsy, and excision of lesion of cervix	1,082
780-789	Treatment of fracture by operations	600
400-409	Operations of abdominal wall, peritoneum, and mesentery	584
607, 608	Cystoscopy (with destruction of lesion)	581
752, 753, 758-762	Delivery operations—excluding normal, Caesarian section and forceps	571

OPCS operation codes[1]	Type of operation	Number
170-179	Operations on lens	460
440-445	Operations on appendix	457
468	Sigmoidoscopy	397
764-769	Caesarian section	371
Mid Glamorgan		
703-706	Dilatation, curettage, biopsy, and excision of lesion of cervix	2,228
607, 608	Cystoscopy (with destruction of lesion)	1,725
770-779	Post-natal or post-abortion operations	1,602
780-789	Treatment of fracture by operations	1,601
752, 753, 758-762	Delivery operations—excluding normal, Caesarian section and forceps	1,601
420, 421, 425-433, 439	Operations on stomach—other	1,424
912-914	Excision of superficial lesion	1,293
651	Ligation of vasectomy of vas deferens	1,145
941-959	Vascular procedures and operations with ill-defined site	971
764-769	Caesarian section	931
Powys		
703-706	Dilatation, curettage, biopsy, and excision of lesion of cervix	106
651	Ligation or vasectomy of vas deferens	93
770-779	Post-natal or post-abortion operations	78
410, 411	Inguinal hernia operations	76
230-239	Tonsillectomy and adenoidectomy	50
742	Other termination of pregnancy	40
890-898	Operations on veins	40
752, 753, 758-762	Delivery operations—excluding normal, Caesarian section and forceps	36
754-757, 763	Forceps delivery	35
400-409	Operations on abdominal wall, peritoneum, and mesentery	30
South Glamorgan		
250, 251	Drainage of abscess and simple dental extraction	1,831
703-706	Dilation, curettage, biopsy, and excision of lesion of cervix	1,643
420, 421, 425-433, 439	Operations on stomach—other	1,609
770-779	Post-natal or post-abortion operations	1,471
912-914	Excision of superficial lesion	1,431
300-329	Operations on heart and intrathoracic vessels	1,218
607, 608	Cystoscopy (with destruction of lesion)	1,163
252-259	Operations on teeth, gums and jaw—other	1,145
780-789	Treatment of fracture by operations	1,069
752, 753, 758-762	Delivery operations—excluding normal, Caesarian section and forceps	957
West Glamorgan		
941-959	Vascular procedures and operations with ill-defined site	2,016
742	Other termination of pregnancy	1,784
752, 753, 758-762	Delivery operations—excluding normal, Caesarian section and forceps	1,485
703-706	Dilation, curettage, biopsy, and excision of lesion of cervix	1,209
880-889	Operation on arteries	1,049
703-706	Cystoscopy (with destruction of lesion)	964
780-789	Treatment of fracture by operations	928
420, 421, 425-433, 439	Operations on stomach—other	870
680-683, 685-689	Operations involving oviduct—excluding division and ligation	840
770-779	Post-natal or post-abortion operations	811

[1] Based on a condensed list of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys classification of surgical operations, 3rd revision.

Health Authority Income

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish for each health authority *(a)* the net income from private patients and clinics and *(b)* the amounts written off as bad debts in each year since 1979.

Mr. Grist: The information requested is shown in the following tables:

Net income from private patients[1]

£ thousands

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*
Clwyd	120·1	171·2	202·7	156·6	251·8	305·4	363·4	358·9	419·2	460·2
East Dyfed[2]	63·7	111·6	117·4	106·8	90·9	139·5	153·4	194·4	220·9	282·3
Gwent	3·2	2·2	0·9	0·4	—	7·0	16·1	13·2	16·8	29·0
Gwynedd	69·6	98·4	99·4	97·9	107·4	104·5	201·1	209·8	203·8	200·4
Mid Glamorgan	11·9	14·3	22·0	14·5	29·5	20·4	27·2	51·5	52·2	63·4
Pembrokeshire[2]	—	—	—	40·0	46·1	58·4	62·2	84·8	87·1	90·5
Powys	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·3	—	—	—
South Glamorgan	41·4	26·5	18·2	30·3	29·0	45·4	91·2	101·5	85·6	97·4
West Glamorgan	12·7	19·0	33·4	35·0	47·5	59·4	86·3	100·7	141·5	141·2
WHCSA	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
TOTAL WALES	332·6	443·2	494·0	481·5	602·2	740·0	1,001·2	1,114·8	1,226·6	1,364·4

Source: Health authorities annual accounts.

[1] Consists of private in-patients (section 65), private non-resident patients (section 65) and accommodation and services provided under section 58 of the National Health Service Act 1977.

[2] Dyfed health authority until 1982-83.

Bad debts and claims abandoned: Private patients[3]

£ thousand

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*
Clwyd	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	2·9	2·2	1·4	1·4
East Dyfed[4]	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	0·5	2·7	1·1	0·5
Gwent	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	—	—	—	—
Gwynedd	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	0·1	2·9	1·2	0·7
Mid Glamorgan	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	0·6	1·0	0·4	0·7
Pembrokeshire[4]	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	2·2	1·7	0·4	1·9
Powys	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	—	—	—	—
South Glamorgan	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	0·0	0·2	1·2	0·2
West Glamorgan	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	—	1·0	2·2	4·2
WHCSA	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	—	—	—	—
Wales	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	6·3	11·7	7·9	9·6

[3] Consists of private in-patients (section 65) and private non-resident patients (section 66). Private patients' bad debts and claims abandoned were not separately identified until 1985-86.

[4] Dyfed health authority until 1982-83.

Source: Health authorities annual accounts.

Bad debts and claims abandoned: total

£ thousand

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*
Clwyd	0·9	3·7	3·3	4·2	1·0	37·1	12·6	9·3	11·2	3·0
East Dyfed[5]	0·6	1·0	3·2	2·1	28·8	3·8	4·4	200·4	7·0	6·2
Gwent	0·5	1·7	0·7	1·2	0·4	2·1	2·7	4·2	5·1	12·1
Gwynedd	0·1	1·3	1·9	4·8	4·0	6·3	12·2	5·4	14·9	22·8
Mid Glamorgan	0·5	0·4	0·3	1·0	3·8	9·1	6·8	16·0	19·0	12·1
Pembrokeshire[5]	—	—	—	0·3	0·3	11·1	2·2	1·7	1·9	3·9
Powys	1·1	0·9	0·2	0·2	0·5	1·4	0·7	0·7	1·2	1·1
South Glamorgan	1·2	2·1	1·6	2·8	8·3	37·5	6·5	17·2	117·1	9·5
West Glamorgan	0·8	51·9	3·1	4·2	8·5	107·9	12·7	33·8	19·8	13·2
WHCSA	—	—	—	—	—	17·4	246·2	253·9	—	—
Wales	5·7	63·0	14·3	20·8	55·6	233·7	307·0	542·6	197·3	83·9

[5] Dyfed health authority until 1982-83.

Source: Health authorities annual accounts.

Wintech

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will make available to the public the correspondence between his Department and the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency regarding the future of Wintech;

(2) if he will make it his policy to expand the work of Wintech; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will place copies of correspondence between his Department and the chairman of the board of the Welsh Development Agency regarding the future of Wintech in the Library;

(4) if he will review the provision of technological and scientific support services to industry by the Welsh Development Agency;

(5) what representations he has *(a)* had and *(b)* proposes to have about the future of Wintech.

Mr. Peter Walker: It is agency policy to keep its operations under continuous review in order to respond more effectively to the changing demands of industry. A review of the agency's technology development activities was completed last year and changes announced in September 1989. These were directed to focusing the agency's technology activities more closely on improving service to high technology businesses in Wales and increasing efforts to secure technology transfer through the attraction of key research and development operations to Wales, in order to enhance Wales' technological base.

Apart from the hon. Gentleman's questions, I have received no representations concerning the future of the agency's technology development activities; nor do I intend to elicit any. It is not my policy to publish such correspondence as I may have with the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency.

Drainage

Sir John Stradling Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he proposes to deal with the question of drainage rates and the relationship of the internal drainage boards' finance and membership in relation to district councils.

Mr. Peter Walker: The Internal Drainage Board (Finance) Regulations 1990, which came into force on 24 January, make provision both for the financing arrangements for internal drainage boards and for the membership of these boards. Each internal drainage board is given power to raise its expenses by means of a drainage rate on the agricultural sector, and special levies on the charging authorities, within its area. The regulations provide that the composition of each board should broadly reflect the relative financial contributions of the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors to its expenditure. Members representing the agricultural sector will continue to be elected or otherwise qualify as at present. Those representing the non-agricultural sector will be appointed by the district councils.

Improvement Grants

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will make it his policy that individuals who had applied for housing improvement and repair grants and *(a)* were told that there was no hope of money being forthcoming and therefore had to go ahead without help but *(b)* would now have received money under the recently announced open-ending of grant money, should be compensated for at least a part of what they have lost.

Mr. Grist: The priority given to home renovation grants must be a matter for individual local authorities to determine. There is no justification for compensation for those who have undertaken work without grant.

Hospital Services

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) against what criteria he intends to advise health authorities in Wales to judge the advisability of contracting a particular service to a hospital outside the authority's own area;

(2) how he intends to assess the impact on journeys for patients and their families of any decisions by a health authority in Wales to contract particular services to a hospital outside that authority's own area;

(3) whether he will instruct health authorities in Wales to assess the likely impact on travel for patients and their families of contracting any service to a hospital outside the health authority's own area and to weigh that assessment in the balance with other relevant criteria before letting any contract.

Mr. Grist: It will be the responsibility of district health authorities to secure an adequate range, quality and depth of services for their local populations through appropriate contractual arrangements. The document "Contracts for Health Services: Operations Principles", which was circulated to the National Health Service in Wales on 20 October 1989, stated that, in determining the content of the contracts they seek to let, district health authorities will need to reconcile need for service, quality of access to service, and value for money in the mode of provision. As now, the majority of services will be provided in local hospitals. However, referrals already take place to hospitals in other districts and health authorities will therefore wish to make some contracts for such referrals.

In considering these contracts, authorities will carefully consult general practitioners to establish anticipated patterns of referral and will take into account the impact of travelling on patients and their families. We should emphasise that in all cases the object will be to secure the patterns of referral preferred by referrers themselves and that no patients will be forced to travel against their will for treatment. The arrangements made by health authorities to secure services for their populations will be subject to scrutiny in the annual reviews of performance chaired by director, National Health Service (Wales).

Consultants (Distinction Awards)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list the amount of distinction awards paid to consultants in each of the area health authorities of Wales for the last five years;

(2) what sums have been made available for top-up bonuses to hospital consultants in each health authority in Wales in the financial year 1988-89 and in the current financial year; and how much will be budgeted for each authority for the 1990-91 financial year;

(3) what total sum has been made available for distinction awards to hospital consultants in Wales in the financial year 1988-89 and in the current financial year; and how much will be made available in the 1990-91 financial year.

Mr. Grist: The information is as follows:

Payments of Distinction Awards to Consultants[1]

Health Authority	*1984-85* £	*1985-86* £	*1986-87* £	*1987-88* £	*1988-89* £
Clwyd	151,435	169,892	176,187	166,838	328,862
East Dyfed	85,265	113,465	93,683	87,044	94,720
Gwent	193,194	216,255	257,142	321,938	343,278
Gwynedd	58,123	70,186	95,904	115,189	113,659
Mid Glamorgan	111,784	86,101	121,133	127,622	164,590
Pembrokeshire	26,317	30,106	30,559	51,174	54,734
Powys	4,489	9,780	10,700	5,717	12,364
South Glamorgan	1,146,812	1,360,037	1,621,917	1,814,516	1,906,649
West Glamorgan	197,253	217,700	210,540	8,752	253,742
Wales	1,974,672	2,273,522	2,617,765	2,698,790	3,272,598

Allocations to Health Authorities for Consultant Distinction Awards

Health Authority	*1988-89* £ million	*1989-90*[2,3] £ million	*1990-91*[2,3] £ million
Clwyd	0·599	0·348	0·231
East Dyfed	0·142	0·127	0·138
Gwent	0·418	0·382	0·412
Gwynedd	0·281	0·216	0·231
Mid Glamorgan	0·344	0·168	0·181
Pembrokeshire	0·095	0·065	0·069
Powys	0·014	0·006	0·007
South Glamorgan	2·092	2·108	2·277
West Glamorgan	0·522	0·320	0·343
Total all Health Authorities	4·507	3·740	3·889

Notes:

[1] Medical and dental consultants, NHS staff and honorary contract holders

[2] Allocation in 1989-90 takes account of overprovision in 1988-89.

[3] Further funding may be made available in the light of any recommendation for increases in the numbers of consultant distinction awards by the Review Body on Doctors and Dentists Remuneration.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will set out the procedure by which distinction awards are allocated for senior hospital consultants in Wales.

Mr. Grist: Distinction awards are made on the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Distinction Awards. That committee approaches its

regional network of committees, the Royal College and Faculties, the public health laboratory service, the Medical Research Council and regional specialist advisers for nominations. The chairman of the committee then visits each regional committee between May and September to discuss their recommendations and all the nominations received from other sources in order to draw up a provisional list for the consideration and final decision of the advisory committee.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the criteria against which distinction awards are made to senior hospital consultants in Wales.

Mr. Grist: There are no formal objective criteria of award worthiness. General guidelines only are used by the awards committees which look for performances "over and above the call of duty."
Principally these can be indicated by *(a)* clinical excellence and recognition of leadership in a specialty; *(b)* research, innovation and improvement in the service; and *(c)* hard work and outstanding service to the NHS.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number of hospital consultants who received top-up bonuses in each health authority in Wales in the financial year 1988-89 and in the current financial year.

Mr. Grist: The numbers of practitioners who received distinction awards in 1988-89 in each health authority are as follows:

	Number
Clwyd	35
East Dyfed	17
Gwent	35
Gwynedd	23
Mid Glamorgan	24
Pembrokeshire	6
Powys	4
South Glamorgan	127
West Glamorgan	36

Notes:
Although practitioners are eligible for only one distinction award, some are included more than once in the above list because they work for more than one health authority.
Figures for 1989-90 are not available because the awards for this financial year have not yet been announced.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the period of years for which any distinction awards will operate when awarded to any hospital consultant in Wales.

Mr. Grist: Distinction awards are, at present, paid to consultants until they retire. The White Paper "Working for Patients" proposes a number of changes which would result in the new awards being reviewable every five years and new or increased awards being pensionable only if the practitioner works for another three years in the NHS.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales who is involved in deciding the allocation of distinction awards to senior hospital consultants in Wales and who takes the final decision.

Mr. Grist: Consultant distinction awards in Wales are made by the Secretary of State on the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Distinction Awards.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the maximum salary of National Health Service consultants in Wales, inclusive of distinction awards.

Mr. Grist: The maximum salary of NHS consultants is currently £38,340. In addition to this, a consultant may be in receipt of one of the following distinction awards A+ £36,420; A £26,840; B £15,340 or C £6,760. The current maximum compares with a maximum of £15,279 in 1979, an increase in real terms of 36 per cent.

Truancy

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will make a statement on truancy in each of the local education authorities in Wales;

(2) what is his estimate of truancy as a percentage in the *(a)* fourth and *(b)* fifth years in high schools in (i) Clwyd, (ii) Powys, (iii) Gwynedd, (iv) Mid Glamorgan, (v) South Glamorgan, (vi) West Glamorgan, (vii) Gwent; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what measures he proposes to lessen truancy concerning the schools of Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Information on truancy levels is not held centrally. The committee of inquiry into discipline in schools in England and Wales made several recommendations aimed at improving attendance rates. Arising from this the Welsh education support grant programme for 1990-91 makes provision for payment of grant to LEAs for schemes to improve attendance at schools.

The remit of LEA education welfare officers includes responsibility for following up cases of unjustified absence.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will make it his policy to make available £3·4 million to health authorities in Wales to tackle waiting lists; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what new measures he proposes to take to eliminate hospital waiting lists; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: We are concerned that some patients have to wait too long for their treatment, which is why health authorities in Wales have been asked to mount a special initiative to reduce such waiting times through more efficient use of their discretionary resources. Authorities' own efforts have been supported by over £4 million of Welsh Office funding since 1986. These intitatives will be further supplemented this year by three specialist centres to treat those who have been waiting too long for treatments such as cataract removal or hip replacement. Subject to approval of the supply estimates, we plan to make available a total of £2·3 million in 1990-91 on the waiting times and treatment centre initiatives.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many people are waiting for in-patient treatment in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Gwent and *(c)* Newport;

(2) how many people are waiting for non-urgent surgery in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Gwent and *(c)* Newport;

(3) how many people are waiting for out-patient treatment in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Gwent and *(c)* Newport;

(4) how many people are waiting for urgent treatment in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Gwent and *(c)* Newport.

Mr. Grist: The available information is shown in the table:

Waiting list as at 31 March 1989

	Wales	*Gwent*	*Newport*[1]
People waiting for:			
In patient treatment	41,964	9,531	5,538
Of which:			
Non-urgent surgery[2]	37,790	8,377	4,874
Urgent in-patient treatment	3,493	1,124	641
Out-patient consultation	90,745	13,616	7,039

[1] People waiting for treatment/consultation at Royal Gwent and St. Woolos hospitals.

[2] People waiting for treatment in surgical specialties which are: general surgery; ear, nose and throat; traumatic and orthopaedic surgery; opthalmology; urology; plastic surgery; dental surgery; neurosurgery; gynaecology and cardiac surgery.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to reduce hospital waiting lists in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Gwent and *(c)* Newport.

Mr. Grist: The prime responsibility for reducing hospital waiting lists rests with district health authorities using their discretionary resources. Authorities' efforts have been supported by over £4 million of Welsh Office funding since 1986, of which £866,000 has been spent in Gwent on a scheme for trauma and orthopaedics based at the Royal Gwent hospital, Newport. This year will see three specialist centres to offer patients across Wales the choice of earlier treatment for key disabling conditions. The orthopaedic centre in South Glamorgan and the general surgery centre in Mid Glamorgan should be of particular benefit to patients in Gwent. Subject to approval of the supply estimates, we plan to allocate some £2·3 million to the waiting times and treatment centre initiatives in 1990-91.

Rail Electrification

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will meet Clwyd and Gwynedd city councils to discuss rail electrification from Crewe-Holyhead; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will meet the standing conference on regional policy in south Wales to discuss the rail electrification of Paddington-Cardiff; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: No. Electrification is a matter for the British Railways Board.

Severn Bridge

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the current projected cost of the repair and maintenance work on the Severn bridge.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The current projected costs for repair and maintenance work, which are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, are as follows:

	1989-90 £ million	*1990-91 £ million*	*1991-92 £ million*	*1992-93 £ million*
Repair (including strengthening	14·9	12·2	2·8	0·1
Maintenance	2·3	2·7	1·8	1·8

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the estimated final cost of repair work likely to be on the Severn bridge.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The final cost of repair and strengthening work on the Severn bridge is estimated to be £70 million at 1989-90 prices.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the nature of work still to be done on the Severn bridge.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The work still to be done on the Severn bridge involves completing the jacking up of the piers and resurfacing.

Health Service (Resources)

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to increase the financial resources of the Health Service in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* Gwent and *(c)* Newport.

Mr. Grist: I would refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) on 11 January when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced the revenue and capital allocations to health authorities in Wales for 1990-91, including those in respect of the Gwent health authority. The distribution of resources within the district is a matter for the health authority to decide.

The distribution of the further sums referred to in the reply as being for centrally directed developments in 1990-91 will be announced in due course.

Gwent Health Authority

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next plans to meet the Gwent area health authority.

Mr. Grist: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no immediate plans to meet the Gwent district health authority.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Investment

14. **Mr. Irvine:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current level of investment in Belfast by the private sector.

Mr. Needham: Private investment in Belfast has increased dramatically in recent years. This is particularly so in the city centre where major projects completed in the past five years, under way or programmed total £573 million. In addition, during the past five years IDB has backed industrial projects with a total planned investment of £191 million.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what policies he will be pursuing in 1990 to attract inward investment to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: The task of attracting inward investment to Northern Ireland falls to the Industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland, whose policies are published in its medium-term strategy 1985-90. I am currently discussing with the IDB a new medium-term strategy, effective from April 1990. Although the detail has yet to be agreed, the basic thrust gives a commitment

"to concentrate the promotional efforts in major markets for internationally mobile investment and sectorally in areas where Northern Ireland has particular strengths."

43. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current level of inward investment in the Province.

Mr. Needham: Since 1 April 1986, a total of 5,288 jobs have been promoted in Northern Ireland through new foreign-owned projects. In addition a further 5,773 jobs should result from investment into Northern Ireland by GB-owned companies. These projects have brought total new financial investment of £576 million. I am encouraged by this level of activity which includes some notable successes such as the Province's first South Korean investment.

27. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the level of investment in Londonderry by the private sector.

Mr. Needham: A complete picture is not available of investment in Londonderry by the private sector. Statistics are, however, available for the period 1983-89 which produces a total of £40 million either spent, under way or projected. This £40 million figure essentially relates to retail, offices, shops, restaurants and hotel developments.

Inter-party Talks

15. **Sir Michael McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the progress of inter-party talks among the constitutional parties in Northern Ireland.

40. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress he has made towards devolution in Northern Ireland.

41. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his plans for devolution.

Mr. John P. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he has taken to pursue the establishment of devolved institutions in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: I refer my hon. Friend and the hon. Members to the reply I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill).

Castle Court Development

16. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will meet a deputation of independent traders occupying premises off Smithfield market, Belfast, to discuss issues arising from the Castle Court development.

Mr. Needham: I am prepared to meet the Smithfield traders. Meetings have already taken place with officials and all possible action has been taken to minimise the adverse effect during construction of this major £100 million development.

Security

17. **Mr. Molyneaux:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland.

23. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in the Six Counties.

48. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current security situation in Northern Ireland.

50. **Rev. Ian Paisley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: Since I answered a similar question on 14 December 1989, eight people have been killed in Northern Ireland in incidents directly related to terrorism. They included six civilians, a member of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and a part-time member of the Ulster Defence Regiment. Last year 430 people were charged with serious terrorist offences in Northern Ireland and large quantities of lethal weapons, ammunition and explosives were recovered, both in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

51. **Rev. William McCrea:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will call for a report on the security situation in Mid-Ulster; and what further security measures he will introduce to secure the safety of constituents of the hon. Member for Mid-Ulster.

Mr. Cope: I am always particularly conscious of those communities that have borne a high level of terrorist attacks. I have regular and frequent meetings with the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and others with responsibility for security to discuss security not only in Mid-Ulster but in Northern Ireland as a whole. New measures which might improve the security situation are under constant review; where practicable they are implemented.

19. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the Government's security policies in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Cope: A measure of the Government's success is the fact that the terrorists have not advanced any of their causes by one step in many years of violence. The Government, the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Army and the people of Northern Ireland remain resolute. Terrorism is futile.

Health Expenditure

18. **Mr. Gerald Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the level of health spending in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: Total funding for the health and personal social services in Northern Ireland in 1989-90 will amount to £962 million—equivalent to about £609 per head of population. This remains substantially above levels in England and Wales and is a continued recognition of the Province's need for additional health and social services care, despite other pressures or resources.

Shoppers

20. **Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he last raised the Irish Government's restrictions on the freedom of movement of southern Irish shoppers into Northern Ireland at a meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference.

Mr. Cope: We have raised with the Irish Government on several occasions recently, within the Conference and

elsewhere, the restrictions they have imposed on travellers' allowances. The European Court will now decide on the legality of the restrictions: its hearing will take place on 21 February, and the United Kingdom Government will be represented.

Legal and Judicial Discussion

21. **Mr. Mallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has had concerning legal and judicial matters pertaining to Northern Ireland and with whom.

Mr. Cope: The Secretary of State and I frequently have discussions with a wide range of people on a wide range of issues including legal and judicial matters. If the hon. Gentleman has a specific matter in mind, I will endeavour to provide the information requested.

Beef Farmers

22. **Mr. McGrady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he has taken or proposes to take to alleviate the financial position of farmers involved in the beef industry in Northern Ireland.

38. **Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he intends to take to improve returns to beef producers in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We have urged my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to seek a devaluation of the United Kingdom green pound in the context of this year's price-fixing round.

We have also asked him to take steps to ensure that the maximum support allowable under the EC beef intervention arrangements is provided for the beef cattle market in Northern Ireland.

The problem of low returns for beef production, particularly winter finishing, in Northern Ireland is not new. There are structural weaknesses in the beef production and processing sectors which need to be addressed and we have asked officials to examine possible solutions to these problems with the farming and commercial interests involved.

Intergovernmental Conference

24. **Ms. Short:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what matters were discussed in the last meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the recent meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference.

Mr. Brooke: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave earlier today to a question from the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross).

34. **Mr. Ashdown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was discussed at the last meeting of the Anglo-Irish intergovernmental body; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I assume that the right hon. Member is referring to the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference which last met on 30 November 1989 and I refer him to the answer I gave earlier today to a question from the hon. Member for Dundee, West.

Devolution

25. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which leaders of political parties in Northern Ireland he will consult in pursuing his proposal to reopen discussions on devolution; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I would expect to consult the leaders of all the main constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland about devolution.

30. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the progress of his talks with Northern Ireland politicians concerning more local involvement in the government of the Province; and what interest has been shown in the possibility of establishing local authorities similar to the authorities within the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Brooke: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill). In their talks with me, most Northern Ireland politicians have looked towards the establishment of a devolved form of government for Northern Ireland as a whole, with an appropriate role for representatives of the minority community. The Government would give serious consideration to any proposals for more local involvement which were workable and seemed likely to command widespread acceptance.

29. **Mr. Allan Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has recently had with Northern Ireland politicians concerning more local involvement in the government of the Province; and if he will make a statement.

42. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he last had formal discussions with the constitutional political parties in the Province.

Dr. Mawhinney: Last year my right hon. Friend held meetings with the leadership of the Ulster Unionist party, the Ulster Democratic Unionist party, the Social Democratic and Labour party, the Alliance party for Northern Ireland, the Workers party and the Ulster Progressive Unionist party at which the prospects for transferring powers to locally elected representatives were discussed. So far this year he has held such meetings with the Social Democratic and Labour party (most recently on 19 January); and I have met the leader of the Alliance party (most recently on 23 January). In addition, my right hon. Friend and his ministerial colleagues have had many other meetings, formal or less formal, over recent months, with politicians from all the main constitutional political parties, when the prospects for political progress among other matters have been discussed.

Irish Medium Education

26. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment has been made of the availability of curriculum materials for Irish medium education for primary age children.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Government recognise the need to improve the availability of curriculum materials in Irish and are giving financial assistance for the production of suitable materials. The needs will be kept under review as part of the implementation of the common curriculum.

Road Casualties

28. **Mr. Stanbrook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current level of road casualties.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: In 1989 there were over 7,000 crashes or collisions involving personal injury or death. The total number of 11,611 casualties includes 9,416 slight injuries, 2,014 serious injuries and 181 deaths.

33. **Mr. Boyes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the programme to reduce road casualties.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Targets were set last autumn to reduce by one third within the 12 months to halloween 1990, the recent average road death total of 210 people, and to cut serious injuries by one third by the end of the century. The death rate is down by 20 per cent., though the period covered so far is too short to be significant.

The newly established road casualty reduction unit will seek to create a climate of public opinion and awareness which is more acceptable to the effective promotion of road casualty reduction; and to examine and evaluate all existing road casualty reduction measures and to identify new measures.

Republic of Ireland

35. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he last met the Prime Minister of Eire; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Brooke: I last met the Taoiseach when paying him a courtesy call in Dublin on 28 November 1989. It was not the occasion for discussion of substantive business.

44. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what subjects he expects to discuss at his next meeting with representatives of the Government of the Republic of Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter).

Social Security Administration

36. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the reorganisation and development of the social security administration.

Mr. Needham: Over the next few years the administration of social security will be improved through the introduction of a sophisticated new computerisation programme known as operational strategy. A major new system for the payment of income support was introduced last month and will be extended to cover all 34 social security offices by January 1991. Further systems for other benefits will be introduced later. This programme will mean a better service to the public, improved jobs and working conditions for staff and increased value for money for the taxpayer. It will cost £45 million and will break even in 1994-95.

With the same aims of improving service quality and efficiency the Department of Health and Social Services is conducting a feasibility study to consider whether social security operations in Northern Ireland should become an executive agency in line with the next steps initiative. The report of the study will be considered by Ministers shortly.

Rural Development

37. **Mr. John Browne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has to encourage development in rural areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There is a need to focus and co-ordinate action towards social and economic development in the most deprived rural areas of Northern Ireland. An interdepartmental committee on rural development will review policies and programmes in these areas to ensure the maximum impact of existing expenditure with due sensitivity to identified needs in the areas themselves.

The opportunities for further action will be examined in light of the committee's findings and recommendations.

Security Forces

31. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what initiatives he has taken to promote public confidence in the security forces.

32. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures he has taken to further public confidence in the security forces.

Mr. Cope: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy).

Integrated Education

39. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the progress of integrated education.

Dr. Mawhinney: There are at present 10 integrated schools operating in Northern Ireland of which seven have achieved maintained status. The Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, which comes into operation on 20 February 1990, introduces provisions that will facilitate the development of integrated schools and which will, I hope, increase the opportunity to opt for integrated education for those parents who wish it for their children.

These provisions do not seek to impose integrated schools and the rate of progress will be determined entirely by parental demand.

Community Workshops

45. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the effects of proposed changes in the funding of youth training projects in community workshops.

Mr. Needham: Under the new arrangements community workshops will become recognised training organisations and there will be a greater emphasis on quality training with outcomes, including the attainment of vocational qualifications. The workshops will be paid a set amount per trainee and, compared with the present system, the management committee will have the freedom to make decisions on how to operate and how to organise

their training programmes. I have listened very carefully to the representations made to me in recent weeks and at my meeting last Monday with the Northern Ireland Association of Community Workshops I told them of modifications I had decided to make to the original proposals to meet their concerns. I am hopeful that the workshops' response will be positive and that they will now proceed to draw up their operational plans for 1990-91.

Small County Towns

46. **Dr. Blackburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his proposals to revitalise small county towns.

Mr. Needham: Since 1987 the Department of the Environment has been extending its environmental improvement programme outside the cities of Belfast and Londonderry and there are also programmes for comprehensive development, pedestrianisation and conservation and open space grants.

The Department also administers a package of financial incentives for urban regeneration made available by the International Fund for Ireland. I understand that the fund is presently reviewing its programmes including its urban development programme which has provided support for regeneration of towns and villages outside Belfast and Londonderry.

Shootings

47. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a further statement on the shooting of the three men in west Belfast on 13 January.

Mr. Cope: I have nothing to add to the answers given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) and other hon. Members on 15 January 1990, at columns 21-27.

Anglo-Irish Agreement

49. **Mr. Barry Porter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will consider a full scale review of the workings of the Anglo-Irish Agreement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: A review of the working of the Intergovernmental Conference as provided for in article 11 of the agreement was completed in May 1989. Copies of the report recording the outcome of the review were placed in the Library at the time. There are no plans for a further review at this stage, but paragraph 29 of the review report provides that

"If in the future it were to appear that the objectives of the Agreement could be more effectively served by changes in the scope and nature of the working of the Conference, consistent with the basic provisions and spirit of the Agreement the two governments would be ready in principle to consider such changes."

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to phase out the Anglo-Irish Agreement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: The Government are committed to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and to the principles it embodies, but I remain ready to consider constructive proposals for political progress which have a wide measure of support.

Hospital Beds

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of the different categories of hospital beds there are at present; and how many there were for the equivalent categories 10 years ago.

Mr. Needham: The earliest year for which this information is available is 1980.

Average daily number of available beds

Category	*1980*	*1988-89*
All specialties	17,064	14,686
Acute	7,168	6,017
Obstetrics	732	702
Geriatric medicine	2,528	2,564
Mental illness	4,779	3,900
Mental handicap	1,533	1,345
General practitioner beds	324	158

Hospital Building

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the five largest hospital building projects in Northern Ireland currently under construction; and what is the projected cost of each.

Mr. Needham: The information is as follows:

Project	*Cost £ million*
New Antrim Hospital	41·1
Mater Hospital, Belfast—reconstruction scheme	13·8
Gransha Hospital, Londonderry—Geriatric Unit and Day Hospital	5·1
Musgrave Park Hospital, Belfast—Geriatric Unit and Day Hospital	2·5
Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast—extension of cardiac surgery intensive care facilities	1·7

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what have been the five largest hospital building projects completed in Northern Ireland since 1979; and what is the cost of each.

Mr. Needham: The information is as follows:

Project	*Cost £ million*
Belfast City Hospital Tower Block	61·0
Daisy Hill Hospital, Newry—major extension	6·1
Altnagelvin Hospital, Londonderry—nucleus cluster II	3·2
Erne Hospital, Enniskillen—Geriatric Unit and Day Hospital	3·1
Altnagelvin Hospital, Londonderry—nucleus cluster I	3·0

Teachers

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will establish a teaching council representative of teachers in Northern Ireland to work in partnership with Government on professional matters related to the teaching profession and the raising of educational standards.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am satisfied that the current arrangements for matters such as the standards of qualifications and entry to the profession and responsibility for teachers' probation and recognition are working satisfactorily. There are no plans for changes of the type suggested by the hon. Member.

On the general issue of raising educational standards, I look forward to a continuing partnership with the teaching profession to achieve the objectives set out in the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989.

Right to Fuel Campaign

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he next expects to meet representatives of the right to fuel campaign.

Mr. Needham: I do not have any immediate plans to meet representatives of the right to fuel campaign.

Breath Testing

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many breath tests were carried out over the Christmas and new year periods in each of the last five years in Northern Ireland; and how many proved positive.

Mr. Cope: The table details the roadside evidential breath tests made by the Royal Ulster Constabulary in each of the last five years during the Christmas and new year periods:

Year	*Tested*	*Positive*
1985	70	25
1986	89	27
1987	34	10
1988	49	19
1989	105	41

Enterprise and Investment

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent initiatives he has announced designed to encourage enterprise and investment in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: The Government are firmly committed to the promotion of enterprise in Northern Ireland and this commitment is reflected in the wide range of enterprise activities of the Local Enterprise Development Unit (LEDU), which is funded by the Government. The importance of the work which LEDU is doing is demonstrated by the substantial increase in resources which the Government are making available to LEDU in 1990-91. Examples of recent LEDU initiatives include stimulating and supporting innovatory technological projects with export potential and an enterprise awareness campaign.

As regards investment, one of the primary objectives of the Industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland is to seek to attract investment from Great Britain and overseas. The IDB is concentrating its efforts on those sectors which are most likely to produce mobile investment projects whose requirements can be matched by the particular strengths and expertise which Northern Ireland offers. For example the IDB is seeking to attract service sector projects from the south-east of England because of the difficulties of recruiting and retaining staff which are intensified by the falling birth rate there. These difficulties do not apply in Northern Ireland where the numbers entering the labour market with good educational qualifications will increase during the 1990s.

Tourism

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will review the composition and membership of the Northern Ireland tourist board; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The present members of the board were appointed for a three-year term ending on 30 June 1991. I will take the opportunity of such occasional vacancies as occur before then to ensure that the board has the range of skills and experience needed to implement the tourism strategy announced last year.

EC Structural Funds

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will provide an estimate of European Community structural funds available to Northern Ireland for 1990-91.

Mr. Cope: The scale and likely timing of structural funds assistance to Northern Ireland is set out in the Community support framework document, recently agreed with the Commission. This forecasts that for the EC budgetary year 1990—the nearest analogue to our own 1990-91 financial year—Northern Ireland's structural funds commitment will amount to 160 million ecu (about £110 million at today's exchange rate).

"War Without Honour"

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what study he has made of Captain Fred Holroyd's book "War Without Honour".

Mr. Cope: The Department and I are aware of the contents of the book.

Electricity

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much electricity was produced by the Irish Republic for Northern Ireland in the last available 12-month period.

Mr. Needham: None.

Stevens Inquiry

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his estimate of the cost so far of the Stevens inquiry in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Cope: Approximately £0·5 million up to the end of January.

Harbour Development Scheme (Ardglass)

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the required funds will be released for the harbour development scheme at Ardglass in South Down; and what is the estimated commencement date for the scheme.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The results of the model study on proposed improvements to Ardglass harbour have indicated that a larger scheme than was originally envisaged would provide greater shelter within the harbour. A cost-benefit analysis for a larger scheme needs

to be completed to establish whether the much greater expenditure would be justified and, if it would, to support a bid for the additional grantaid in competition with other demands for Government funding. At this stage it is not possible to indicate a commencement date.

Educational Maintenance Allowance

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table showing in 1980-81 and for each of the school years from 1985-86, inclusive *(a)* the value of the educational maintenance allowance and *(b)* the means-test level, and the indexed real value of the allowance using (i) 1980-81, (ii) 1985-86 and (iii) 1989-90 as a base.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is as follows:

School Year	Maximum Allowance	Means-test Levels		Indexed Real Value		
		Lower	Upper	1980-81	1985-86	1989-90
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Aged 16						
1980-81	380	1,670	2,880	380	516	630
1985-86	390	2,485	3,925	287	390	477
1986-87	390	2,485	3,925	279	379	436
1987-88	390	2,485	3,925	268	363	444
1988-89	390	2,485	3,925	253	343	420
1989-90	390	2,485	3,925	235	319	390
Aged 17						
1980-81	430	1,670	3,140	430	542	663
1985-86	475	2,485	4,165	377	475	580
1986-87	475	2,485	4,165	366	461	563
1987-88	475	2,485	4,165	351	443	541
1988-89	475	2,485	4,165	332	418	511
1989-90	475	2,485	4,165	308	389	475
Aged 18						
1980-81	510	1,670	3,470	510	734	897
1985-86	494	2,485	4,645	343	494	604
1986-87	494	2,484	4,645	333	480	586
1987-88	494	2,485	4,645	320	460	563
1988-89	494	2,485	4,654	302	435	532
1989-90	494	2,485	4,645	281	404	494

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information is available to indicate the number of educational maintenance allowances paid in each board area in each school year from 1985-86, inclusive.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is as follows:

Board	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	[1]1989-90
Belfast	226	230	109	67	35
Western	715	575	398	171	60
North Eastern	186	179	93	65	36
South Eastern	155	130	82	51	50
Southern	491	389	303	192	150

[1] Estimated.

Young Offenders

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish the figures for the number of people in Northern Ireland who were convicted of offences in Northern Ireland when under the age of 20 years, and have been detained for more than 10 years and are still detained.

Mr. Cope: Thirty-five such prisoners have served periods of 10 years or more in prison and are still detained. Of these 11 are Secretary of State's pleasure cases and 21 are life sentence prisoners; the remaining three are serving determinate sentences.

Student Loans

Mr. Flannery: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has received any representations on student loans in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: Since the publication of the White Paper "Top-Up Loans for Students" (Cm. 520) in November 1988 representations expressing a variety of views have been received from four Members of Parliament, two district councils, the Fair Employment Agency, local representatives of the National Union of Students and other student bodies. In addition, some 400 postcards were received during the course of a campaign mounted by student unions.

Social Security

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total amount *(a)* spent, *(b)* estimated to be spent and *(c)* planned to be spent on social security in Northern Ireland in actual and at 1989 prices for each of the years 1978-79 to 1992-93; what was the cash and real terms percentage increase for each year; and what is his estimate of each year's increase accounted for by (i) an increase in the number of claimants and (ii) a real terms increase in benefit levels.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* The total amounts of social security expenditure in Northern Ireland for the years in question are set out in the table:

	£ million (cash)	Actual percentage increase annually	£ millions (1989 prices)	Real terms percentage increase annually
1978-79	494	20·5	1,162	8·8
1979-80	590	19·4	1,189	2·3
1980-81	717	21·5	1,221	2·7
1981-82	865	20·6	1,341	9·8
1982-83	995	15·0	1,439	7·3
1983-84	1,084	8·9	1,498	4·1
1984-85	1,190	9·8	1,566	4·5
1985-86	1,298	9·1	1,621	3·5
1986-87	1,412	8·8	1,706	5·3
1987-88	1,492	5·7	1,712	0·4
1988-89	1,556	4·3	1,665	−2·8
1989-90	1,698	9·1	1,698	2·0
1990-91	1,860	9·5	1,771	4·3
1991-92	2,017	8·4	1,856	4·8
1992-93	2,124	5·3	1,897	2·2

The cash expenditure column shows amounts spent for the years 1978/79 to 1988/89, the latest available forecast for the current year 1989/90 and planned expenditure for 1990/91 onwards.

The percentage increases in real terms mainly reflect the ever increasing number of beneficiaries. An accurate breakdown between this increase and the real terms increase in benefit levels is not readily available.

Disabled People

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the effect of the proposals contained in, "The Way Ahead: Benefits for Disabled People" on claimants in Northern Ireland; and if he will estimate the number of people in Northern Ireland who will benefit from the proposed mobility component together with his estimate of the number who will benefit from the proposed care component.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* On the basis of the well-established principle of parity in social security provision between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, the new proposals affecting social security entitlement for the disabled and their carers will be introduced in Northern Ireland and on the same time scale as in the rest of the United Kingdom. In addition to those currently entitled to mobility allowance and attendance allowance in Northern Ireland, it is estimated that 4,000 people will benefit from the mobility components and 4,000 from the care components of the proposed disability allowance.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will meet representatives of the disabled in Northern Ireland to discuss the Government Paper, "The Way Ahead: Benefits for Disabled People", and if he has any plans to issue an equivalent document for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* As parity in social security provisions between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom remains Government policy, there are no plans to issue a further document for Northern Ireland. My noble Friend the Minister responsible for health and social services in Northern Ireland will be pleased to hear the views of representatives of the disabled in Northern Ireland on the new proposals.

Hospital Services (Privatisation)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the impact of the proposals for the privatisation of hospital services upon the equality of opportunity between the two communities and between the sexes.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* The health and social services boards are fully committed to the principle of equality of opportunity for all employees. Companies tendering for contracts in the health and personal social services are required to meet their statutory obligations under the fair employment and sex discrimination legislation.

SOCIAL SECURITY

One-parent Families

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much was paid in benefit in 1989 to one-parent families in Britain; and what estimate he has as to the amount likely to be spent in 1990.

Mr. John Townend: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the annual cost of support for one-parent families.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information is set out in the table:

Social security expenditure on lone parents
£ million, Great Britain

	Cash prices	*Real terms (in 1989-90 prices)*
	£	£
[1]1988-89	3,630	3,884
1989-90	3,930	3,930
1990-91	4,290	4,086

Notes:
[1] Revised figures for 1988-89 take account of amended estimates of Housing Benefit and Child Benefit expenditure.
[2] Benefits included are Child Benefit, One Parent Benefit, Income Support, Family Credit, Housing Benefit and Maternity Benefit.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what improvements have been made to benefits for single parents since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Improvements made to the benefit system for lone-parent families since 1979 are shown in table 1. Other improvements to the benefit system for families with children which have also helped lone-parent families are shown in table 2. These are in addition to increases of benefit in annual upratings.

Table 1
Improvements In Benefit System for Lone Parent Families
Date and Change

November 1980
Supplementary Benefit. The £6 weekly flat rate disregard was replaced by a tapered earnings disregard up to a maximum of £12 (first £4 of earnings disregarded in full, and half of the amount of any earnings between £4 and £20 also disregarded.)

April 1988
Income Support. The new structure of personal allowances provided that all lone parents aged 18 or over received the full adult rate of Income Support. For single people without dependants this rate only available from age 25.

Lone parent premium introduced; paid on top of the family premium from the outset of a claim for those lone parents who did not qualify for another type of premium.

Earnings disregard increased from the £12 a week tapered disregard to a flat rate £15 a week.

Family Credit. A much more generous scheme for all low-income families than the Family Income Supplement scheme.

Lone parent families assessed at the same level as two-parent families.

One Parent Benefit disregarded in calculating a claimant's income.

Housing Benefit. General alignment of benefit rules with Income Support, with higher level of lone parent premium in Housing Benefit providing an incentive to move off Income Support.

Proposed Improvements

October 1990

Housing Benefit, Community Charge Benefit. For lone parents not on Income Support earnings disregard to be increased from £15 to £25 a week.

Table 2

Improvements in Benefit System for Families with Children which have also helped Lone Parent Families

Date and Change

November 1979

Supplementary Benefit. Introduction of age-related heating addition for children under 5 years of age.

November 1980

Supplementary Benefit. Reduction of qualifying period for long-term scale rate from 2 years to 1 year.

July 1982

Maternity Grant. The £25 Maternity Grant made non-contributory.

November 1985

Family Income Supplement. Age-related rates for children introduced.

April 1987

Maternity Benefits. Introduction of Statutory Maternity Pay paid by employer.

More recent contribution test for Maternity Allowance for women not entitled to Statutory Maternity Pay.

Greater choice for women as to when to give up work in pregnancy without affecting title to either Statutory Maternity Pay or Maternity Allowance.

April 1988

General. Social Security reforms improved the position for those wanting to work.

For the first time the income-related benefits aligned so that entitlement to Income Support, Housing Benefit and Family Credit assessed using the same basic rules.

By assessing Famil Credit and Housing Benefit on net rather than gross income the worst effects of the poverty trap eliminated.

Income Support. Family premium introduced to help families bringing up children.

Value of interest in former home disregarded for 26 weeks following estrangement or divorce.

Housing Benefit. Start point for Housing Benefit became 100 per cent. of eligible rent and 80 per cent. of eligible rates.

April 1989

Income Support, Family Credit, Housing Benefit. Children's rates enhanced by 50p over and above amount needed to maintain their real value.

Proposed Improvements

April 1990

Income Support, Housing Benefit, Community Charge Benefit. Extra 50p to be added to the family premium over and above the amount needed to maintain real value.

Family Credit. Adult credit to be increased by £1 over and above the amount needed to maintain real value.

Disablement Benefit Claims

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims or requests for review of disablement benefit are held up at his Birkenhead offices awaiting guidance on CI/156/88.

Mr. Scott: A total of 1,069 new claims and 832 review applications have been received to date by the two social security offices serving the Birkenhead area following the decision of the commissioners CI/156/88. These are now being processed.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what date the Commissioners' decision CI/156/88 concerning vibration white finger claims was issued.

Mr. Scott: Commissioners' decision CI/156/88 was issued on 1 September 1989.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when his offices in the north-western region will start to take CI/156/88 into account in making their decisions.

Mr. Scott: Claims affected by and taking account of commissioners' decision CI/156/88 began to be processed from 19 January 1990 in all local offices.

Attendance Allowance

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give details for the latest available date of how long it takes to process attendance allowance applications from the date of claim to the issuing of a decision.

Mr. Scott: At 31 December 1989 the average time taken to decide an attendance allowance claim was about seven to eight weeks.

Residential Care

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security from what budget the costs of the new entitlements from April 1991 to income support and housing benefit for residents of independent nursing homes or residential care homes will come.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Existing arrangements for all income support and housing benefits expenditure will continue.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out how the new responsibilities for administration and payment of housing benefit will operate for local authority-sponsored residents who are placed in residential care homes or nursing homes outside the placing authority's boundaries.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We are consulting the local authority associations on these and other issues.

Income Support

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how, from 31 March 1991, an increase in the weekly charge for independent nursing home or residential care home fees will affect the benefit entitlement of an income support claimant with preserved rights *(a)* if the claimant is already receiving the maximum permitted under the ceiling for that category of care and *(b)* if the amount the claimant is receiving towards the care element is below the ceiling payment for that category;

(2) on what basis the ceiling payments for care support in respect of income support claimants in residential accommodation with preserved rights from 31 March 1991 will be increased;

(3) how the preserved rate of income support will be calculated for residents in residential care homes or nursing homes on 31 March 1991.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Government intend to preserve the present scheme of special income support limits for existing claimants who are resident in most homes when the new funding structure is introduced on 1 April 1991. As now, under those arrangements there will be limits to the level of benefit available for different types of care; those whose fees are at or below the limit will have their charges met in full. Existing arrangements for reviewing the level of the limits will continue.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing the value of income support in 1990 for *(a)* a single person aged under 25 years, *(b)* a single person aged over 25 years, *(c)* a lone parent over 18 years with a child under 11 years, *(d)* a couple over 18 years with two children under 11 years and *(e)* a pensioner as a percentage of estimated (i) average net male earnings and (ii) average net male manual earnings.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Estimates cannot be provided for 1990-91 until the earnings figures for April 1990 are known.

Hostel Accommodation

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations have been received from organisations that provide hostel accommodation about the financial difficulties they are experiencing as a result of the changes in income support introduced in April 1989; and if he will list the nature and extent of the problems that are being experienced.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Changes to income support for hostel dwellers were introduced from 9 October 1989. Since that date we have received a small number of representations about financial difficulties resulting from the change. Most problems appear to have been caused by initial difficulties with the administration of housing benefit. Latest indications are that those problems have now been largely resolved satisfactorily.

Warwickshire Welfare Rights Service

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth will receive a reply to his letter dated 21 December 1989 referring to Warwickshire welfare rights service.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: My noble Friend Lord Henley replied to my hon. Friend's letter today.

Homeworkers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans the Government have to allow exemption certificates to be backdated for homeworkers if they opt to pay the self-employed contribution; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Those homeworkers who are self-employed can apply in the normal way for a certificate of exception from liability to pay class 2 contributions; if appropriate, the certificate can be backdated for a maximum of 13 weeks. There are no plans to extend these backdating provisions for any group of workers.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are in receipt of invalid care allowance in the Dewsbury constituency.

Mr. Scott: I regret that this information is not available.

Child Benefit

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many children are receiving child benefit, broken down into *(a)* England, Scotland and Wales and *(b)* the English regions and the cost of paying child benefit in each case.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The latest available information as set out in the table is for December 1988. I regret that separate figures for the English regions are not available.

	England	*Scotland*	*Wales*
Number of children	10,253,000	1,094,000	623,000
Estimated annual amount of child benefit expenditure	£3,851·0m	£410·9m	£234·0m

"Households Below Average Income 1987"

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to publish the next set of "Households Below Average Income 1987".

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We expect to publish the next edition of "Households Below Average Income" in the next few weeks.

Student Benefits

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to publish any draft regulations concerning students' entitlement to social security benefits; which bodies he intends to consult regarding any such changes; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The White Paper "Top-up Loans for Students" outlined proposals for removing entitlement to social security benefits from the majority of full-time students. Draft regulations to give effect to these proposals will be published shortly. They will be referred to the Social Security Advisory Committee in the usual way, and will also be subject to consultation with the local authority associations.

Disability Allowance

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number of people who will be eligible for the proposed disability allowance.

Mr. Scott: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on 19 January at columns *482-83*.

Administration Costs

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the administrative cost incurred per £100 paid in benefit for *(a)* national insurance retirement benefit, *(b)* income support, *(c)* the social fund and *(d)* housing benefit for the latest available year.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* Details of the costs of administering social security benefits are published in the public expenditure White Paper. The following information for 1987-88 has been extracted from the latest edition (Cm. 1014) published on 30 January 1990:

(a) national insurance retirement benefit—administrative cost £1·37 per £100 benefit paid

(b) housing benefit—administrative cost £4·30 per £100 benefit paid.

Income support was introduced in April 1988 and figures for administration costs are not yet available. The social fund was introduced in a limited way in 1987-88 for funeral and maternity payments only but no separate figures are available—the cost for 1987-88 is included in the overall supplementary benefit administrative costs for that year.

Families (Income Levels)

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the information contained in the letter to the rt hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham dated 8 January, showing the estimated numbers of working and out-of-work families with children at different income levels in 1986.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information requested is shown in the tables. For statistical reasons, detailed information of this kind should be treated as free-standing annual analyses and not as a time series.

Table one

Number of working families with children at various income levels: Great Britain 1986

Thousands

Gross weekly income excluding state benefits £	*Total*	*One parent families*	*Two parent families*	*One wage families*	*Two wage families*	*Number of dependent children*			
						1	*2*	*3*	*4 or more*
Under 80	150	20	130	150	10	60	50	30	10
80-89	70	10	60	70	[1]—	20	30	20	[2]—
90-99	100	10	90	80	20	40	30	10	10
100-109	110	20	90	90	20	50	40	10	[2]—
110-119	90	20	70	70	20	60	20	10	10
120-129	140	20	120	120	20	60	60	20	10
130-139	120	20	100	80	30	60	40	20	[1]—
140-149	130	10	120	80	50	60	40	20	10
150-159	160	10	150	100	60	80	70	10	[2]—
160-169	160	10	160	110	60	90	60	10	[2]—
170-179	190	10	180	110	80	70	90	30	10
180-189	220	20	210	120	110	80	110	30	[2]—
190-199	210	10	200	110	100	90	90	20	10
200-219	380	10	370	160	220	180	140	50	10
220-239	390	10	380	150	240	160	170	50	10
240-259	390	10	380	140	260	150	170	60	10
260-279	330	[2]—	330	110	220	140	130	50	10
280-299	300	10	290	100	200	140	120	30	10
300 and over	1,690	20	1,670	480	1,210	660	810	190	40
Total	5,330	230	5,100	2,410	2,920	2,240	2,280	650	150

[1]— Nil.

[2]— Less than 5,000.

Notes:

1. The figures are derived from the 1986 Family Expenditure Survey and are subject to sampling error. All figures have been rounded to the nearest 10,000 and so rows and columns may not sum exactly to the totals shown.
2. Gross weekly income is the income reported in 1986 without any updating.
3. A "working family" is defined as one where at least one parent is in full-time (30 hours or more) employment or self employment.
4. The figures exclude any families not living in private households.
5. A "two wage family" is one where the second wage exceeds £4 a week.

Table Two

Number of non-working families of working age with children at various income levels: Great Britain 1986

Thousands

	Gross weekly income including state benefits												
	Under £50	*£50 to £59*	*£60 to £69*	*£70 to £79*	*£80 to £89*	*£90 to £99*	*£100 to £109*	*£110 to £119*	*£120 to £129*	*£130 to £139*	*£140 to £149*	*£150 and over*	*Total*
Total	100	40	100	200	230	170	170	130	60	60	20	190	1,460
One parent families	80	30	90	150	90	90	80	60	30	20	10	40	760
Two parent families	20	10	10	60	130	80	90	70	30	40	20	150	700
Number of dependent children:													
One	70	30	80	130	140	50	40	20	20	10	10	40	630
Two	20	*	20	60	70	90	60	50	10	20	10	90	520
Three	10	10	*	10	20	30	50	30	10	10	10	20	200
Four or more	—	—	—	*	*	*	10	20	20	20	10	30	110
National Insurance benefits being received:													

	Gross weekly income including state benefits												
	Under £50	*£50 to £59*	*£60 to £69*	*£70 to £79*	*£80 to £89*	*£90 to £99*	*£100 to £109*	*£110 to £119*	*£120 to £129*	*£130 to £139*	*£140 to £149*	*£150 and over*	*Total*
None *(a)*	40	10	10	10	20	20	30	20	20	10	*	100	290
(b)	50	20	90	160	170	130	110	70	20	30	20	20	890
UB *(a)*	*	*	10	10	10	*	10	10	—	—	*	10	60
(b)	—	—	—	10	10	20	10	10	10	10	—	10	70
SB/SSP *(a)*	—	—	—	—	—	*	—	*	—	—	—	—	10
(b)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	*	—	—	—	*
IVB *(a)*	*	—	—	10	10	*	10	*	10	10	—	30	80
(b)	—	—	—	10	10	—	—	—	—	—	—	10	20
Other *(a)*	—	10	—	10	10	*	*	10	—	—	—	10	50
(b)	—	*	10	—	*	—	*	—	—	—	—	—	10

(a) without supplementary benefit.
(b) with supplementary benefit.
— nil.
* less than 5000.
Notes:
1. The figures are derived from the 1986 Family Expenditure Survey and are subject to sampling error.
All figures have been rounded to the nearest 10,000 and so rows and columns may not sum exactly to the totals shown.
2. The totals do not coincide exactly with other published statistics. This is due to the different data sources.
3. Income is gross of taxes and national insurance and is the income reported in 1986 without updating.
4. A "non-working family" is defined as one where neither parent is in full-time employment or self employment.
5. The figures exclude any families not living in private households.
6. "Other" National Insurance benefits include industrial disablement and widows benefit.

Table 3
Non-working families of working age with children not in receipt of supplementary benefit (Great Britain 1986)

Gross weekly income including state benefits	*Not entitled to supplementary benefit*	*Entitled but not claiming supplementary benefit*	*Total*
£			
Under 50	[1]	50	50
50-59	10	10	20
60-69	10	10	10
70-79	30	10	30
80-89	30	20	40
90-99	30	—	30
100-109	50	[1]	50
110-119	40	[1]	40
120-129	30	[1]	30
130-139	20	—	20
140-149	10	—	10
150 and over	140	10	150
Total	360	110	470

[1] Less than 5,000.
Notes: 1. The figures are derived from the 1986 Family Expenditure Survey and are subject to sampling error. All figures have been rounded to the nearest 10,000 and so rows and columns may not sum exactly to the total shown.
2. Income is gross of taxes and national insurance and is the income reported in 1986 without updating.
3. A "non-working family" is defined as one where neither partner is in full-time employment or self employment.
4. The figures exclude any families not living in private households.
5. Inferences cannot be drawn from the number of non-working families with children entitled but not claiming supplementary benefit about the take-up of supplementary benefit.

HEALTH

Product Licences

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether there have been any changes in the data required for the granting of an abridged product licence since January 1987; and whether there has been any change in the interpretation of the existing regulations governing the granting of an abridged product licence.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Since January 1987 there have been changes in the data required from applicants in support of an abridged product licence application. This is as a result of directive 87/21/EEC which amended directive 65/65/EEC and new guidelines issued by the EC Committee on Proprietary Medicinal Products entitled "Rules Governing Medicinal Products in the European Community", a copy of which is in the Library. Medical, pharmaceutical and other scientific interpretation of existing regulations was adapted to reflect the revised EC requirements.

AIDS

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many potential cases of HIV-2 virus have so far been tested as part of the screening process.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The communicable disease surveillance centre is aware of nine HIV-2 positive reports in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his reply of 18 January, *Official Report*, column *405*, to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe, what information his Department has on the employment prospects, insurance and mortgage status of people who acquired AIDS from blood transfusions under the National Health Service; and whether the ex gratia payment of £20,000 to people with haemophilia who contracted the virus will be paid in each case of infection if more than one member of a family is infected.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 31 January 1990]:* The Government's decision to make ex gratia grants to people with haemophilia who are also infected with the AIDS virus was a recognition of their unique position. I refer the right hon. Member to the reply my

right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) on 23 November 1989 at columns *11-12*. A £20,000 lump sum payment will be made to each haemophiliac infected with HIV. In co-operation with the trustees of the MacFarlane Trust a new discretionary trust has been set up and is now making payments.

Friedrich's Ataxia

Mr. Ted Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if any departmental funding of research is provided into the disease Friedrich's Ataxia.

Mr. Freeman: Research related to Friedrich's Ataxia is currently being supported by the Medical Research Council and in 1988-89 the total cost of research projects which were relevant to Friedrich's Ataxia amounted to £197,000. The Medical Research Council is always willing to consider further soundly based proposals for research funding in competition with other applications. The MRC, which receives grant in aid from the Department of Education and Science, is the main Government agency for the promotion of biomedical and clinical research in the United Kingdom. The Department of Health is not currently funding any research on this subject.

Patients (Information and Records)

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the outcome of his Department's consultation on the draft code of practice on "Communicating information to patients and their access to their own manual health records"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Following consultation with the medical profession, it was accepted that a draft code of practice on "Communicating information to patients and their access to their own manual health records" could be used as the basis for a wide consultation exercise, although there was no formal approval of or agreement to it.

The draft code was circulated on 23 May 1989 to a wide range of health professional and patient interests bodies and to health authority management. Twenty-five copies of the consultation papers were issued. Some recipients incorporated within their responses comments received from their constituent members. Others copied the document to other interested parties who responded on their own account. Overall, 52 separate responses were received.

From five of the six responses received from bodies representing the medical profession, it is clear that the majority of the profession remains firmly opposed in principle to patients having a right of access to their own health records. It believes that it would be harmful to patients, would result in less comprehensive records, would seriously affect the trust between doctor and patient and would divert resources from patient care. These views are held particularly strongly by the JCC and the GMC. The GMSC's reply to the consultation drew our attention to the conference of local medical committees resolution passed in 1988

"That this conference rejects the principle of open access to their records by patients".

The sixth respondent body regarded the principles as acceptable, on the assumption that doctors could keep separate personal notes, whilst recognising that the character of medical record-keeping would be affected. One individual doctor also expressed his opposition to the principle.

Of the other 45 respondents, some of whom offered detailed comments including reservations about resource implications, the need to secure co-operation by doctors, procedural difficulties, training requirements and the need for time to allow for administrative and organisational changes, not one has taken a stance against the principle of access to manual records by or on behalf of patients.

The Campaign for Freedom of Information doubts whether the medical profession would effectively implement access to medical records on a non-statutory basis. It takes as evidence of the profession's deep-seated resistance to access the fact that it has taken two years to produce even minimum proposals. The Campaign for Freedom of Information has therefore produced a draft Bill aimed at securing statutory rights of patients' access. It has subsequently been adopted as a private Member's Bill by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson). Twelve other respondents share the Campaign for Freedom of Information's view that anything short of legislation will be inadequate and that access can only be assured only by statutory provision. A number of these as well as some hospital and Health Service organisations have given their public endorsement to the Campaign for Freedom of Information's draft Bill.

The concerns of the medical profession—that greater access by patients to their records will affect the quality of medical record-keeping to the ultimate disadvantage of both patient and doctor—were brought to the attention of non-medical parties to the consultation exercise. Nevertheless, there is a clear balance of opinion in support of a right of access.

Registration Service

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has any proposals on the future of the registration service in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement;

Mr. Simon Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Vote Office a copy of the White Paper he has published on the future of the registration service in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Yes, the White Paper entitled "Registration: proposals for change", Cm 939, makes recommendations for reforming the system for registering births, marriages and deaths in England and Wales on lines already canvassed in a Green Paper and widely welcomed in consultation.

The White Paper proposes a clear management structure for the registration service, under which its day-to-day running will be squarely in local authority hands while the Registrar General retains responsibility for setting national standards of performance. An end will be made to the legal restrictions on the duties of registrars which at present lessen its cost-effectiveness and the quality of service it can offer to the public. Alongside these structural changes there are proposals which will allow people to marry in any registration district in England and Wales and offer a new choice over the buildings in which civil marriages may take place. The standard period of notice which must be given for a marriage will come down

from 21 days to 15, but a notice which is given longer in advance will remain valid for six months, rather than three as at present.

There will also be changes in all registration procedures to improve the statistical information which is then obtained. Still-birth registrations will be aligned more closely with the procedures for registering deaths, in accordance with the wishes of the parents concerned. A new system will be introduced for notifying deaths which will save informants having always to travel to the district where the death took place in order to register it. There will be short certificates available for death or still-birth, alongside the existing short birth certificate. And there will be an extension of the arrangements whereby Welsh speakers can obtain bilingual certificates of birth and death, so that these are no longer confined to events taking place in Wales.

Finally, the White Paper proposes a distinction between historic registration records—those at least 75 years old—and more recent ones. Although access to all records will be maintained through a right to buy non-official copies of them, there will be new rules governing the purchase of certified copies of recent records for use for official purposes. These will help to curb an abuse which has arisen. By contrast, it is intended that information from the older registration records will be entirely within the public domain. It will be possible to buy either certified or non-official copies of certificates of events which occurred 75 years ago or longer, and it is also proposed that an agency outside the Government should hold copies of these records and provide the browsing facilities which are sought by genealogists, researchers and historians.

Response to the earlier Green Paper shows there will be a widespread welcome for the White Paper proposals. They will modernise and improve the registration service by giving it a new flexibility to respond to public wishes, while at the same time so improving its efficiency as to secure a reduction in its net cost locally and centrally. Nearly all of the changes envisaged will require legislation for their implementation, and the Government hope to introduce this at an early date. Meanwhile, I commend them most strongly to the House.

Prescription Pricing Authority

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his reply of 15 January to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central, *Official Report*, column *86*, how many visits were undertaken by regional medical officers each year since 1984 and in which National Health Service regions; what was his basis for the estimate of saving per practice; whether the PACT data for the 2,800 practices referred to confirm those savings; and what was the expenditure per patient on practice lists of the 2,800 practices referred to in each year since 1984.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The number of visits by region to high-cost practices undertaken by regional medical officers is given in my reply to the hon. Member on 16 January, at columns *197-98*. The estimates of savings per practice following a visit to a high-cost practice are based on a comparison of practice prescribing costs before and after the visit using PACT data. Information on the cost per patient for the practices mentioned since 1984 can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

"Caring for People"

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will present the information in chart 6 entitled: Estimated cumulative rate of transfer of DSS Care Expenditure in the White Paper, "Caring for People" (Cm. 849) in the form of a table.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The White Paper "Caring for People", Cm. 849, made it clear that the information illustrated in chart 6 was to be kept under review as more detailed information became available. We are currently considering relevant evidence. I will write to the hon. Member when the review has been completed.

Audiology (Waiting Lists)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) on what basis decisions are made and resources allocated to reduce waiting lists for audiology and related specialisms;

(2) pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside of 25 January, *Official Report*, column *857*, whether he has considered collecting waiting list figures for audiology and related services at a national level to assist in determining the use of resources to reduce those waiting lists.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In-patient waiting list figures for the specialties of audiological medicine and ear, nose and throat are collected centrally. At 31 March 1989 there were no patients waiting for either in-patient or day case treatment in audiological medicine. We do not collect centrally figures on out-patient waiting lists but health authorities will have these locally as part of their management of local services.

Decisions on the use of resources to reduce waiting lists in particular specialties are for regional and special health authorities to take in the light of local circumstances. Resources available to them include their allocation from the waiting list fund to help tackle the problem of long waits for hospital treatment. Since 1987 regions have used nearly £5.5 million from the fund to treat additional patients in the ear, nose and throat specialty.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether moneys will continue to be transferred to local authorities from the social security budget after 1995-96.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There will be a single formal transfer of provision from DSS to local authorities in the 1990 public expenditure survey, covering the years 1991-92, 1992-93 and 1993-94. Provision for both social security and local authorities in subsequent surveys will be determined in the light of the declining number of cases with preserved entitlement under social security rules and the rising demand for local authority services, including demographic changes.

Local Authority-Sponsored Residents

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the placing authority for local authority-sponsored residents placed outside its own boundaries will be responsible for meeting the full costs of the placement by making a payment direct to the establishment; whether

the placing authority or the authority where the establishment is based will be responsible for the calculation and payment of the housing benefit; and if housing benefit paid by the authority where the home is based will be paid direct to the placing authority.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: As the White Paper "Caring for People" indicates, the local social services authority which arranges residential or nursing home care will be responsible for meeting the fees agreed with the home, whether this is within its area or not. Housing benefit is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security, but I understand this will be claimed, as now, from the local housing authority in whose area the home is situated. Precise details of the way income support and housing benefit will be paid are still under consideration.

Pharmaceutical Sales

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was the actual average pharmaceutical company return on capital on sales to the National Health Service under the pharmaceutical price regulations scheme in respect of the years 1981 to 1988;

(2) what was the average allowable target return on capital on sales to the National Health Service in respect of pharmaceutical companies operating within the pharmaceutical price regulations scheme for each year 1979 to 1989.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I shall write to my hon. Friend.

Resource Management Initiative

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the results of his Department's evaluation of the resource management initiative.

Mr. Freeman: The joint evaluation of the resource management initiative six pilot schemes has not been concluded by the Department and the joint consultants committee. The Department is also funding an independent evaluation of the resource management initiative by the health economics research group, Brunel university. Its interim report was published on 18 July 1989. In addition, the Department helped to defray the cost of disseminating the central consultants and specialists committee evaluation of the initiative's six pilot sites. This report was published in October 1989. Copies of both these reports are being placed in the Library.

Creutzfeldt Jakob Dementia

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is now taking to monitor the incidence of Creutzfeldt Jakob dementia.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 10 January at column *665* and to my reply to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) on 31 January.

Hospital Deaths

Mr. Terry Fields: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will undertake an inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the deaths of six patients transferred from Sefton general hospital to Mossley Hill hospital between December 1989 and January 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The Liverpool health authority has already inquired into this and is satisfied that there is nothing to link the deaths of these patients with their transfer from Sefton general hospital to Mossley Hill hospital. These moves were carried out under proper medical supervision and were part of the health authority's carefully planned strategy for rationalisation of geriatric services in the district.

Live Births

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the latest information he has on live births and survival at low gestational age, and on live births with estimated gestation of less than 28 weeks, in England and Wales.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is not available; information on gestation is not collected at live birth registration.

Abortion (London Hospitals)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the following hospitals and clinics in London are licensed to carry out abortions *(a)* Humana hospital, *(b)* Cromwell hospital, *(c)* Hallam medical centre, *(d)* IVF centre, 100-146 Harley street and *(e)* Churchill clinic.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Of the hospitals and clinics listed only the Humana hospital is licensed under the Abortion Act 1967.

NHS Treatment

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the latest figures available on the costs to the National Health Service of *(a)* dental care, *(b)* treating strokes, *(c)* treating heart disease and *(d)* treating cancer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 21 December 1989]:* The cost to the NHS of dental care provided by general dental practitioners in England was £674·1 million in 1988-89. This figure includes £14·8 million administration expenditure by the Dental Estimates Board. I regret that information on the precise costs to the National Health Service of treating strokes, heart disease and cancer is not available. However the Department has estimated that the costs in England in 1988-89 were of the order of:

	£ million
Strokes (Cerebrovascular disease)	650
Heart disease (including chronic rheumatic, ischaemic and other forms of heart disease	900
Cancer	1,000

Notes:
1. Estimates include in-patient, out-patient and primary care costs.
2. Estimates derived from costing and activity data from various sources.

Northern Health Region

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what basis £7,054,000 was deducted from the 1990-91 allocation to the Northern health region; if he will place

copies of the information that supports the deduction in the Library; and to which other English National Health Service regions sums equivalent to that amount were given.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 30 January 1990]:* From 1990-91, regional health authorities' allocations reflect the amount of money available for services for their resident populations. From that allocation they must pay for services used by their residents in other regions: they will also receive income for providing services to residents of other regions. For 1990-91, these payments will be made through central adjustments to cash limits. For Northern RHA this means a net deduction of £7,054,000. This is the sum of Northern RHA's net flows with all the other English regions. The amounts in question were agreed between the regions concerned.

The information on cross-boundary flows to support these adjustments will be included in the 1990-91 cash limits exposition booklet, which will be issued shortly. A copy will be placed in the Library as requested.

Subject to legislation, cross-boundary flows, like other health services, will in future be paid for by contracts between a patient's district health authority or general practitioner and the place of treatment.

Mr Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the £1,361,000 credited to the Northern health region in respect of cross-boundary flows from Scotland and Wales was deducted from National Health Service spending in Scotland and Wales; and where he proposes to record all such deductions or contributions in the public accounts.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 30 January 1990]:* Historically, there have not been transfers of funds across borders in respect of flows of patients between the home countries. In 1990-91, the Northern regional health authority will be compensated for treating patients from Scotland and Wales by means of a sum top-sliced from English Health Service revenue funds. Subject to legislation, contracting for health services will be introduced from the financial year 1991-92; from that stage Scottish health boards and Welsh district health authorities will be able to place contracts with English hospitals and English authorities will have similar freedom to place cross-border contracts. The treatment in the statutory accounts of funds crossing national borders under the terms of such contracts has yet to be decided.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department has carried out into the connection between bovine spongiform encephalopathy and Creutzfeldt Jakob disease; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I refer to the reply given on 31 January to the hon. Member by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has initiated any prosecutions in respect of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy infected cattle identified at markets and slaughterhouses; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Prosecutions will be taken where there is evidence of deliberate attempts to evade the legal requirement to notify the Ministry of suspected cases of BSE. So far no such cases have arisen.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has recently introduced a greater level of inspection of bovines at markets and slaughterhouses to detect bovine spongiform encephalopathy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: In November 1989, official veterinarians began random ante mortem inspections of cattle submitted for slaughter at non-EC approved abattoirs. Ministry vets carry out regular monitoring at markets.

Enzymes

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what form of words he deems acceptable for labelling meat where gels containing enzymes have been used as binding agents; and if he will make a further statement.

Mr. Maclean: There is very little I can add to the answer I gave to the hon. Member on 17 January 1990, at column 217. All food is required to be labelled so as to give an indication of its true nature and where necessary its physical condition or treatment to ensure consumers are not misled. It is for the food manufacturer to decide how he complies with the law; it would be inappropriate for me to suggest forms of labelling for specific products such as this.

Cattle Offals

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what uses are still permitted for those cattle offals now banned for use for human consumption.

Mr. Maclean: Bovine offal which has been banned from human consumption is normally removed at the slaughterhouse, or, in the case of bovine brain, at a specialist boning plant.

If the material is sterilised, it is subject to the general prohibition on its use for human consumption. If not sterilised, it may be moved only under a local authority movement permit and must either be stained and taken to a rendering plant or licensed waste food processor or, if unstained, may be used only in the production of non-food products such as strings for musical instruments or sports equipment, in medical, veterinary or other research premises or in the manufacture of pharmaceutical products.

Special guidelines on the use of bovine material were circulated to the pharmaceutical industry in March 1989.

The feeding of ruminant-based protein to ruminants is prohibited by the Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (No. 2) Order 1988 as amended.

Black Pudding

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received about restrictions imposed on black pudding makers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: My officials met representatives of the Natural Sausage Casings Association on 12 January to

discuss the consequences of the Bovine Offal (Prohibition) Regulations 1989. There was a useful discussion of the background to, and the effects of, these regulations.

Veterinary Investigation Centres

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the veterinary investigation centres he intends to close and the dates when the closure is due; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The review of the veterinary investigation service commissioned by the Minister is now being finalised and the report will shortly be submitted to Ministers. As yet, no decisions have been made on any recommendations that might arise from this review.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many persons are employed at the veterinary investigation centre at *(a)* Aberystwyth, *(b)* Bangor and *(c)* Carmarthen.

Mr. Maclean: As of 1 January 1990, the total veterinary scientific and laboratory support staff employed at the veterinary investigation centre at *(a)* Aberystwyth was 11, *(b)* Bangor was 10 and *(c)* Carmarthen was 15.

Food Quality

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will commission a national survey into the quality of food supplied by wholesalers to local authority schools and elderly persons' homes; and if he will publish the results;

(2) what action he proposes to take in response to the results of the recent survey undertaken by trading standards officers in Yorkshire and Humberside on food supplied by wholesalers to local authority schools and elderly persons' homes.

Mr. Maclean: I too was disturbed to read the results of this survey by trading standards officers. There are, however, already powers in the Food Act 1984 which make it an offence to sell food which is not of the nature, substance or quality demanded by the purchaser and trading standards officers are very familiar with the operation of this law. The Food Safety Bill currently before Parliament continues these powers.

It is of course for any local authority to ensure that foodstuffs supplied to its establishments meet the terms of its purchase contract and to take appropriate civil or criminal action if there should be any failure to supply the quality demanded. In the circumstances, the local authorities concerned already therefore have adequate powers to deal with the matter and I see no cause for me to intervene.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will take steps to increase the sanctions available to trading standards officers investigating the supply of unfit food.

Mr. Maclean: The application of sanctions against those who supply unfit food is of course a matter for the courts. However, the Food Safety Bill is substantially increasing the statutory penalties for contraventions of this kind.

Miss Sarah Furnival

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth will receive a reply to his letter dated 11 December 1989 referring to Miss Sarah Furnival.

Mr. Gummer: A reply to the hon. Member's letter dated 11 December 1989 referring to Miss Sarah Furnival was dispatched on 30 January 1990.

Organic Farming

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how he intends to implement the European Commission's regulations concerning standards for organic farming.

Mr. Maclean: The European Commission proposal for a regulation on organic foodstuffs is currently under discussion in a Council working group and much detailed work remains to be done before it is ready for consideration by the EEC Council of Agriculture Ministers. If adopted by the Council in the form of a regulation, it will be directly applicable in all member states. The proposals provide for the designation of an authority to implement certain measures. I have already indicated that the United Kingdom Register of Organic Food Standards would, in this country, be the designated authority.

Calves' Brains

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he intends to introduce measures to restrict the use of calves' brains for human consumption.

Mr. Maclean: I have no plans to restrict the use of brains from calves aged under six months beyond the controls contained in the Meat Products and Spreadable Fish Products Regulations.

Hill Farming

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he anticipates announcing the outcome of the hill farming review and the hill livestock compensatory allowances to be paid in 1990.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Member to the statement I made to the House on 30 January 1990, at column 159-70.

Pesticides

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, further to his answer to the hon. Member for South Shields on 16 January, *Official Report*, column *220*, he will give the dates when each of the active ingredients first received approval; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* The information requested is as follows:

Active Ingredient	*First Approved*
Aldicarb	1973
Aldrin	1956
Aminotriazole	1961

Active Ingredient	*First Approved*
Binapacryl	1962
Biological agents used as pesticides;	
Bacillus Thuringiensis	1967
Trichoderma viride	1979
Verticillium lecanii	1980
Bitertanol	1982
Captafol	1965
Chlordane	1962
Cyhexatin	1970
Daminozide	1967
DDT	1944
Dieldrin	1956
Dimethoate	1958
Dinoseb	1961
Dinoseb-acetate	1965
Dinoterb	1972
DNOC	1960
Endrin	1984
Ethylene dibromide	1961
Fenbutatin oxide	1983
Fentin acetate	1965
Fentin hydroxide	1964
Iprodione	1976
Maleic hydrazide	1960
Mercury compounds:	
Phenyl Mercury Acetate	1959
Mercuric oxide	1968
Mercurous chloride	1965
Ethyl Mercury Phosphate	1956
2-Methoxyethyl Mercury Acetate	1971
Sulphonyl Ureas:	
Chlorsulfuron	1981
Metsulfuron-Methyl	1984
Synthetic Pyrethroids	1970-1980
Triazophos	1972
2, 4, 5-T	1965

Glycol ethers, which appeared under "Use continues unchanged" in my answer of 16 January to the hon. Member for South Shields, at column *220*, is in fact a solvent and not an active ingredient. It has been in use for a number of years and was last reviewed in 1983.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, further to his answer to the hon. Member for South Shields on 11 January, *Official Report*, columns *748-49*, how many new active ingredients in 1986 were *(a)* received, *(b)* approved and *(c)* rejected prior to 6 October 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* The information set out relates to new pesticide active ingredients for which my Department has responsibility:

	Numbers
(a) Applications received before 6 October 1986	28
(b) Approvals (full/provisional/experimental permit) granted before 6 October 1986	9
(c) Applications rejected before 6 October 1986	3

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 2 February 1990

PRIME MINISTER

EC Membership

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a further statement on the Government's policy about European countries not currently members of the EEC applying for membership of the EEC.

The Prime Minister: According to the EEC treaty (article 237), any European state may apply to become a member of the Community. However, we agree with the general view within the Community that—until at least 1993—the emphasis must be on consolidation, not enlargement. The Community's priority must be completion of the single market.

Mice

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister if she will be raising the issue of the European Commission's proposed appointment of a European mouse care expert at the forthcoming European summit; and what assessment she has made of the value of the Commission's encouragement of inter-community trade in mice and rats.

The Prime Minister: There is no such proposal. I assume that the hon. Member is referring to a proposal for a Council regulation on animal health conditions governing trade in rodents. These proposals are of real concern as they are relevant to Her Majesty's Government's fight against rabies. The Government's assessment of it was set out in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's explanatory memorandum 9715/89 of 27 November 1989, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Football Spectators Act 1989

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Prime Minister what has been the cost to the Cabinet Office of the introduction and passage of the Football Spectators Act 1989 through Parliament.

The Prime Minister: It is not possible to identify separately the cost to the Cabinet Office attributable to this legislation.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Michael: To ask the Prime Minister what split of responsibilities has been decided between the Department of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food regarding areas of overlap in responsibility for problems relating to food poisoning.

The Prime Minister: Departmental responsibilities for food safety have not been changed. Food safety is a shared responsibility, as reflected in the Food Safety Bill. Most food safety regulations are jointly signed by the Secretary of State for Health and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The Department of Health leads on food hygiene and microbiological contamination except in respect of milk production and distribution, hygiene of meat and meat products, and eggs, where the lead is with MAFF. The Department of Health also operates a hazard warning system to deal with emergencies when unfit food poses an immediate hazard to health. MAFF leads on emergency measures under the Food and Environment Protection Act when a pollution incident threatens the food supply and leads on chemical contamination but takes advice on health risks from the Department of Health. There is close liaison between both Departments and consultation with relevant outside interests.

Transport (Official Duties)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Prime Minister (1) how many miles she travelled in 1989 on official business in a motor vehicle;

(2) when she last travelled on a public omnibus on official business.

The Prime Minister: For reasons of practicality and security it is difficult for me to travel by public transport on official business. I do so when a suitable opportunity arises. Information on miles travelled in a motor vehicle is not available.

Civil Servants (Posts)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make it her policy to consult all departments before authorising the acceptance of a post by any senior civil servant.

The Prime Minister: No. There are well established procedures for dealing with the acceptance of outside appointments by civil servants.

Projects (Funding)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister what is her policy towards making the offer of funding for a project conditional on the association of a civil servant with that project.

The Prime Minister: Public funding for expenditure projects is allocated on the basis of the merits of individual proposals and the need to obtain the best value for money for the taxpayer.

TRANSPORT

Communications Infrastructure

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the policy of his Department on the provision of future fixed-link improvements in communications infrastructure from *(a)* public funds and *(b)* the private sector.

Mr. Portillo: In deciding what public funds are to be spent on transport infrastructure, the Government take account of the demands of other areas of Government expenditure; but will increase capital investment where this is justified. The amount of public expenditure provided for investment in rail and national road schemes over the next three years is over 60 per cent. higher in real terms than in the three years up to the end of 1989-90.

Although the public sector will for the foreseeable future account for the majority of infrastructure funding, as indicated in "New Roads by New Means", I am always looking to secure the benefits which the private sector can bring in terms of innovation, enterprise and management efficiency. Road infrastructure measures are judged on their individual merits. For example, the M25 Dartford-Thurrock crossing and the Channel tunnel are projects at the construction stage which show how the private sector can make a valuable contribution towards the provision of transport infrastructure.

Air Traffic Distribution

Mr. Haselhurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the reasons for maintaining the air traffic distribution rules which determine priority between classes of air transport carrier using airports in the London area.

Mr. McLoughlin: The 1985 White Paper, "Airports Policy", noted that as airports become busier the need may arise for a form of regulation to distribute traffic rationally between the airports of a single system. The present traffic distribution rules for airports serving the London area were made in 1986, following advice from the Civil Aviation Authority. Last July, in response to a request for fresh advice on London air traffic distribution policy, the authority recommended only minor modifications to the existing rules. My right hon. Friend decided not to make those modifications, and awaits the authority's further and more wide-ranging advice, due this summer, on the adequacy of United Kingdom airport capacity in the longer term.

Mr. Haselhurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether his Department has had access to independent legal opinion on the legality under United Kingdom and European Economic Community law of any future rule designed to give preference in slot allocation at Gatwick to scheduled traffic at the expense of charter traffic; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: We have no plans to make such a rule, and have sought no advice on how the law might bear on it.

Wales (Railways)

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has received any requests for further investment in the valley lines of south Wales.

Mr. Portillo: No.

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has received any representations proposing the re-opening of railway stations and lines in Wales.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend has received a number of such representations. The opening or re-opening of stations or railway lines to passenger services is for the British Railways Board to decide, in the light of the objectives set for it by the Government.

Pilotage Exemption Certificates (Portsmouth)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce a decision on the charges imposed on the use of pilotage exemption certificates at Portsmouth, following the inspector's report conducted by Mr. James Fitzpatrick.

Mr. McLoughlin: The inspector has submitted his report to the Secretary of State following the public inquiry held on 17 October 1989. This is now being considered and a decision will be announced as soon as possible.

Road Building

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the implications of the recently announced £12 billion road building programme for *(a)* atmospheric pollution levels, *(b)* the greenhouse effect, *(c)* existing sites of special scientific interest, *(d)* existing areas of outstanding natural beauty and *(e)* populations of native flora and fauna; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The Government's road building programme will contribute to reducing pollution and CO_2 emissions from vehicles by cutting down on congestion and removing traffic from unsuitable roads and communities.

Wherever possible, roads are kept away from protected areas such as sites of special scientific interest and areas of outstanding natural beauty. When there is a risk that a proposed scheme will affect such an area it is examined with particular care to establish that a new or improved road is needed, and that the route has been chosen to do as little damage to the environment as possible. Every effort is made to blend the road into the landscape and to take all reasonable measures to minimise any adverse effects, including appropriate measures to preserve flora and fauna.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if it remains Government policy to match the level of their road building programme with the anticipated level of future traffic demand.

Mr. Atkins: Forecasts of traffic demand are an important, but not the only, factor in considering road schemes and programmes. There have always been cases where traffic demand could not be met for economic or environmental reasons. This was set out clearly in "Roads for Prosperity" (Cm. 693, May 1989), which stated in paragraph 27 that

"it is not possible or economic to remove all congestion".

The need for substantial investment on the major inter-urban network remains. This is the basis on which the expanded programme was drawn up. It remains the Government's judgment of what needs to be done.

NATIONAL FINANCE

USA Budget

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the economic impact on the United Kingdom economy of the proposed United States of America budget.

Mr. Ryder: Assessments of the fiscal position of major trading partners and the consequences for the United Kingdom economy are made routinely as background to the Industry Act forecast.

Trade Deficits

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of gross domestic product are the trade deficits of the United States of America and of each of the European Community countries, in descending order, for the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Ryder: Data on trade balances and nominal gross domestic product for the United States and each of the European Community countries are published in the IMF's international financial statistics each month.

Tobacco Products

Mr. Parry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the incidence of taxation of tobacco products in the United Kingdom and in other Economic Community member states; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 31 January 1990]:* The table shows the combined burden of excise duty and VAT on cigarettes in each of the EC member states. Cigarettes represent over 90 per cent. of the Community market in tobacco products. Information on the incidence of taxation on the other tobacco products (cigars, smoking and chewing tobacco) is not readily available.

Cigarettes
Total tax burden on most popular brand

Country	*ECUs per 1,000 cigarettes*[1]
Denmark	137·89
Ireland	95·19
United Kingdom	90·84
Germany	71·39
France	51·34
Netherlands	50·99
Belgium	50·17
Italy	44·77
Luxembourg	36·84
Portugal	32·51
Spain	22·79
Greece	21·74

[1] *Source:* EC Commission; as at 1 April 1989.

Stamp Duty

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the yield from and cost of collection of stamp duty in the current financial year.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 1 February 1990]:* The latest forecast of receipts from stamp duties for 1989-90 was given in the reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) on 30 November 1989, (*Official Report*, column *431-32*). The cost of collection is expected to be around 0·3 per cent. of those receipts.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Allen Stewart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his latest estimate of the yield from and cost of collection of capital gains tax in the current financial year.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 1 February 1990]:* The latest available forecast of receipts from capital gains tax for 1989-90 was given in the reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice) on 23 January 1990, *Official Report*, column *622*. The cost of collection is expected to be around 1·4 per cent. of those receipts.

THE ARTS

Museums and Galleries

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Minister for the Arts what is the increase in the provision for the maintenance of museums and galleries in the current financial year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: The current year's provision for the building and maintenance programmes at the national museums and galleries which I sponsor is £48 million. This represents a real terms increase of 50 per cent. since 1979-80 and an increase of £3 million on the previous year's allocation.

I announced on 16 November 1989 that this provision will rise to some £64 million in 1992-93. This will bring the total provision for building and maintenance over the next three years to over £180 million.

Arts Funding (North-West)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will meet North West Arts representatives to discuss the implications of the Wilding report on funding of the arts.

Mr. Luce: I discussed Mr. Wilding's report with representatives of North West Arts on 23 January.

Arts Funding

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister for the Arts when he intends to make a statement on the results of his consultations with the regional arts associations on the Wilding report.

Mr. Luce: I shall make an announcement as soon as I have had an opportunity to consider carefully all the responses to Mr. Wilding's report.

Science Museum

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts (1) what was the income from admission charges at the Kensington site of the science museum for the period October 1988 to October 1989;

(2) what was the total cost of *(a)* setting up the admission charging system in equipment and staff and *(b)* running the admission charging system between October 1988 and October 1989 at the Kensington site of the science museum;

(3) what were the admission figures at the Kensington site of the science museum for the periods *(a)* October 1987 to October 1988, *(b)* October 1986 to October 1987, *(c)* October 1985 to October 1986, *(d)* October 1984 to October 1985 and *(e)* October 1983 to October 1984;

(4) what were the admission figures for the Kensington site of the science museum for the period October 1988 to October 1989 *(a)* in total, *(b)* for those paying the full admission price and *(c)* for each exempt or partially exempt category.

Mr. Luce *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* I am advised that the estimated number of admissions at the science museum, including outstations, for the years 1983 to 1989 are as follows:

Year	*Admissions*
1983	4,784,000
1984	4,510,103
1985	4,607,852
1986	4,824,906
1987	4,732,784
1988	3,861,433
1989	2,607,724

The staffing and administration of the arrangements for the collection of admission charges at the science museum are matters for the museum's trustees. I understand, however, that not only has the science museum generated a substantial income of just over £1 million from the introduction of admission charges, but has done so with the museum being free of charge, or accessible at reduced rates, to 65 per cent. of all visitors.

I also understand that the science museum intends to invest its admissions income in improved visitor facilities.

I shall ask the director of the science museum to write to the hon. Member about the other points raised.

WALES

Employment Training

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will identify the relevant costs per head for employment training trainees participating in the programme through training managers that operate nationally and locally in the voluntary sector.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Information on the cost per trainee in employment training for training managers which are voluntary organisations is not available.

Training Managers

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes in supplementary grants to local training managers and those that negotiate their supplementary grants with their area office occurred in 1989-90.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: In 1989-90 there has been no change in the range of supplementary grants available to training managers, local or national. Each training manager's level of supplementary grant was reviewed and agreed in contracts for 1989-90.

School Building

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give details of the *(a)* bids and *(b)* allocations for capital expenditure in respect of school building for each Welsh local education authority since 1974.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The information is not available in the form requested. Capital allocations to local education authorities are formula rather than bid-based.

Capital allocations since 1984-85 are unhypothecated between services. The public expenditure provisions for education capital at an all-Wales level for those years are shown in the table. Figures for previous years were not produced on a comparable basis.

	Constant 1988-89 prices
1984-85	37
1985-86	37
1986-87	38
1987-88	44
1988-89	46
1989-90	48

Welsh Language

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the present number of school students that are currently educated through the medium of the Welsh language, in each county education authority in Wales both primary and secondary.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: At September 1988 the number of pupils educated through the medium of Welsh was as shown in the table:

	Primary[1]	*Secondary*[2]
Clwyd	6,674	2,871
Dyfed	15,102	4,629
Gwent	704	52
Gwynedd	18,817	11,785
Mid Glamorgan	6,319	3,178
Powys	1,292	1,287
South Glamorgan	2,621	986
West Glamorgan	3,029	1,198

[1] Includes full-time and part-time pupils in classes taught solely through the medium of Welsh or in classes where some of the teaching is through the medium of Welsh.

[2] Includes pupils in Welsh-speaking secondary schools as defined in section 3(7) of the Education Reform Act 1988.

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will make it a statutory requirement for all Welsh principal local authorities to publish notices and forms bilingually.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no plans to do so.

Radiation (North Wales Coast)

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether the Welsh Office will carry out a detailed study of possible radiation hot spots along the north Wales coast as a matter of urgency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: No. Recent reports that hot spots of radioactivity were detected in north Wales have been investigated by Government scientists and the tests showed that the radiation dose rates were not above background levels.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will place copies in the Library of agreements he reached with Welsh Water in relation to the allocation of unforseeable costs arising from the achievement of new or unexpected water quality standards within the artificial lake to be created by the proposed Cardiff bay barrage, via the K factor, the cost pass-through formula to customers, as distinct from the shareholders;

(2) what agreement he has reached with Welsh Water in respect of the K factor, cost pass-through mechanism, for

any costs involved in meeting new or enhanced water quality standards within the artificial lake created by the proposed Cardiff bay barrage, that are not met by the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation; and if he will publish details;

(3) what agreements he reached with Welsh Water Cyf, or Welsh Water Authority prior to its privatisation to allocate all unforseeable costs related to water quality standards in the inland lake created by the proposed Cardiff bay barrage to Welsh Water customers through the K factor, the cost pass-through mechanism and not to its shareholders;

(4) when he reached agreement with Welsh Water Authority or Welsh Water Cyf to allocate any unforseeable costs related to the achievement of new or unexpected water quality standards within the lake to be created by the proposed Cardiff bay barrage to the customers of Welsh Water, through the K factor, the cost pass-through mechanism and not to its shareholders.

Mr. Grist: The Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill currently before the House seeks to ensure that any reasonable costs incurred by organisations or individuals as a result of the construction of the barrage that would not otherwise occur are met by the promoters of the Bill.

The Bill therefore provides that the costs of carrying out necessary works or operations outside the inland bay to maintain prescribed water quality standards in the inland bay will be met by the promoters in the 20-year period following the commencement of impoundment. The period is in line with all other such undertakings in the Bill.

The cost of works undertaken within the inland bay to maintain water quality will be the responsibility of the promoters.

These provisions were fully recognised and made known at the time of flotation of Welsh Water. The prospectus set out that expenditure arising from changes to discharge consents resulting from the construction of the barrage to the extent not covered by the promoters would be eligible for consideration by the Director General of Water Services for specific K adjustment in the normal way. These arrangements are described in section 9 of the prospectus, a copy of which was placed in the Library in November 1989.

Part IV of condition B of the licence appointing water and sewerage undertakers, a copy of which is also in the Library, fully sets out the mechanism by which K may be adjusted.

Water Supply (Disconnections)

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the latest figures for the number of people who were disconnected from their water supplies in Wales.

Mr. Grist: The information is not available in the form requested. The latest available figures are for 1988-89, when in the Welsh Water Authority's water supply area a total of 1,249 domestic and non-domestic customers were disconnected.

The figures do not reflect the new procedures that each water undertaker is required to follow before disconnecting domestic customers under their conditions of appointment, which came into force on 1 September 1989.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Select Committees

Mr. Wray: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, what was the total funds made available by the Commission for overseas travel by Select Committees in the financial year 1989-90; how much of this was specifically for European travel; and what are the corresponding figures, for the financial year 1990-91.

Mr. Beith: The total funds made available for overseas Select Committee travel in the financial year 1989-90 was £495,980 of which £60,000 was earmarked exclusively for visits to Community countries. The equivalent figure for the financial year 1990-91 is £505,400 of which £100,000 is set aside for travel to Community countries.

Vote Office Bundle

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he has any proposals to reduce the size of the Vote Office bundle.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have recently received an undertaking from the Chairman of the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee that once the Procedure Committee's study of matters affecting the Order Paper is completed and any recommendations for change agreed, the Sub-Committee is prepared to conduct a comprehensive examination of the Vote bundle itself.

Football Spectators Act 1989

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Lord President of the Council what is his estimate of the cost to Parliament of the introduction and passage of the Football Spectators Act 1989; and if he will give a breakdown of these costs.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: It is not possible to identify separately the costs arising from the preparation and consideration of any particular piece of legislation.

Non-smoking Areas

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Lord President of the Council whether he will give consideration to the establishment of non-smoking areas in the Westminster Hall canteen, the Strangers Cafeteria, the Harcourt Room and the Strangers Dining Room.

Sir Geoffrey Howe *[holding answer 1 February 1990]:* The upper part of the Westminster Hall Cafeteria has for some time been designated as a no-smoking area. The crowded nature of the Strangers Cafeteria does not lend itself to the establishment of a no-smoking section. There are no areas in the Harcourt Room or the Strangers Dining Room reserved for non-smokers, but notices displayed in both rooms request diners to refrain from smoking before 1.30 pm at lunchtime and before 9 pm in the evening. No-smoking areas have also been identified for the catering facilities to be established in phase 1 of the new parliamentary buildings. It remains the Catering Sub-Committee's policy to increase the number of no-smoking areas in all its outlets as further opportunities arise.

EMPLOYMENT

Minimum Wages

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give details of research his Department has commissioned into the minimum wage proposals of the social charter; and if he will place the findings in the Library.

Mr. Howard: My Department has commissioned no external research into the minimum wage proposals of the social charter. Officials in the Department have carried out work to estimate the costs of imposing a national minimum wage in Britain. A note explaining the method used has been placed in the Library.

Training

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much has been allocated since 1987 by the European social fund to each of the Manpower Services Commission and Training Agency training and employment measures; what proportion these allocations represented of total Great Britain European social fund allocations; and what sums have been applied for in 1990, for each individual Training Agency programme.

Mr. Eggar: The figures for the European Commission's individual ESF allocations to the Manpower Services Commission, Training Commission and Training Agency for the years 1987 to 1989 inclusive can only be provided at disproportionate cost. The decisions of the European Commission on funding for these years have been placed in the Library.

The amounts applied for by the Training Agency for 1990 are as follows:

Programme	*Amount £ million*
Employment Training	206·17
Youth Training Scheme	111·40
Enterprise Allowance Scheme	78·32
Work Related Further Education	12·50
Business Growth Training	14·74

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to introduce outside consultants to evaluate the effectiveness of the Government's employment training programmes including YTS; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Nicholls: There is an extensive programme of research and evaluation covering the full range of the Government's employment and training schemes including YTS. External consultants and researchers play a major part in this programme.

Tourism

Mr. Lee: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the latest estimate of the spend per head of *(a)* Japanese and *(b)* North American visitors.

Mr. Nicholls: During the first two quarters of 1989 Japanese residents spent an estimated £429 per visit to the United Kingdom. For the same period, residents of North America spent an estimated £456 per visit.

Mr. Lee: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the latest estimate that he has of the amount of new investment under way in the tourism and hospitality industries; and what regional analysis is available of this figure.

Mr. Nicholls: The table gives the latest figures published by the English Tourist Board of the amount spent on tourism projects (worth £0·5 million or more) which were completed during the period July to December 1989, and those still under construction on 31 December 1989.

Tourism investments completed and under construction, by tourist board region

Tourist board region	*Completed during July-December 1989 £ million*	*Under construction on 31 December 1989 £ million*
Cumbria	—	73
Northumbria	—	135
North West	72	583
Yorkshire and Humberside	38	631
Heart of England	70	283
East Midlands	38	176
Thames and Chilterns	8	125
East Anglia	98	114
London	84	674
West Country	80	215
Southern	37	172
South East	26	438
Total England	551	3,619

Mr. Lee: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the latest estimate that he has of the number of new jobs being created in the tourism and hospitality industries.

Mr. Nicholls: Between September 1988 and September 1989, the number of employees in employment in tourism-related industries in Great Britain rose by 44,000 to 1,374,000. In addition, it is estimated from the labour force survey that there were 204,000 self-employed workers in tourism-related industries in spring 1988, 4,000 more than in spring 1987.

Supplementary Grants

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what changes in supplementary grants to local training managers and those who negotiate their supplementary grants with their area office occurred in 1989-90.

Mr. Nicholls: In 1989-90 there has been no change in the range of supplementary grants available to training managers, local or national. Each training manager's level of supplementary grant was reviewed and agreed in contracts for 1989-90.

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many staff of the Health and Safety Executive in the grade deputy superintending inspector possess formal health and safety qualifications; and what percentage of those in that grade this represents.

Mr. Nicholls: There are currently 38 staff in the grade of deputy superintending inspector. All of these have secured the formal qualification awarded on the successful conclusion of the training of a factory inspector; and five (13 per cent.) have additionally an externally validated health and safety qualification.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the Health and Safety Executive directorate of information and advisory services budget for the year 1989-90.

Mr. Nicholls: The gross budget for 1989-90 allocated to the directorate of information and advisory services (part of Resources and Planning Division) was £3·9 million. The Health and Safety Commission's planned use of resources was described in its "Plan of Work for 1989/90 and beyond" published on 3 May 1989.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what formal qualifications in occupational health and safety are held by the Health and Safety Executive's chief inspector of factories and the three deputy chief inspectors of factories.

Mr. Nicholls: The chief inspector of factories and his three deputy chief inspectors underwent the full two-year training programme, concluding in an examination in all aspects of health and safty conducted by the Civil Service Commission, which was the required formal qualification for all inspectors of factories.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the average length of time taken for inspector (specialists), within the technology division of the Health and Safety Executive, to be promoted to the grade principal specialist inspector, for the last year for which figures are available; and what was the average length of time taken in 1978.

Mr. Nicholls: The average length of time taken for inspector (specialist) within the technology division of the Health and Safety Executive to be promoted to the grade of principal specialist inspector for the promotion board held in December 1988 was seven years six months.

Comparable information for 1978 is not available.

Stroboscopic Light

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if his Department has carried out a recent review of the health and safety implications of flicker or stroboscopic light sources.

Mr. Nicholls: The Health and Safety Executive has recently supported a research project undertaken by the Medical Research Council's applied psychology unit in Cambridge which included an investigation into the effects of flickering fluorescent lighting on people working with this type of illumination.

Dirty Stonework

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information his Department has on health hazards resulting from dirty stonework.

Mr. Nicholls: The Employment Department has no evidence of any health hazards resulting directly from dirty stonework.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has as to the number of workers refused employment because of non-membership of a trade union.

Mr. Nicholls: There is no requirement for workers who are refused employment on the grounds of non-membership of a trade union to report such refusals to my Department. In any case, such a requirement would be of limited value. It would not, for instance, provide information which would take account of vacancies filled by way of arrangements to which non-members of unions are denied access. Nor could it take into account those workers who decide not to apply for a particular position because they are aware of the operation of a closed shop.

British Refugee Council

Mr. Lester: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make representations to the European Commission in Brussels about the adverse financial effect on the British Refugee Council of delays in making European social fund payments.

Mr. Eggar: I understand from the European Commission that the Council's outstanding payments have been authorised and payment can be expected soon.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. McCusker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how may cattle showing symptoms of bovine spongiform encephalopathy were detected and brought to the attention of the Department of Agriculture during f989; and how many cattle were detected at slaughterhouses and meat plants in 1989.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: During 1989, 54 cattle showing symptoms suggestive of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) were brought to the attention of the Department of Agriculture. Thirty of these were confirmed as BSE cases on post-mortem. Four of the suspect cases were found in the course of routine official inspection of all animals presented at slaughterhouses. Of these only one proved positive.

Sewage Sludge

Mr. McCusker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what tonnage of sewage sludge has been dumped around the coast of Northern Ireland by the Department of the Environment water service during the past five years.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Complete statistics for 1989 are not yet available but the figures for sewage sludge from water service treatment works which was dumped in the coastal waters of Northern Ireland during the years 1984-85 are as follows:

	Tons
1984	310,203
1985	326,022
1986	285,436
1987	309,489
1988	291,904

Concessionary Fares

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland under what statute transport undertakings in Northern Ireland are able to offer concessionary fares; and what arrangements are made to reimburse them for the cost of such schemes.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The concessionary fares scheme in Northern Ireland, sponsored by the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland and administered by the passenger transport undertakings, is provided under article 5 of the Transport (NI) Order 1977. The Department reimburses the undertakings on the basis of claims which are subject to audit.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what categories of person are currently eligible for consessionary fares on Ulsterbus, Citybus and Northern Ireland Railways; and what are the numbers in each category who have used concessionary fares in the last year.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The concessionary fares scheme provides unlimited travel at half fare at all times on all scheduled services by road and rail throughout Northern Ireland for passengers over 65-years-old, children up to the age of 16 years and war disabled pensioners. Registered blind people are entitled to free travel.

The passenger transport undertakings do not maintain records of the number of people in each category who are entitled to half fare concession. Taken together there were about 17·7 million passenger journeys by public transport at half fare in the last year. There are 1,163 registered blind person passes in issue at present.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether consideration was given to including a concessionary travel scheme for disabled people in the draft Transport (Amendment) Northern Ireland Order 1989 similar to that provided for in the London Regional Transport Act 1984; what representations were received on the question of a concessionary scheme for the disabled; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Article 5 of the Transport (Northern Ireland) Order 1977 already makes satisfactory statutory provision for concessionary travel schemes in Northern Ireland. The draft Order has been given a general welcome. Such representations were not made.

Transport Consultation

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what time was allowed by his Department for the submission of views by individuals and organisations on the draft Transport (Amendment) Northern Ireland Order 1989; and if he will list those organisations who submitted their views.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: A proposal for a draft Order was published on 20 November 1989. The consultation period ended six weeks later on 29 December.

Ten organisations responded:

The Southern Education and Library Board
The General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Council on Disability
Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company
South Eastern Education and Library Board
Western Health and Social Services Board
Northern Health and Social Services Board
The Royal Ulster Constabulary
North Eastern Education and Library Board
Ulsterbus

Teachers

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will establish a teaching council representative of teachers in Northern Ireland to work in partnership with Government on professional matters related to the teaching profession and the raising of educational standards.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am satisfied that the current arrangements for matters such as the standards of qualifications and entry to the profession and responsibility for teachers' probation and recognition are working satisfactorily. There are no plans for changes of the type suggested by the hon. Member.

On the general issue of raising educational standards, I look forward to a continuing partnership with the teaching profession to achieve the objectives set out in the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989.

Non-smokers

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what provisions are being made in all the offices and other places under his Department's control for the convenience and comfort of non-smokers; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy for non-smokers.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* The Northern Ireland Civil Service, with the support of the Trade Union Side of the Whitley council, introduced in 1987 a formal policy on smoking in Government premises.

Under the terms of this policy smoking is specifically prohibited in:

1. Conference rooms when used for meetings with civil servants;
2. Training rooms;
3. Lifts;
4. Official cars;
5. Kitchens, other cooking facilities, mess rooms and food stores;
6. Public counters and security/reception points.

A mechanism was also established by which, through local agreement, the occupants of buildings could introduce further measures.

In recognition of members of staff who choose to continue smoking, smoking rooms have been provided in those buildings where smoking at the workplace has been restricted or banned.

The policy is monitored on a continuous basis.

With regard to the Home Civil Service element in the Northern Ireland Office, management endorse the ideal of non-smoking as a safeguard to health. However, HCS staff occupy accommodation which is shared with other Government Departments, and it is also difficult to secure extra space for designated smoking areas. Smoking is not permitted in areas such as lifts. The matter is kept under review.

Educational Maintenance Allowance

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the operation of the educational maintenance allowance and its future.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 1 February 1990]:* In August 1988, I announced that I had decided to let the educational maintenance allowance scheme continue to operate in its present form until I had had an opportunity to assess the effects, if any, of changes brought about by the introduction of the new social security benefits in April 1988. This examination is still being undertaken.

Council for Catholic Maintained Schools

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth will receive a reply to his letter dated 13 December 1989 referring to the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 1 February 1990]:* I signed the reply to the hon. Member's letter on 31 January 1990.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Nursing and Residential Homes

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much has been spent on keeping residents in nursing homes and in residential care homes throughout England and Wales since 1984.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I regret that the figures are not available in the form requested. The figures as collected for Great Britain are shown in the table:

Supplementary benefit/Income support
Residential care and nursing homes expenditure and caseloads—1984-1989

	Numbers of claimants	*Annual equivalent expenditure (nearest £ million)*
Residential Care Homes (RCH)		
December 1984[1]	—	—
December 1985	55,000	259
February 1986	70,000	328
May 1987	85,000	438
May 1988	103,000	556
May 1989	119,000	658
Nursing Homes (NH)		
December 1984[1]	—	—
December 1985	15,000	89
February 1986	20,000	129
May 1987	32,000	233
May 1988	44,000	322
May 1989	57,000	446

[1]Figures for 1984 not collected separately. RCH and NH combined: Claimants 42,000. Annual equivalent expenditure £200 million.

[Due to the effects of rounding when separating categories, combined figures may vary slightly from previously published totals.]

Community Charge

Sir Rhodes Boyson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide examples of the effects of community charge benefit on the levels of gross earnings in 1990-91 at which families with children are free of the poverty trap assuming two-parent families with one, two, three and four children, community charge per adult of £200, £300, £400, £500 and £600, and that family credit entitlement is taken up in full.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he has any plans to raise the present upper limit on the amount of capital which may be held by community charge payers before they become ineligible for any rebate; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We have no such plans. The upper capital limit of £8,000 strikes the right balance between helping those people who need assistance to pay their community charge and protecting the interests of taxpayers.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will place in the Library a copy of the latest draft of the proposed claim form for terminally ill persons claiming attendance allowance.

Mr. Scott: We intend to put a draft claim form to the organisations involved in the care of terminally ill people and to terminally ill people themselves to ensure that we have found the most acceptable and sensitive form of wording. Once we are satisfied on this point, copies of the form will be placed in the Library.

Pensioners

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to reply to the hon. Member for Crawley's question for priority answer on 18 January, concerning Her Majesty's Government's policies for caring for pensioners.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply given today.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the past achievements and present objectives of Her Majesty's Government's policies for caring for pensioners.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 18 January 1990]:* The Government have always attached the highest priority to the interests and needs of elderly people, and will continue to do so. We believe that our record demonstrates the depth of our commitment in caring for pensioners. We would particularly point to the improving economic circumstances of pensioners brought about by the wide range of successful Government policies aimed at creating a stable economic environment.

This success led to an increase in average pensioners' total net income of 23 per cent. in real terms between 1979 and 1986. The increases during the same period of the value of income from savings of 64 per cent. and occupational pensions of 56 per cent. are particularly encouraging. This demonstrates the vital importance to elderly people of the economic policies which the Government have pursued, and will continue to pursue. We think it is fair to say that the elderly are not a homogeneous group with wholly common interests and circumstances and our policies recognise this. For example, we are conscious that not all pensioners have benefited from sources of incomes other than their state pension. In recognition of that the package of measures introduced last October directed an extra £200 million towards 2·6 million individuals in greatest need—the less well-off, elderly and disabled pensioners on income

support and housing benefit. However, many people wish to continue in work beyond pension age and the abolition of the retirement pension earnings rule, also last October, allows them the freedom to choose to do so and receive their pension.

In addition, many pensioners may benefit from the changes to personal taxation to be made from this coming April.

These are, we believe, all good examples of the sound policies which have enabled pensioners to share in the increased wealth of the nation.

Finally, the depth of our commitment may be measured by the levels of spending on the provision of benefits and services for the elderly; spending on social security benefit rose by 24 per cent. in real terms between 1979 and 1989-90; spending on health services for the elderly rose by 29 per cent. between 1978 and 1987 and spending on social services for the elderly rose by 21 per cent. between the same dates. This Government are committed to continuing to look after the interests of elderly people.

Social Security Claimants

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give for the Greenock and Port Glasgow local offices of his Department the statistical information he has to date regarding the different reasons given by social fund officers for refusals to claimants for *(a)* budgeting loans, *(b)* crisis loans and *(c)* community care grants; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 25 January 1990]:* Provisional figures for the period 9 April 1989 to 31 December 1990 are set out in the table.

The table gives the number of times that a reason for decision is used by social fund officers for determining a nil award for community care grants, budgeting and crisis loans.

An application can be refused for more than one reason. The total number of reasons for decision used will be equal to or greater than the number of applications refused. Information on the numbers of applications processed and awarded is available in the Library.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 19 May 1989, (*Official Report*, column *327-28*), which gave the data for April 1988 to April 1989 for these offices.

	Grants *Number of times a reason for refusal used*	*Budgeting loans* *Number of times a reason for refusal used*	*Crisis loans* *Number of times a reason for refusal used*
Office: *Port Glasgow 1989-90*			
Savings over £500 meet the full cost	1	0	0
Not in receipt of IS	n/a	109	0
Not in receipt of IS for 26 weeks	n/a	154	0
Not in receipt of IS and not likely to qualify	90	0	0
Item(s) excluded by Direction	18	67	0
Applicant excluded	[1]363	7	2
Applied for less than £30 (not travelling expenses)	7	7	0
Adjusted amount less than £30 (not travelling expenses)	2	6	0
Total debt exceeds £1,000	0	1	1
Previous application and decision for this item	54	45	1
No serious risk to health or safety	0	0	3
Inability to repay	0	73	6
Help available from another source	5	7	2
Priority too low to meet from the budget	26	173	1
Alternative available to the whole application	10	3	1
Loan refused because CCG awarded	0	95	0
Direction 4 not satisfied	[2]28	0	0
Others not covered above	24	21	6

[1] Input errors have caused this figure to be inflated.
[2] This information has been collected for two months only. Previously it was included in "Others".

	Grants *Number of times a reason for refusal used*	*Budgeting loans* *Number of times a reason for refusal used*	*Crisis loans* *Number of times a reason for refusal used*
Office: *Greenock 1989-90*			
Savings over £500 meet the full cost	9	2	0
Not in receipt of IS	n/a	233	0
Not in receipt of IS for 26 weeks	n/a	321	0
Not in receipt of IS and not likely to qualify	148	0	0
Item(s) excluded by Direction	27	79	4
Applicant excluded	1	0	1
Applied for less than £30 (not travelling expenses)	9	24	0
Adjusted amount less than £30 (not travelling expenses)	3	23	0
Total debt exceeds £1,000	0	0	0
Previous application and decision for this item	50	152	1
No serious risk to health or safety	0	0	111
Inability to repay	0	59	3
Help available from another source	2	3	2
Priority too low to meet from the budget	8	624	4
Alternative available to the whole application	2	3	1
Loans refused because CCG awarded	0	92	0
Direction 4 not satisfied	[1]65	0	0
Others not covered above	592	90	5

[1] This information has been collected for two months only. Previously it was included in "Others".

ENERGY

BNFL (Contracts)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what recent export contracts have been awarded to British Nuclear Fuels plc; and what permissions have been sought by British Nuclear Fuels plc under the Nuclear Installations Act 1965 to carry out exports.

Mr. Baldry: Within the past two years, British Nuclear Fuels plc has been awarded export contracts amounting to some £80 million for providing a variety of nuclear services including uranium processing and enrichment, design and engineering work, and transport of spent fuel. Following the increase in capacity available to overseas customers for the first 10 years of reprocessing in its thermal oxide reprocessing plant (THORP), the company has also secured orders for over 80 per cent. of this additional capacity. Of these exports only those which involve the disposal of fissile material require approval by the Secretary of State for Energy under the Nuclear Installations Act 1965.

All exports of nuclear materials, equipment and technology are made within the guidelines set out in the statement by the then Foreign Secretary, James Callaghan, on 31 March 1976 at columns *514-16*.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether there have been any changes in the arrangements for operating the return to sender options in contracts for reprocessing nuclear fuel from overseas as set out in his answer to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), *Official Report*, 2 May 1986, column *500*.

Mr. Baldry: There have been no changes to the arrangements mentioned by the hon. Member.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Hoax Alarm Calls (Deaths)

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many members of the general public in the past 10 years have been killed; and how many have been injured by vehicles of the emergency services whilst responding to hoax alarm telephone calls.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: One hundred and three police officers in England and Wales were killed in the course of duty during the last 10 years as a result of criminal action or accidents. Details of the circumstances surrounding these deaths are not held centrally. It is not therefore possible to determine whether an officer was killed whilst responding to a hoax alarm telephone call. Details of officers injured on duty are also not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Firearms

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the total number of firearms certificates on issue in England and Wales as at 31 December 1988; and when he will be able to supply detailed statistics in the form previously made available by his Department.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The number of firearms certificates on issue in England and Wales as at 31 December 1988 was 155,468. This information is included in table 2 of the Home Office statistical bulletin, issue 18/89, "Statistics on the operation of the Firearms Act 1968 England and Wales 1988". The bulletin also contains further information about the number of firearms certificates. A copy of this bulletin is in the Library, as are those relating to previous years.

Boundary Commissions

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will indicate the matters relating to the boundary commissions on which he is prepared to answer questions.

Mr. Waddington: The boundary commissions are independent bodies operating under statute. I answer questions relating to those matters which are my responsibility (for example, making appointments to and meeting the costs of the English and Welsh commissions, and the consideration of their reports) and I will, as appropriate, answer questions relating commonly to all four parliamentary boundary commissions. Customarily I also answer questions seeking information about the commissions' work; this information is in the public domain and is available directly from the commissions. So far as the local government boundary commissions for England and Wales are concerned, I receive reports on electoral arrangements and will answer questions on my consideration of those.

Burglaries (Rochdale)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many burglaries and attacks on the person there were in 1987 and 1988 in the borough of Rochdale.

Mr. John Patten: The information readily available to the Home Office is for recorded crime in the Greater Manchester police force area and is published annually in table 2·5 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales". More detailed information, for areas within Greater Manchester such as Rochdale, is published annually in the report of the chief constable for Greater Manchester. Copies of these publications are in the Library.

Vice Rings

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to whether the Metropolitan police have requested assistance from Scottish police in respect of vice rings.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that no such request has been made in recent months.

Brixton Prison

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ask the chief inspector of prisons to carry out a full inquiry into the recent spate of suicides and deaths in suspicious circumstances in Brixton prison.

Mr. Mellor: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to a question from my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) on 1 February 1990.

All deaths in prison custody are the subject of a coroner's inquest and any death in suspicious circumstances would be a matter for the police to investigate.

Drugs

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his best estimate of the current number of *(a)* opiate abusers and *(b)* non-opiate abusers in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Mellor: Information about the numbers of drug addicts notified to the Home Office in 1988 was published in Home Office statistical bulletin, issue 13/89, "Statistics of Drug Addicts notified to the Home Office, United Kingdom, 1988", a copy of which is in the Library. Notification applies only to certain controlled drugs, mainly opiates, but including cocaine, and many misusers will not have sought treatment and so will not have been notified. The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs has estimated that there may be between 75,000 and 150,000 misusers of notifiable drugs in the United Kingdom, and as many again misusing a variety of non-notifiable drugs such as amphetamine (but excluding cannabis) on an experimental or occasional basis.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number and weight of seizures of *(a)* cocaine, *(b)* crack and *(c)* heroin in each of the last five years.

Mr. Mellor: Information about seizures by the police and Customs of cocaine and heroin from 1978 to 1988 was published in table 2.4 of Home Office statistical bulletin issue 30/89, "Statistics of the Misuse of Drugs: Seizures and Offenders Dealt with, United Kingdom, 1988", a copy of which is in the Library. Comparable information is not yet available for 1989.

Crack is a form of cocaine which was not analysed and reported separately before 1987 and has not, so far, been recorded separately in published statistics. Seizures of crack by the police and Customs and reported to the National Drugs Intelligence Unit since 1987 are as follows:

Year	*Seizures*	*Grams*
1987	12	6·7
1988	27	113·7
1989	[1]139	243

[1] Provisional figures.

Immigration Policy

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with his European Community counterparts about *(a)* immigration policy and *(b)* racism after 1992.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: For details of the most recent of the regular reports to the House on the meetings of immigration Ministers, I would refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) on 20 December 1989 at column *276*. As to racism, the Government participated in the joint declaration against racism and zenophobia by the EC institutions in June 1986. A draft resolution, submitted to Parliament as COM(88) 318 Final under a Home Office memorandum in October 1988, is still under consideration.

Children (Crimes)

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on (i) the incidence of crime committed by children between *(a)* the age groups of five to 11 years and *(b)* 12 to 16 years, (ii) the time at which these crimes are committed; immediately after school hours, during school hours and during weekends and holidays and (iii) an analysis of the crimes committed together with regional variations.

Mr. John Patten: The earliest age at which a juvenile can be brought to court in criminal proceedings is 10 years. Information on the number of persons in the age groups 10-13 and 14-16 proceeded against at magistrates courts and the Crown court can be found in the "Criminal Statistics England and Wales 1988", supplementary volumes 1 and 2, tables S1.1(B), S2.1(B) and S1.1(C), S2.1(C), analysed by offence, sex and court disposal. Supplementary volumes 3 and 5 give a further breakdown by police force area, commission of the peace area and petty sessional division. Copies of these volumes may be found in the Library.

Data on the times and dates when offences occur are not collected centrally.

Police

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will list for each year since 1979, the countries from Latin America and from non-democratic states, that have sent delegations of police officers or military to study the police technology, crowd control techniques and computers used by United Kingdom police forces.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The table gives details of all centrally recorded visits by police officers and associated civilian personnel from overseas to study police technology, computers or crowd control techniques since 1980:

Year	*Technology*	*Computers*	*Crowd Control*
1980	Japan Saudi Arabia	Australia	
1981		United Arab Emirates Singapore	Kuwait Australia United Arab Emirates
1982	Sri Lanka Egypt Qatar	Sweden India Sri Lanka	Hong Kong

Year	Technology	Computers	Crowd Control
1983		Oman Pakistan Israel Japan	New Zealand Sri Lanka
1984	Gabon Kuwait Singapore	Australia Zimbabwe Canada Pakistan Oman	Australia
1985	Greece	Kenya Australia	Turkey Australia Japan
1986	Indonesia	Australia Tanzania	Canada Australia Guyana
1987		North Cyprus Zambia	Uruguay Mexico
1988	France Malawi	Portugal Kenya India Australia Hungary Netherlands	France Botswana West Germany Belgium Netherlands
1989	Brazil Spain Portugal United Arab Emirates	Israel India Australia Saudi Arabia Sri Lanka	Nigeria Brazil Pakistan Tunisia Australia Belgium

Civil Defence Grant Aid

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total amount of civil defence grant aid for *(a)* staff costs, *(b)* building works and *(c)* other costs in the financial years from 1983-84 to 1988-89; what is the projected sum for 1989-90 received by each local authority in south Yorkshire; and if he will express the costs in real terms.

Mr. John Patten: Payments of civil defence grant in the financial years from 1983-84 to 1988-89 are not recorded in the form requested, and the information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Total grant payments made in cash terms to local authorities in each of the years in question were as follows:

Year	£ million
1983-84	9·406
1984-85	9·170
1985-86	11·861
1986-87	13·431
1987-88	19·740
1988-89	21·780

The projected total grant payment to South Yorkshire fire and civil defence authority in 1989-90, which is based upon information about forecast expenditure provided by that authority in October 1989 and is subject to final scrutiny, is £396,000. Information on grant payments to district councils in south Yorkshire will not be available until later this year.

Football Spectators Act 1989

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the cost to his Department of the introduction and passage of the Football Spectators Act 1989 through Parliament.

Mr. Waddington: The central staff costs incurred by my Department on the introduction and passage of the Football Spectators Act 1989 were approximately £80,000. This excludes other costs, which cannot readily be separately identified.

Nottinghamshire Police Authority

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what amount of grant has been given to the Nottinghamshire police authority in each year since 1979.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Payments of police grant were made as follows:

Year	£
1978-79	9,905,741
1979-80	12,639,235
1980-81	14,822,138
1981-82	17,976,392
1982-83	20,569,628
1983-84	23,731,818
1984-85	[2]45,426,033
1985-86	23,713,300
[1]1986-87	27,248,372
1987-88	28,329,014
1988-89	30,624,673

[1] The rate of police grant was increased from 50 per cent. to 51 per cent. from 1986-87.

[2] In addition to the above payments, Nottinghamshire police authority has received £23,840,404 in special grant arising from additional expenditure incurred in policing the coal strike; the bulk of this was paid in 1984-85.

Low-alcohol Drinks

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will list the alcohol percentages used for legal definitions of low-alcohol drinks in all those European Economic Community and European Free Trade Association countries which have such definitions.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information about labelling and licensing practices in these countries is not readily available. I will write to the hon. Member.

Sentenced Prisoners

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the prison population in England and Wales for the latest available date; and how many of those prisoners had been sentenced by *(a)* a Crown court and *(b)* a magistrates court; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 25 January 1990]:* On 26 January 1990 there were 46,630 prisoners in prison service establishments in England and Wales.

Details of sentencing courts are published annually in "Prison Statistics, England and Wales" (table 1.15 of the latest volume, for 1988 (Cm. 825)), copies of which are in the Library. The latest available information is for June 1989 and is given in the table:

Population under sentence in prison service establishments on 30 June 1989: by court sentencing

Court sentencing	[1] *Number*
Crown Court	33,100
Magistrates court	3,400
Other courts	100
Not recorded	1,500
Total sentenced population	38,000

[1] Provisional figures.

ENVIRONMENT

Councillors

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the changes in the Local Government Act abolishing payments for loss of earnings and affecting councillors' allowances, and in particular on their impact on the full participation of elected council members in council business and the implications for local democracy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations from local authority associations, from local authorities, and from individual councillors about the proposed changes to the system of councillors' allowances. My hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities met the chairmen and leading members of the local authority associations on 25 January to discuss these proposals. Since the meeting he has written to the chairmen of the local authority assocations and offered to consider any modifications to the proposals—within the basic framework that has already been established—which they are able to agree by 16 February. We are anxious to secure the fairest possible distribution of the total available resources and thereby to ensure that people from all walks of life will continue to be able to serve as councillors without suffering undue hardship.

Councillors' Allowances

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will bring forward proposals for local authority councillors' allowances to take into account the size of the council; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether he will consider introducing greater allowances for elected councillors for those local authorities with populations in excess of 200,000 as against ex-rural district councils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Knowles: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) whether he will make it his policy in considering changes to the scheme of local councillors' allowances to take account of the special situation of ex-county boroughs;

(2) whether he will make it his policy to take account in any changes to the scheme for local councillors' allowances of the position of the ex-county boroughs with populations in excess of 200,000;

(3) whether, in considering changes to the scheme of local councillors' allowances, he has considered the size of population of the local authority area;

(4) whether, in considering the suggested changes to the scheme of local councillors' allowances, he proposes to distinguish between district authorities with under 100,000 population and those with populations over 200,000.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In discussions with the local authority associations we have made it clear that if they wish to propose a distribution of the total amounts available to particular types of authority by population bands we shall be ready to consider it. No such proposals have so far been received. However, following a meeting with the chairmen and leading members of the local authority associations on 25 January my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities has offered to consider any modifications to the proposals—within the basic framework that has already been established—which they are able to agree by 16 February. He has indicated that such modifications could be in respect of the distribution of the total resources, and it is open to the associations to propose population banding.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what allowances are available to elected members of *(a)* district councils in rural areas and *(b)* county boroughs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: All councillors, whatever the type of authority, are currently entitled to either attendance or financial loss allowance, and travel and subsistence allowances, in respect of approved duties at a rate set by the authority, subject to maxima prescribed by the Secretary of State. In addition, a council may pay special responsibility allowances within prescribed maxima, which vary according to the type of authority and the population of its area.

Building Maintenance (Tenders)

Mr. Thornton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing for each metropolitan local authority the number of tenders received in 1989 for day-to-day building maintenance contracts from *(a)* local authority direct labour organisations and *(b)* private building contractors.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: This information is not available. Local authorities are not required to provide details of these tenders to my Department.

Canals and Waterways

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what grants from his Department are available to voluntary organisations to help with the work of restoring canals and waterways; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what grants his Department has made to local authorities for help in restoring canals and waterways; what is the total amount of each grant; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* Derelict land grant may in certain cases be paid to both public and private sector bodies; including voluntary organisations towards the cost of canal and waterway restoration. It is normally available only where the work forms part of a wider reclamation scheme and is limited to the reclamation element in the restoration scheme. The Department has made derelict land grant available to local authorities for water-related reclamation schemes, but it is not possible to distinguish the amounts of grant paid in respect of the canal or waterway involved.

Grants may also be made to voluntary organisations under the Department's special grants programme towards their management costs.

Under the urban programme grant is paid to local authorities in support of a wide range of projects. In 1988-89 grant-eligible expenditure of £796,029 was approved to help with restoring canals and waterways.

Grants from the European regional development fund (ERDF) are available through the Department for infrastructure schemes in assisted areas where the cost of the works is wholly or substantially financed by public authorities. Work undertaken by a voluntary organisation may be eligible depending on whether its obligations to carry out such works are incorporated in its articles of association or trust deeds.

Local authorities also have power in section 114 of the Transport Act 1968 to assist the maintenance or improvement of any inland waterway in or near their area.

Radioactive Waste Conference

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department will be *(a)* represented or *(b)* presenting a paper at the radioactive waste conference to be held at the Gloucester hotel, London, on 5 and 6 February.

Mr. Trippier: The Department will be represented at the conference by three officials from Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. The head of HMIP's northern region will present a paper on the regulation of radioactive waste in the United Kingdom.

Football Spectators Act 1989

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the cost to his Department of the introduction and passage of the Football Spectators Act 1989 through Parliament.

Mr. Moynihan: The central staff costs incurred by my Department on the introduction and passage of the Football Spectators Act 1989 were approximately £130,000. This excludes ministerial and other costs which we are unable to identify separately.

Chemicals (Clearance and Control)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to review the clearance of and controls on existing chemicals.

Mr. Trippier: The Department of the Environment and the Welsh Office published a consultation paper on statutory powers to evaluate and control the environmental hazard of existing chemicals in April 1989. The Secretary of State for the Environment announced on 20 December 1989 that further provisions on the control of chemicals forming a legal framework for the evaluation of potentially harmful effects on human health or the environment would be introduced in the Environmental Protection Bill.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to introduce a benign list clearance system for new chemical substances.

Mr. Trippier: New chemical substances are subject to the provisions of the Notification of New Substances Regulations 1982 which implement European Communities directive No. 79/831/EEC. The regulations require that specified information on the properties and use of new substances is provided to the Department of the Environment and the Health and Safety Executive. The information is evaluated to assess any potential risk to man or the environment resulting from the use of the substance and where necessary appropriate action is taken.

Badgers

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to make provision for the protection of badger setts.

Mr. Trippier: It is an offence to destroy a badger sett if badgers may be unavoidably killed or injured as a result. A recent survey has shown that the badger is not under threat of extinction, not likely to become so and there are therefore no conservation grounds for extending the already substantial degree of protection afforded to badgers to the badger sett.

Marine Nature Conservation

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements he intends to make for the completion of a marine nature conservation review.

Mr. Trippier: The marine nature conservation review is a long term programme to provide a descriptive framework of British marine ecosystems and is being

conducted by the Nature Conservancy Council. This review commenced in 1987 and the Nature Conservancy Council has always envisaged that it would take 10 years to complete. I am satisfied with the Nature Conservancy Council's arrangements for its completion, although it is for the council to decide where its priorities lie.

Water Supply (Disconnections)

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the latest figures for the number of people who were disconnected from their water supplies in England.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The latest available figures are for 1988-89, when a total of 13,967 domestic and non-domestic customers in England were disconnected for non-payment of charges. The figures do not therefore reflect the new procedures which each water company is required to follow, under their conditions of appointment, before disconnecting domestic customers.

Water Meters

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will withdraw the £240,000 payment by the Government to the compulsory meter trial in the Normanton constituency in view of the statement made by Sir Gordon Jones, chairman of Yorkshire Water, that domestic metering of water may not now take place; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what assessment he has made of the value for money of the Government's 50 per cent. contributions to South Normanton in the light of the announcement that meters may not be used in Yorkshire for assessing water charges for domestic customers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 1 February 1990]:* I understand that, although Sir Gordon Jones has expressed a personal preference for charging domestic customers on the basis of a flat rate charge in the future, the board of Yorkshire Water has made no decision as to a future method of charging to replace charging by rateable values. Whatever method of charging is adopted by Yorkshire Water, it will not affect the Government's decision to contribute towards the cost of the South Normanton trial, which, together with the other metering trials, will provide information to the Director General of Water Services and the water industry generally on a wide range of metering issues. The Government consider that the lessons learnt from all of the trials will help ensure that those companies who decide to adopt metering in place of charging by rateable values will do so cost effectively and with the least inconvenience to customers.

Mice

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what facilities he intends to provide for the European Community Commission's European mouse care expert in order to facilitate his work in this country.

Mr. Gummer: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to his related questions today.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Student Loans

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many representations he has had regarding student loans and the effect they might have on those students studying four and five year courses such as medicine.

Mr. Jackson: We have received some 5,100 letters about top-up loans, including many referring to long courses and many supporting the principle that students should contribute towards their own living costs.

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has been in further correspondence with the banks since they pulled out of the student loans scheme.

Mr. Jackson: There has been no correspondence with the banks since the transfer of ownership of the Student Loans Company.

Foreign Language Students

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the number of students pursuing *(a)* a degree, *(b)* an A-level and *(c)* a GCSE, or nearest appropriate equivalent, in (i) French, (ii) German, (iii) Spanish, (iv) Portuguese, (v) Italian, (vi) Japanese, (vii) Chinese and (viii) Russian for 1970, 1975, 1980 and 1985 and any estimate he has for 1990.

Mr. Jackson: The available information is given in the tables.

(1) Universities in Great Britain
Numbers of full-time first degree students on courses

	Academic year beginning				
	1972[1]	1975	1980	1985	1988
French	3,583	3,668	4,296	3,501	3,256
German	1,810	1,729	1,853	1,552	1,521
Italian	259	241	274	245	273
Spanish	637	516	539	461	510
Portuguese	2	7	9	10	1
Russian	633	519	403	497	527
Chinese	119	124	133	259	304
Japanese	36	35	38	67	82

[1] Earliest year available.

(2) Public sector
Numbers of full-time and part-time first degree students on courses[1]

	As at November				
	1970	1975	1980	1985	1988
French	116	193	291	559	725
German	29	75	117	204	164
Italian	nil	nil	nil	nil	1
Spanish	38	56	154	221	270
Portuguese	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil
Russian	46	69	61	69	98
Chinese	nil	nil	nil	nil	50
Japanese	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil

[1] England and Wales in 1970 and 1975. England only for 1980, 1985 and 1988.

(3) School leavers in England
Examination attempts at A-level

Thousands

	Academic years			
	1976-77[1]	*1979-80*	*1984-85*	*1987-88*
French	19·4	20·4	18·8	15·4
German	6·7	7·4	6·8	5·8
Italian	0·5	0·4	0·3	0·4
Spanish	1·9	2·1	2·1	1·7
Portuguese	Not known			
Russian	0·4	0·3	0·3	0·3
Chinese	Not known			
Japanese	Not known			

[1] Earliest year available.

(4) School leavers in England
Examination attempts at GCSE[1]*, O-level and CSE*

Thousands

	Academic years			
	1976-77[2]	*1979-80*	*1984-85*	*1987-88*
French	217·6	239·9	254·1	229·6
German	54·8	66·1	70·5	64·4
Italian	2·0	2·6	2·1	1·8
Spanish	12·2	14·1	14·2	13·9
Portuguese	Not known			
Russian	2·1	1·6	1·4	1·2
Chinese	Not known			
Japanese	Not known			

[1] Including GCSE from 1987-88.
[2] Earliest year available.

Schools (Information)

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if head teachers are not now required to submit precise information in regard to educational provision under the 1989 Information Regulations; and why detailed questions are presented;

(2) if he will advise head teachers that there is no need for them to provide particularly precise information when responding to the 1989 Information Regulations;

(3) what is his estimate of the time which head teachers will need to devote to provide a response to the 1989 Information Regulations concerning the submission of statistical information regarding educational provision in their schools;

(4) what is his policy on whether head teachers should respond with a broad brush when submitting information concerning educational provision under the 1989 Information Regulations.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) on 29 January at column *31*.

BNFL (Sponsorship of University Appointments)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the university appointments currently sponsored by British Nuclear Fuels plc.

Mr. Jackson: This information is not collected by the Department.

Cash Limits

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether there are any changes to the cash limits for his Department's votes.

Mr. MacGregor: The cash limit for class XII, vote 5 will be increased by £1,489,000 from £815,875,000 to £817,364,000. A total of £1,191,000 of the increase reflects the take-up of the entitlement to carry forward capital underspend under the end-year flexibility arrangement, as announced by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 20 July 1989. A total of £548,000 of the increase reflects an adjustment to the level of grant following an administrative error in the payment of 1988-89 grant to the Science and Engineering Council. Increased expenditure on fees paid under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 accounts for a further £4,000.

These increases are offset by a reduction of £254,000 in the grant to the Agricultural and Food Research Council (AFRC) to reflect a further reduction in the AFRC's grant to the Institute of Plant Science Research following the institute's retention of proceeds from the sale of the Plant Breeding Institute.

SCOTLAND

Social Security Benefit

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of the Scottish population of 16 years and over receive any form of social security benefit payment or pension; and if he will make a statement containing numerical information on this matter.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have been asked to reply.

In 1988 about 2·5 million adults in Scotland (65 per cent.) were in receipt of some form of social security benefit. This figure includes both partners of all couples in receipt of benefit but excludes dependent young people aged 16 to 18 as well as children under 16. The total includes about 1·1 million adults in families receiving child benefit and about 800,000 pension recipients.

Source: Administrative Statistics and the Family Expenditure Survey.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Family Law

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Attorney-General when the family law and administration working party intends to report its interim deliberations for consultation.

Mr. Key: To ask the Attorney-General when the family law and administration working party intends to report its interim deliberations for consultation.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Attorney-General when the family law and administration working party intends to report its interim deliberations for consultation.

The Attorney-General: The role of the family law and administration working party is to oversee and where necessary co-ordinate advice to Ministers on matters within the announced rolling programme to review family law and administration. Accordingly it is not expected itself to publish reports or consultation documents.

Mr. Day: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the rolling programme of family law reform promised in the later stages of the Children Act 1989.

Sir George Young: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the rolling programme of family law reform promised in the later stages of the Children Act 1989.

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the rolling programme of family law reform promised in the later stages of the Children Act 1989.

The Attorney-General: The Government's rolling programme of review of family law and its administration includes:

(a) implementation of the Children Act 1989, including a review of court procedures;
(b) consideration of the Law Commission's report on divorce when it is received and with it the future provision of conciliation and reconciliation services;
(c) consideration of the law relating to financial provision in family cases;
(d) consideration of the Law Commission's report on domestic violence and rights to occupy the family home when received;
(e) the future provision and organisation of the services which provide independent and expert advice to the courts in family proceedings or which provide representation for the child or his interests; and
(f) consideration, in the light of other changes, of the jurisdiction of the courts in family matters.

The Government have set up an interdepartmental working party, the family law and administration working party, to oversee and, where necessary, to co-ordinate advice to Ministers on implementation of the Children Act 1989 and matters falling within the rolling programme.

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Attorney-General if the family law and administration working party is considering the future of welfare and conciliation services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Attorney-General if the family law and administration working party is considering the future of welfare and conciliation services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Squire: To ask the Attorney-General if the family law and administration working party is considering the future of welfare and conciliation services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Doran: To ask the Attorney-General if the family law and administration working party is considering the future of welfare and conciliation services.

The Attorney-General: The role of the family law and administration working party is to oversee and where necessary co-ordinate advice to Ministers on matters within the announced rolling programme to review family law and business. Work is in hand in the responsible Departments on the future of welfare and conciliation services but it is too early to say what the results may be.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Attorney-General when the family law and administration working party last met; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Attorney-General when the family law and administration working party last met; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Attorney-General when the family law and administration working party last met; and what matters were discussed.

The Attorney-General: The family law and administration working party last met in November 1989, when it discussed the parliamentary passage of the Children Bill and progress towards the Bill's implementation, including training in the handling of children's cases.

Mr. French: To ask the Attorney-General if he has any proposals to increase the rate at which divorce hearings and child custody hearings are processed.

The Attorney-General: It is the aim of the Government that child custody cases should be processed expeditiously. When the Children Act 1989 comes into force it will re-emphasise the importance of avoiding delay in determining any issue relating to the upbringing of a child and will facilitate the imposition of timetables in such proceedings.

Mr. French: To ask the Attorney-General if he will introduce legislation to provide for indexing of maintenance payments in divorce proceedings to the retail price index.

The Attorney-General: No. The Government are, however, reviewing the arrangements for assessing, collecting and enforcing maintenance payments; and means of keeping the levels of maintenance awards up to date is one of the major aspects being addressed.

Mr. French: To ask the Attorney-General what information he has on the length of time taken to process *(a)* divorce hearings and *(b)* child custody hearings; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The length of time a divorce hearing or child custody hearing takes from application to completion is subject to several factors, including the action of the parties.

The only measurement of time recorded is the interval between a request from the parties for a hearing, or at the instigation of the court, and the next date with sufficient time available to hear the case. It is not possible to distinguish between divorce or child custody hearings and other civil cases.

Mr. Waller: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the future of welfare services and their role in resolving matrimonial disputes.

The Attorney-General: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer which I have given today to the questions on the rolling programme of family law reform.

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Attorney-General when proposals from the family law and administration working party on the future of welfare and conciliation services will be available for consultation.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Attorney-General when proposals from the family law and administration working party on the future of welfare and conciliation services will be available for consultation.

Mr. Graham: To ask the Attorney-General when proposals from the family law and administration working party on the future of welfare and conciliation services will be available for consultation.

The Attorney-General: The role of the family law and administration working party is to oversee and where

necessary co-ordinate advice to Ministers on matters within the announced rolling programme to review family law and administration. Accordingly it is not expected to publish reports or consultation documents. Work is in hand in the responsible Departments on the future of welfare and conciliation services but it is too early to say what the results might be.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the future of the conciliation services.

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the future of the conciliation services.

The Attorney-General: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave on 29 January at column *27*.

Divorce Laws

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Attorney-General what plans have been formulated for a reform of the divorce laws; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Knapman: To ask the Attorney-General what plans have been formulated for a reform of the divorce laws; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Attorney-General what plans have been formulated for a reform of the divorce laws.

The Attorney-General: The Law Commission is reviewing the law of divorce and is expected to report later this year. It would be premature to reach any conclusions until its proposals have been considered in detail.

Crèches

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list by location where crèche facilities are provided for working mothers employed in his Department; and if they have to make any payment for this service.

The Attorney-General: Crèche facilities are not provided at the legal secretariat to the Law Officers or the Serious Fraud Office. The Crown prosecution service is encouraging the establishment of crèche facilities where this is justified by demand and local CPS offices are encouraged to co-operate with other Departments. The Treasury Solicitor's Department provides accommodation in Queen Anne's chambers for a holiday play scheme, run in conjunction with the Cabinet Office, and which offers 32 places for five to 12-year-olds. A payment of £5 per day per child is required for this service. The Treasury Solicitor's Department is actively considering a crèche and hopes to establish such facilities in conjunction with the Charity Commission when its property division relocates to Taunton in August 1991.

Welfare Services

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the future of welfare services and their role in resolving matrimonial disputes.

The Attorney-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer which I have given today to the questions on the rolling programme of family law reform.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Local Government Pensioners

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received concerning the level of pensions paid to retired Kenya local government officers.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have received representations on behalf of retired Kenya local government officers on a number of occasions, both from the retired officers themselves and through hon. Members.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will estimate the cost of extending United Kingdom pension increase arrangements to *(a)* all expatriate local government pensioners and *(b)* local government pensioners formerly employed in Kenya.

Mr. Waldegrave: We do not hold sufficient information about these groups of pensioners to enable us to provide meaningful estimates.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans his Department has to assume responsibility for pensions paid to retired Kenya local government officers.

Mr. Waldegrave: None. I refer my hon. Friend to the answer which my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development gave him on 16 January.

Ethiopia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the Government's policy on giving *(a)* emergency famine relief to Ethiopia and *(b)* assistance for long-term development.

Mr. Waldegrave: We shall continue to respond generously to the renewed threat of famine in Ethiopia and the hon. Member will be aware of the most recent commitment of relief aid announced by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development on 31 January at column *189*. As to the question of assistance for longer-term development, the Government's policy remains as stated in their observations (column 432) on the report of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs on famine in the Horn of Africa and, in particular, in the response (page 6) to the recommendations contained in paragraph 101 of the report.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will give details of the £0·7 million provided for food-growing programmes in Ethiopia referred to by the Minister for Overseas Development on 29 January, *Official Report*, column 16; and whether the Government will support agricultural rehabilitation programmes in Ethiopia, sponsored by British voluntary agencies.

Mr. Waldegrave: The figure stated by my right hon. Friend represents anticipated expenditure in the current financial year against overall commitments totalling £2·6 million in respect of four community-level, agricultural rehabilitation and development projects being implemented by British non-governmental organisations

(CARE Britain, Farm Africa and SOS Sahel) and a commitment of up to £400,000 in respect of a research project designed to produce improved strains of teff (an indigenous cereal crop). Two further NGO proposals are under consideration and we remain ready to consider any others which may be submitted.

Development Assistance

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was United Kingdom official development assistance as a percentage of gross national product for each year from 1979 to 1989; what is the estimated percentage for 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: United Kingdom official development assistance as a percentage of gross national product for each year from 1979 is given in the table. The figure for 1989 is not yet available, nor is an estimate for 1990.

Net overseas development aid as percentage Gross National Product

Year	*Per cent.*
1979	·51
1980	·35
1981	·42
1982	·37
1983	·35
1984	·33
1985	·33
1986	·31
1987	·28
1988	·32

Source: British Aid Statistics.

Arms Exports

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he will take in order to implement the resolution on arms exports unanimously adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in September 1989.

Mr. Waldegrave: We already apply stringent licensing controls to all proposed arms exports; the sale of equipment judged likely to be used for internal repression, for example, would not be allowed. We are now taking part in the United Nations study group promoting transparency in international transfers of conventional arms, which had its first meeting in New York on 22 to 26 January.

PHARE

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on British involvement in the Poland and Hungary Assistance for Economic Restructuring, PHARE, programme with reference to that priority sector of the programme which concerns environmental issues.

Mr. Waldegrave: We strongly support the work of the Group of 24 in providing co-ordinated help to Poland and Hungary, under the chairmanship of the European Commission. The European Community has so far provided £210 million for aid to Poland and Hungary in 1990, some £35 to £50 million of which has been earmarked for expenditure on the environment. United Kingdom experts participated in two recent fact-finding missions to Poland and Hungary to assess environmental priorities in those two countries. Proposals based on their reports are in preparation. We shall continue to urge that resources and expertise are deployed according to a scientifically based assessment of those countries' needs.

Ivory

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement on how the existing 600-tonne stock of ivory in Hong Kong was acquired.

Mr. Waldegrave: Hong Kong's ivory stock was acquired in the normal process of trade. Most was imported in the raw form from all major sources, either directly or through intermediaries.

Hong Kong

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much elephant ivory and rhino horn has been seized by the authorities in Hong Kong during the last six months.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* In the last six months, the following has been seized by the authorities in Hong Kong:

	Number of seizures	*Quantity*
Elephant ivory	27	2·16 tonnes
Rhino horn	2	21·2 kilogrammes

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much ivory has been exported from Hong Kong in the last six months; to which countries it was exported; and how much of such ivory was *(a)* worked and *(b)* raw.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* Since 1 June 1989, Hong Kong has exported 4·8 tonnes of worked ivory and 50 tonnes of raw ivory. The principal destinations were China, Macau, Singapore, Taiwan, Japan, India, Thailand, South Korea, the Federal Republic of Germany and Mexico.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if all the current ivory stock in Hong Kong is marked and registered in accordance with CITES requirements.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* All ivory stock in Hong Kong that may be traded is marked and registered in accordance with CITES requirements.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give details of the steps being taken by the Hong Kong authorities to monitor the disposal of the ivory stocks which can be traded during the next six months.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* All traders are required to take out possession licences for all commercial ivory and personal effects in excess of 5 kg. Details of stocks are entered into the computer data base of the CITES management authority. The authority has to be notified of transfers of stocks between traders and their stock balance is varied accordingly. An export licence is required for any trader to export ivory, either in raw or in

worked form. An export licence will be granted to the trader only if the ivory in question is from the trader's legally registered stock from CITES approved sources and the destination of the export is not a CITES party which exercises a ban on ivory imports.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has as to whether all the current ivory stock in Hong Kong was legally acquired.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* The Hong Kong authorities have inspected all the ivory stocks in the territory. They have found no evidence that the stocks were illegally acquired.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the exact current stock of ivory in Hong Kong which may be traded in the next six months; and how much of it is *(a)* worked and *(b)* raw.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* The current stocks of ivory in Hong Kong that may be traded in the next six months are 104 tonnes of worked ivory and 254 tonnes of raw ivory.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what will happen to that Hong Kong ivory not disposed of by the end of the six months exemption to the current trade ban.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* Under the CITES ban, all commercial exports of ivory will cease. Ivory not disposed of by the end of the six months exemption period could not be legally exported as no licence for this would be issued by the Hong Kong authorities. It will remain in Hong Kong.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs where the legally held ivory in Hong Kong came from.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 30 January 1990]:* The Hong Kong authorities believe that Hong Kong stocks are likely to include ivory originating from all major sources, either directly or via intermediary countries.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the shipment records of Hong Kong ivory recently given an exemption from the ivory trade ban will be open to inspection by the public.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* Commercial documents such as bills of lading and export licences are not open to public inspection.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the Hong Kong authorities have received from the ivory trade to extend the six-month exemption on the sale of ivory.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* No representations have been received since the exemption was announced.

EEC Overseas Territories

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the names and populations of overseas territories of members of the EEC; if he will futher indicate what plans there are to allow persons from such territories the right of abode within the EEC; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude *[pursuant to his reply, 22 January 1990, c. 527-28]:* The following additions should be made to the list of United Kingdom dependent territories:

Territories	*Numbers and Year*
Pitcairn	56 (1989)
Ascension (Like Tristan Da Cunha, a dependency of St. Helena)	No indigenous population

DEFENCE

Defence Expenditure

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest information on defence budget reductions *(a)* proposed and *(b)* implemented by (i) the United States of America, (ii) Hungary, (iii) NATO as a whole and (iv) the Warsaw pact as a whole.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Member states of NATO report their budgetary plans each summer in their response to the NATO defence planning questionnaire. The plans reported in 1989 generally provided for budget increases. We expect the plans reported by the United States in 1990 to reflect the Administration's proposals now before Congress for reductions in defence spending over the next five years.

With the exception of Romania, all Warsaw pact countries have announced reductions in defence spending and there is evidence that these reductions are being implemented. Hungary, whose contribution to total Warsaw pact defence expenditure is very small, announced a reduction of about one quarter in its defence budget for 1989.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has made any estimate of the likely increase or decrease in expenditure of *(a)* North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and *(b)* Warsaw pact countries over the next five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The plans reported last year to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation by member states generally provided for modest real increases in defence expenditure in the years immediately ahead. All Warsaw pact countries, with the exception of Romania, announced cuts in defence expenditure in 1989 to take effect in that and subsequent years. We are monitoring the implementation of these announcements.

Mr. Rathbone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what additional review of defence expenditure he is carrying out in the light of developments in Warsaw pact countries.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what evaluation he has made of the implications of developments in eastern Europe for United Kingdom defence spending.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are no plans to reduce defence expenditure.

British Army of the Rhine

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of *(a)* the capital costs and *(b)* the revenue savings of reducing the number of men in the British Army of the Rhine.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We have no current plans to reduce the number of men in the British Army of the Rhine, and it is not our practice to speculate on hypothetical possibilities concerning future force levels.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost of the armed services covering civilian ambulance services.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Up to 31 December 1989 extra costs in the region of £1·9 million have been reported for recovery by the Ministry of Defence from the Department of Health, the Scottish Home and Health Department and the Welsh Office.

Skye Toll Bridge

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the stipulations which his Department has imposed upon the design of the proposed Skye toll bridge and the reasons for so doing.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My Department has asked that the bridge should have a minimum height clearance of 34 m above mean high water springs, or 36 m if a tidal gauge is installed. This is to ensure that the channel can be used by ships of up to and including destroyer or frigate size as well as by the vessels of the Royal Maritime Auxiliary Service, which regularly use the channel en route to the range at Raasay.

Britannia

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the clearance height required by the royal yacht Britannia.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The royal yacht requires a clearance of approximately 130ft (39·62m), or 122ft (37·18m) if the mast is "scandalised".

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the number of occasions in each of the past few years on which the royal yacht Britannia has passed through the Kyles of Lochalsh.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The royal yacht has passed through the Kyles of Lochalsh on three occasions in the past five years: once each in 1986, 1988 and 1989.

TA Depot, Govan

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from Govan Initiative arising out of its secure communities project which referred to excessive noise levels from the Territorial Army depot adjacent to the Teucharhill housing scheme; and what action has been taken.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

Defence Support Agencies

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the organisational and financial differences between defence support agencies run on next steps lines and next steps executive agencies such as the Defence Research Agency and the Meteorological Office.

Mr. Neubert: Organisationally the main difference will lie in the relationship between the chief executive and the Minister. In the case of next steps executive agencies, the chief executive is personally and directly accountable to the Minister, for his or her performance. This is the relationship which will apply in the cases of, for instance, the Meteorological Office and the Defence Research Agency.

Other defence support organisations must, however, remain fully embedded within the defence chain of command, for the reasons that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence gave in the House of Commons on 18 October, column 155. In these cases, the chief executive will be accountable to Ministers, through the chain of command.

In most other respects it will not be possible to differentiate the characteristics of defence support agencies from the normal next step agencies. The aim of both is to secure improved management and better results. Each agency will have different requirements and the policy and resources framework in each case will be tailored to the individual circumstances of the organisation concerned.

Cash Limits

Mr. Bendall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he can announce any changes to the defence cash limits and running costs limit for 1989-90.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Subject to parliamentary approval to the necessary spring Supplementary Estimates the following changes will be made:

(1) Defence Cash Limits

£'000s

Class and Vote	*Current Cash Limit*	*Increase/ Decrease*	*Revised Cash Limit*
I, 1	8,349,433	+130,282	8,479,715
I, 2	8,339,159	+260,841	8,600,000
I, 3	1,202,721	+9,606	1,212,327
I, 4	1,816,030	+52,518	1,868,548
I, 5	441,372	+43,858	485,230

These changes, totalling £497,105,000, reflect the take-up of part of the entitlement to carry-forward of capital underspending under the end-year flexibility scheme (announced by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 20 July 1989, *Official Report*, columns *258-62)* and the additional arrangements for defence procurement (announced on 16 January 1990 by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King), *Official Report*, columns *135* and *136*). These increases will be charged to the reserve.

The changes also take account of a transfer of £800,000 from the Department of Transport (class VIII, vote 2) to class I, vote 1, reflecting the transfer of responsibility for the costs of royal flights in civil aircraft (announced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) *Official Report*, 18 May 1989, column *280*), and a further transfer of £34,000 from the Cabinet Office:

Office of the Minister for the Civil Service (class XX, vote 1) in respect of the challenge funding scheme for senior management development training. These changes will not add to the planned total of public expenditure.

(2) Running Costs Limit

The running costs limit for the Department will be increased by £2,034,000 from £5,149,347,000 to £5,151,381,000 reflecting both the transfer of £34,000 in respect of challenge funding and an increase of £2,000,000 for the running costs element of the additional expenditure incurred by the Ministry of Defence in providing assistance in the ambulance dispute.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Pet Foods

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the use of those bovine offals currently banned for use in products for human consumption is permitted for use in pet foods; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether pet food manufacturers can currently use without restriction brine offals currently banned from human consumption.

Mr. Maclean: Spongiform encephalopathies have never been recorded in domestic pets. Moreover, the industry's policy is not to use these materials. There is thus no need for regulatory action.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will state *(a)* when the first case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy was positively identified, *(b)* when bovine spongiform encephalopathy was made a notifiable disease, *(c)* when offals from cattle were banned for use for human consumption, *(d)* when compensation for farmers for bovine spongiform encephalopathy-infected cattle was introduced, *(e)* when research into the possibility of transmission of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy infective agent from generation to generation was begun; and *(f)* if he will make a statement about the sequence of events, and their respective timings.

Mr. Maclean: It was made notifiable in June 1988 as soon as research and field investigation had established a clear clinical picture and techniques had been developed to obtain a definitive diagnosis. Without such action it is not possible to deal with any disease, let alone a new disease never previously reported in cattle.

The feeding of ruminant-based rations to ruminants was banned from July 1988 as soon as studies had confirmed this to be the most likely cause of the disease.

In April 1988 the Government set up an independent working party under the chairmanship of Sir Richard Southwood to look at BSE, in particular at any human health implications. An interim recommendation was made in June 1988 that, although there was no evidence of a risk to humans, as a precautionary measure all cattle suspected of having BSE should be slaughtered and destroyed to take them out of the food chain. The Government acted promptly on this and the slaughter policy began on 8 August that year.

A research committee under the chairmanship of Dr. David Tyrrell was established to advise on research in relation to BSE and the other transmissible spongiform encephalopathies following another interim recommendation. In January this year the Government announced that over £12 million would be spent over the next three years as part of a comprehensive programme of research which had been started as soon as the disease was first identified. The Southwood report was published in February last year. It welcomed the Government's action to deal with the disease, including the prompt implementation of its interim recommendations, and concluded that the risk of transmission to humans was "remote". All its final recommendations have been implemented.

The Government's commitment to protecting and reassuring the public following the emergence of BSE is clearly shown by the action taken, which includes, in addition, the ban from November 1989 on the use of certain offals which, although not recommended by Southwood, represents a further safeguard to consumers.

Mice

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how his Department intends to liaise with the European Community Commission's mouse care expert;

(2) whether he was consulted on the European Community Commission's proposal to appoint a mouse care expert to raise the productivity of the European Community market on mice and rats; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: There is no proposal to appoint a European mouse care expert. I assume that the hon. Member must be referring to a proposal for a Council regulation on animal health conditions governing trade in rodents. These proposals are of real concern as they are relevant to Her Majesty's Government's fight against rabies and if adopted will require staff resources to be devoted to ensuring that its requirements are being fulfilled. The Government's assessment of it was set out in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's explanatory memorandum 9715/89 of 27 November 1989 a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Cereals

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the benefits which will accrue to the cereals sector from the current year's grants from the European Community for the improvement of marketing and processing facilities.

Mr. Maclean: Awards made by the Commission under European Community regulation 355/77 to projects aimed at improving the marketing and processing of agricultural products are announced in June and December each year. The first awards for 1990 will be announced in June.

For 1989 the Commission announced awards totalling £1,714,160 to seven projects in the cereals sector in the United Kingdom.

European Community Grants

Mr. Moss: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what benefits will accrue to Cambridgeshire from the current year's grants from the European Economic Community for the improvement of marketing and processing facilities.

Mr. Maclean: Awards made by the Commission under European Community regulations 355/77 aimed at improving the marketing and processing of agricultural products are announced in June and December each year. The first awards for 1990 will be announced in June.

For 1989 the Commission announced three awards for projects in Cambridgeshire; one in the cereals sector for £210,012, one in the horticulture sector for £323,312 and one in the pigmeat sector for £533,658.

Nitrate-sensitive Areas

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to announce the level of compensation payable to farmers in nitrate-sensitive areas.

Mr. Maclean: We are currently examining the detailed costs of the measures proposed in each area, and will make a statement as soon as this examination is complete.

Salmonella

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a further statement on his consideration of the testing of imported eggs for salmonella.

Mr. Maclean: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) on 11 December 1989 at column *522*.

Scrapie

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make scrapie a notifiable disease; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I have no plans to do so. The disease, which has been present in the national flock for well over two centuries, is endemic in a sheep population of over 10 million and there is no test in the live animal. Intensive study has shown that there is no epidemiological relationship between scrapie and the human encephalopathies.

Carcases

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will now outlaw the use of animal carcases as foodstuffs for pigs.

Mr. Maclean: There is no scientific evidence to indicate that such action is necessary. Pigs are omnivores, unlike cattle and sheep, which are ruminants. They are in particular likely to have had heavy exposure to the bovine spongiform encephalopathy agent through the feeding of meat and bone meat derived from ruminants without any ill effect. The Southwood report acknowledged the importance of the feed ban for ruminants but did not recommend it be extended to pigs and poultry.

Milk Quotas

Mr. Andy Stewart: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he intends to set a deadline for the notification of milk quota transfers in England and Wales.

Mr. Gummer: Following discussions with the industry I have decided to make use of the powers provided by the Dairy Produce Quotas Regulations 1989. Quota transfers notified after 23 April, even if they are notified as having occurred in the previous quota year, will not affect the calculation of supplementary levy liability in respect of that quota year.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Michael: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what part is played by his Department in identifying the causes of trends in figures in the incidence of food poisoning in the United Kingdom;

(2) what responsibilities lie with his Department in regard to monitoring trends in figures in the incidence of cases of food poisoning.

Mr. Maclean: My Department co-operates with the Department of Health in identifying areas where action may be needed to minimise the risk of contamination of food at the point of production, for example in relation to salmonella in eggs. The Department also provides any support which may be needed by the Department of Health in monitoring and interpreting trends in the incidence of food poisoning.

Dredge Spoil

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the percentage of mercury contamination in dredge spoil in *(a)* the Tyne estuary and *(b)* Liverpool bay.

Mr. Gummer: Information on the trace metal composition of dredged materials licensed for disposal at sea is held on a public register maintained by my Department. For the Tyne estuary the concentration of mercury in dredged materials is 0·0001 per cent. In the Mersey estuary concentrations in dredged materials range from 0·0001 to 0·0006 per cent. (1 to 6 mg/kg dry weight).

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the contamination of heavy metals of dredge spoil in *(a)* the Tyne estuary and *(b)* Liverpool bay; what monitoring of release of heavy metals in dredge spoil in these areas is being or has been carried out; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Licences for the disposal of dredged material at sea are granted for one year and details of trace metal concentrations and other information are placed on a public register held in my Department. For recurrent dredging operations, these data are reviewed annually and locations are resampled at least every three years in accordance with guidelines set down by the Oslo commission. There are currently four licences for the disposal of material in Liverpool bay and three licences for disposal at a site three and a half miles off the mouth of the Tyne estuary.

The Ministry has conducted a programme of both laboratory and field investigations on the fate of heavy metals in dredged materials. The Ministry has also conducted a survey of trace metal contamination in the Tyne estuary and has identified areas where, in the event of dredging, the sediments are not suitable for disposal at sea. Results of the field monitoring surveys have been published in the fisheries research technical report series and are in the Library of the House.

Further work on the quality of fish and shellfish in these and other coastal areas is published in "Aquatic Environment Monitoring Report No. 16", a copy of which is also in the Library of the House. These investigations have shown that, in the case of mercury in Liverpool bay which has been subject to historical industrial inputs, the concentration of mercury in a range of fish satisfies the EC environmental quality standard of 0·3 mg/kg wet weight. For other heavy metals in both locations, concentrations are well below national standards for food quality.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Girobank

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to announce the completion arrangements for the sale of Girobank.

Mr. Forth: The Post Office and Alliance and Leicester building society are engaged in detailed negotiations with a view to completing the sale as soon as practicable. The sale is a complex matter and it was invevitable that it would take some time to complete.

Fraud (Liability)

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has on the extent of the potential liability of banks to recompense members of the public as a result of frauds being perpetrated by agents tied to life assurance subsidiaries of banks.

Mr. Redwood: The statutory responsibility of the principal of a tied agent under the Financial Services Act is limited to the latter's actions in carrying on investment business for which the principal has accepted responsibility in writing. The liability of the principal's parent company depends on the nature of the parent-subsidiary relationship. If both are limited companies, the liability of the parent, whether or not a bank, is that of any limited liability company to a limited liability subsidiary.

Garston Amhurst

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether Companies House records on Garston Amhurst Associates Holdings Limited are up to date.

Mr. Redwood: There is no company currently registered under the name Garston Amhurst Associates Holdings Limited. There are, however, five similarly named companies on the register which are listed in the table, together with details of their current filing position in relation to annual returns and accounts.

Company name	*Outstanding documents* *Annual accounts*	*Annual returns*
Garston Amhurst Associates (Bristol) Limited	1988	1987-88
Garston Amhurst Associates (Financial Management) Limited	1988	1986-88
Garston Amhurst Associated (Financial Services) Limited	1988	1988
Garston Amhurst Associates (General) Limited	1988	1986-88
Garston Amhurst Associates (London) Limited	1988	1987-88

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will commence an inquiry under the Companies Act into Garston Amhurst Associates Holdings Limited, its directors and its auditors;

(2) what information he has about the auditors of Garston Amhurst Associates Holdings Limited;

(3) what information he has on the corporate entity called Garston Amhurst or Garston Amhurst Associates Group Holdings Limited and its directors.

Mr. Redwood: I am aware of recent developments concerning GAA Group Holdings Limited and other companies in the Garston Amhurst Associates Group.

On 25 January 1990 the Securities and Investments Board presented petitions for the winding up of the following group companies of which the Official Receiver was appointed provisional liquidator on the same day:

GAA Group Holdings Limited
Garston Amhurst Associates (London) Limited
Garston Amhurst Associates (Bristol) Limited
Garston Amhurst Associates (Financial Services) Limited
Garston Amhurst Associates (Financial Management) Limited

These companies have been drawn to the attention of the Serious Fraud Office by the Securities and Investments Board and the Serious Fraud Office has confirmed that an inquiry into them is in progress.

In the circumstances I have no plans to exercise investigatory powers in relation to those companies and I cannot comment further.

Comecon (Joint Ventures)

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received about the need for property rights and a coherent law of contract for individuals within Comecon countries engaging in joint ventures with western countries.

Mr. Redwood: My Department has received many and various comments to this effect. The lack of property rights and a coherent law of contract is of course a primary feature of the Communist system and a great disincentive to investment as well as to personal initiative. Measures to reduce or remove this disincentive have already been implemented in Hungary and are under active consideration in Poland and Czechoslovakia as well as in other Comecon countries. I welcome all such measures and on my visits to the USSR and Poland in March will emphasise the relevance of a proper legal framework to successful inward investment.

Bank Accounts (Monitoring)

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any proposals to improve the clearing banks' arrangements for monitoring the use of client bank accounts under the Financial Services Act.

Mr. Redwood: The extent of the responsibility of institutions at which client money accounts under the Financial Services Act are lodged is set out in section 55(4) of that Act, and I have no plans to review this legislation.

Securities and Investments Board

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals he has to strengthen the present arrangements of the Securities and Investments Board for monitoring the rule book of LAUTRO.

Mr. Redwood: The Securities and Investments Board's arrangements for monitoring the regulatory bodies it has recognised are a matter for the board.

LAUTRO

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he has taken to ensure that the rules of the self-regulatory body known as LAUTRO are adequate to protect the public against fraud.

Mr. Redwood: Responsibility for ensuring that LAUTRO's rules provide the appropriate level of protection for investors lies with the Securities and Investments Board.

Tied Agents

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will take steps to amend the Financial Services Act to make it clear that the liability for monitoring tied agents rests with the life insurance company which has entered into the contractual arrangements which result in the tied arrangement.

Mr. Redwood: The Financial Services Act already makes the principal of a tied agent responsible for the latter's actions in carrying on investment business for which the principal has accepted responsibility in writing. The Securities and Investments Board and the various self-regulatory bodies established under the Act are responsible for making and enforcing rules to ensure compliance with this requirement.

Public Safety

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment he has made of the circumstances in which decision-making involving public safety could be compromised because of the lack of openness to scrutiny by the public or the scientific community of the computer codes which may be involved in that decision-making;

(2) what steps the Government are taking to ensure that decision-making involving public safety is in no way compromised by the commercial secrecy of computer codes which may be involved, directly or indirectly, in that decision-making;

(3) whether he has identified any occasions on which decision-making involving public safety has been compromised because of the lack of openness to scrutiny by the public or the scientific community on computer codes which were involved in that decision-making.

Mr. Forth: In my reply to the hon. Member on 6 November 1989 I described the steps which the Government are taking to encourage the development of suitable standards and guidelines, both at national and international levels, and in particular the work of the Inter-departmental Committee on Software Engineering (ICSE) and its working group on safety-related software, of which my Department and the Health and Safety Executive share the secretariat.

On the relevance of any commercial secrecy pertaining to computer codes, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), (*Official Report*, 2 November 1989, column *358*): under section 20 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, inspectors have powers to make any necessary examination or investigation.

On the question of openness to scrutiny, the public and the scientific community have the opportunity to contribute to the development of the standards which will be used by regulatory bodies and their inspectorates in assessing the safety of systems which rely on computer codes. These standards are evolving and their coverage in the software field is being made more complete. I know of no occasion on which public safety is known to have been endangered by shortcomings in the existing arrangements for software inspection.

RENAVAL Programme

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make an application for support for Tyne and Wear from the European Community's RENAVAL Programme.

Mr. Ridley: In view of clarification I have received about the relationship between RENAVAL grants and other structural funds' support for British industrial areas, I have decided to make to the European Commission a RENAVAL application for Tyne and Wear. My Department will be discussing the proposed programme of measures with the European Commission, local authorities and others concerned.

Mr. Holt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make an application for support for Langbaurgh from the European Community's RENAVAL programme.

Mr. Ridley: In view of clarification I have received about the relationship between RENAVAL grants and other structural funds' support for British industrial areas, I have decided to make to the European Commission a RENAVAL application for Middlesbrough and Langbaurgh districts. My Department will be discussing the proposed programme of measures with the European Commission, local authorities and others concerned.

Company Financial Statements

Mr. Stevens: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will implement section 15 of the Companies Act 1989 to enable listed companies to issue summary financial statements.

Mr. Redwood: My Department has today sent draft regulations to interested organisations for their detailed

comments, and copies have also been placed in the Library. The proposals take account of the responses to the earlier public consultations and I hope that the response to the proposals will allow regulations to be made early in March, to come into force early in April.

Companies Act 1989

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what further plans he has to commence the provisions of the Companies Act 1989.

Mr. Redwood: I have signed an Order which commences certain parts of the Act, including the provision under which regulations will be made for listed companies to issue summarised financial statements to their shareholders. The Order will also complete the commencement of part III (Investigations and Powers to Obtain Information) and part VI (Mergers and Related Matters) of the Act. The effective commencement dates of the provisions commenced in this Order range from 2 February to 1 April 1990. In addition, I plan to make a further Order within the next month to commence the main accounting and certain other provisions of the Act.

Eastern Europe

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if his Department has commissioned any research into the implications and opportunities for British industry to supply equipment and goods to countries of eastern Europe to help repair environmental damage in those countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The European Commission is co-ordinating the Group of 24's package of assistance to Poland and Hungary and consideration is being given to extending the coverage of this assistance to the rest of eastern Europe.

Within the EC's 300 million ecu for Poland and Hungary, specific provision is available to facilitate environmental protection. My Department is encouraging British business fully to exploit these multilateral funds.

Information on specific export opportunities is available under the Department's export intelligence service.

Recycling

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 24 January, *Official Report*, column *699*, if he will list the more than 40 recycling experts who are providing advice to the Government on recycling matters, and indicate what organisations, if any, they represent and why they were selected.

Mr. Forth: The composition of the advisory group has changed slightly since I announced its formation on 22 September 1989. The present members are:

Mike Cohen—Director, Business and the Environment Unit, DTI.
Frank Argent—NAWDC.
Professor Graham Ashworth—The Tidy Britain Group.
Alex Bennett—Plastics and Rubber Institute/Austin Rover Group.
Dr. Robin Bidwell—Environmental Resources Ltd.
Harold Clayton—Hydro Polymers.
Jeff Cooper—Local Authority Recycling Advisory Committee.
Dr. Bill Cook—British Glass Manufacturers Confederation.
Claire Cheney—The Retail Consortium.
Adrian Chalk—Reedpack.
Richard Davis—INCPEN.
Deidre Dowie—Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.
John Elkington—SustainAbility.
Andy Elmer—Association of Metropolitan Authorities.
Lord Ezra—UK Reclamation Council.
Brian Etheridge—Association of District Councils.
Rod Fox—Plas-Tech.
Jo Gordon—National Council for Voluntary Organisations.
Pippa Hyam—Friends of the Earth.
Dr. Alastair Hay—Leeds University.
Dr. David Harris—Aluminium Federation.
Ron Jones—British Plastics Federation.
Brian Kermode—Association of County Councils.
Brian Lymbery—UK2000.
Richard Leveton—British Battery Manufacturers Association/Duracell Batteries.
Cameron McLatchie—Packaging and Industrial Films Association.
John May—British Steel.
David Perchard—David Perchard Associates.
David Peacock—British Paper and Board Industry Federation.
Dennis Smith—Food and Drink Federation.
Peter Stokes—Coca-Cola.
Brian Stone—The Can Makers.
John Winward—Consumers Association.

Members were invited for their individual experience of recycling matters, as well as being representatives of the organisations to which they belong. Several additional experts have been added to this list to sit on working parties examining specific subjects or products.

Single Market

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which representatives from the United Kingdom attended the meeting with Commissioner Millan on 25 January to discuss the EEC Commission/university of Louvain report on the impact of the single market on regions.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 30 January 1990]:* I understand that the following British representatives attended the meeting:

Greater Manchester	Councillor Brotherton
Merseyside	Councillors O'Hara, Rimmer and Watts
South Yorkshire	Councillors Salt, Welch Knight and Cooper
West Yorkshire	Councillor Tricket (Leader, Leeds City Council)
West Midlands	Councillor Davis (Vice-chairman, West Midlands regional Forum)
Fife	Councillor MacDougall (Leader, Fife regional administration).

Mice

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance he proposes for the encouragement of intra-Community trade in mice and rats and for participating in the efforts of the European Community mouse care expert to raise the productivity of the United Kingdom in mice and rats as the single market develops.

Mr. Gummer: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to his related questions today.

HEALTH

National Health Service

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many National Health Service hospitals he has visited in the last 12 months; and if he will name them.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have visited the following National Health Service hospitals since the start of 1989:

Hammersmith Hospital
Addenbrookes Hospital, Cambridge
Queens Medical Centre, Nottingham
Bealeys Hospital, Bury
Hope Hospital, Salford
Seacroft Hospital, Leeds
Countess of Chester Hospital
Hoylake Cottage Hospital
Bassetlaw District General Hospital, Worksop
The London Hospital
Royal Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle
The Freeman Hospital, Newcastle
Newcastle General Hospital

Anaesthetics

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many persons died as a result of being given anaesthetics before operations for each of the last five years; and what percentage they constituted of those anaesthetised during that period.

Mr. Freeman: Information is not available in the exact form requested since of over 3 million cases operated on in National Health Service hospitals in England each year, a very small number, which cannot be readily identified, will not involve any form of anaesthetic. Information about the number of deaths possibly associated with anaesthesia is given in the table:

Categories of deaths coded under the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) ninth revision

	E855.1	*E855.2*	*E876.3*	*E938*
1984	2	0	0	3
1985	3	0	3	0
1986	0	2	2	1
1987	0	4	0	0
1988	1	1	2	1

Source: OPCS death registrations.

E855.1. Accidental poisonings by other drugs acting upon the central and autonomic systems: includes either, gaseous anaesthetics, intravenous anaesthetics, halogenated hydrocarbon derivatives, thiobarbiturates.

E855.2. As above for local anaesthetics; includes cocaine, lidocaine, procaine and tetrocaine.

E876.3. Cases of misadventure during medical care.

E938. Other central nervous system depressants. Correct drug properly administered, but adverse reaction to it.

HIV Infection

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the rates of HIV infection among heterosexuals with no other risk factors in sexually transmitted disease clinics in London.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There are published papers (Loveday et al, *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 298, 18 February 1989, 419-422 and Evans, B. A. et al, *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 296, 13 February 1988), which suggest that the identified prevalence of HIV infection among heterosexuals with no other risk factors in sexually transmitted disease clinics in London in 1987 was rather less than 1 per cent. The numbers in these studies were small and should be treated with great caution. Copies of the papers are available in the Library.

Ambulance Service

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he proposes to publish the report on stress in the ambulance service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Consideration of the final report of the working party on the problems of long-serving ambulance men and women has not yet been completed. I shall consider the question of publication when it has been.

Disabled Persons

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to monitor the implementation of sections 5 and 6 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The Department's social services inspectorate has carried out a number of exercises to monitor the implementation of the Act. The findings of an inspection of the operation of all sections of the Act in force, and a more specific study of the progress of six authorities towards implementation of sections 5 and 6, are due to be published shortly.

Hoax Alarm Calls (Deaths)

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many ambulance men in the past 10 years have been killed; and how many have been injured whilst responding to hoax alarm telephone calls.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally.

NHS (Land and Buildings)

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the valuations of National Health Service land and buildings as at the latest available date.

Mr. Freeman: A valuation of the National Health Service estate was undertaken in 1987 and the figures are available in the Library. New valuations are now in hand in preparation for the introduction of capital charging in 1991.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will outline his statutory responsibilities and those of his Department in relation to food poisoning.

Mr. Freeman: Statutory responsibilities in relation to food poisoning lie in the Food Act 1984, the Public Health (Control of Diseases) Act 1984 and the National Health Service Act 1977.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what part is played by his Department in identifying the causes of trends and figures in the incidence of food poisoning in the United Kingdom;

(2) what responsibilities lie with his Department in regard to monitoring trends in figures in the incidence of cases of food poisoning.

Mr. Freeman: The Department works together with other health and agriculture departments, local authorities and the public health laboratory service to monitor and interpret trends in the incidence of food poisoning and to identify their causes as a basis for considering Government and other action required to protect the health of the public.

Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of Creutzfeldt Jakob disease have been diagnosed in the United Kingdom during each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Freeman: When this illness was last studied in detail for England and Wales (1980-84 inclusive), the incidence of identified and confirmed Creutzfeldt Jakob disease was 0·49 per million. The purpose of the study to be conducted by Dr. R. G. Will, referred to in my reply to the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) on 10 January at column *665*, is to make a more accurate assessment of cases of Creutzfeldt Jakob disease than that available from death certificates alone. Since 1979, Creutzfeldt Jakob disease has been given on death certificates as the underlying cause of death in about 30 deaths a year in England and Wales.

AIDS

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to publish updated short-term predictions of HIV infection and AIDS in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The report of a working group, "Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome in England and Wales to end 1993: Projections Using data to end September 1989" has today been published by the public health laboratory service and a copy has been placed in the Library.

The report concludes that the predicted incidence of AIDS in homosexual men is lower than previously calculated, and that as a result of behavioural change, the probable number of this group infected with HIV is also lower than previously estimated. But the potential for widespread dissemination of HIV still remains, particularly amongst heterosexuals and injecting drug users. The range of future predictions for these groups is wide. This is because the predictions for the continued rate of spread of the epidemic depend on the extent to which individuals change their behaviour, and this is difficult to foresee.

We are at a critical stage in the HIV epidemic, and behavioural change amongst heterosexuals and injecting drug users will be crucial in keeping down the incidence of HIV infection. It is also essential that behavioural changes amongst homosexual men are sustained and reinforced in the future.

We must not allow ourselves to become complacent, or to relax our guard. This report reinforces the messages which we have been giving for some time:

> if the spread of HIV goes unchecked the potential outcome could be devastating..
>
> if people take sensible precautions, and avoid high risk activities, the virus has less opportunity for spreading..
>
> we must continue the work to increase awareness about the serious risks of heterosexual transmission..

The work being carried out by the Health Education Authority and by district health authorities and other local agencies to educate and inform people is therefore vital, so that these behavioural changes take place before it is too late.

We are grateful to Professor Day and members of the working group for their work in preparing revised predictions of HIV infection and AIDS in England and Wales which updates the predictions made by Sir David Cox, published in November 1988.

Ambulance Dispute

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost per ambulance worker of his Department's advertising campaign informing them of their pay offer.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 8 January 1990]:* The cost of the Department's advertising campaign in the national daily press on 27 and 28 November 1989 was £241,441.

It is not sensible to estimate the cost per ambulance man or woman, particularly as the advertisements would have been seen by many other people.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 5 February 1990

NORTHERN IRELAND

Student Loans

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many representations he has received to date supporting the introduction of student loans;

(2) how many representations, including postcards, he has received to date opposing the introduction of student loans.

Dr. Mawhinney: Since the publication of the White Paper "Top-Up Loans for Students" (Cm. 520) in November 1988, a total of 472 representations expressing a variety of views have been received from various sources. Of these, 452 were postcards sent in pursuance of a campaign mounted by student unions.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement indicating the estimated cost of the introduction of student loans in Northern Ireland and outlining the proposed administrative arrangements for such a scheme.

Dr. Mawhinney: There is Estimates provision of some £5·5 million for loans in 1990-91. The Student Loans Company Ltd. will have responsibility for the administration of loans to all eligible students in the United Kingdom and provision will be made for each of the Education Departments to meet its respective proportion of the running costs.

Students' Incomes

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information is available to indicate *(a)* the average student rent in Northern Ireland and *(b)* the average housing benefit received by students in Northern Ireland during term time.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested in *(a)* is not available. The information requested in *(b)* is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Hume: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information is available to indicate the average income levels in Northern Ireland received 12 months after graduation by *(a)* disabled graduates, *(b)* women graduates, *(c)* graduates over 26 years of age and *(d)* all graduates.

Mr. Cope: The information is not available for Northern Ireland.

Social Fund

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will announce the budget available for payments from the discretionary part of the social fund in 1990-91.

Mr. Needham: The total sum will be £21·32 million. The budget for small care grants will be £7·32 million and budget for loans will be £14 million.

Firearms

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many fees have been paid by applicants and for what total sums in respect of *(a)* applications for firearm certificates, *(b)* renewal of firearm certificates and *(c)* variation of firearm certificates; and how much has been repaid in each case because the application was rejected, in each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* The Police Authority for Northern Ireland has informed me that the information is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The total net amount received for all firearms certificate fees and the total refunds are as follows:

Financial year	*Firearms Certificates* £	*Refunds* £
1986-87	605,129	22,975
1987-88	844,132	18,691
1988-89	612,727	20,346

PRIME MINISTER

Food Surpluses

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if she will raise at the next meeting of the European Council the proposed expenditure by the EEC in 1990 of £9,000,000,000 on the disposal of food surpluses;

(2) if she will raise at the next meeting of the European Council the sums being spent on the disposal of food surpluses.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so. The provision of £9 billion in the European Community's budget for the storage and withdrawal of agricultural products and for export refunds represents a reduction in real terms on the Community's 1989 budget. Surplus stocks are now a fraction of what they were at their peak and the proposed expenditure is well within the legally binding guideline which was one of the measures agreed at the February 1988 European Council as part of the process of CAP reform.

I shall certainly continue to take every opportunity to impress upon our Community partners the need for this process of reform to be maintained and for agriculture to be reformed worldwide in the context of the current multilateral trade negotiations.

Trade Imbalance

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Prime Minister if she will indicate in the *Official Report* the representations made to the European Commission by Her Majesty's Government on the need to equalise the adverse imbalance of trade between the United Kingdom and the empire of Japan; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The Government keep in close contact with the European Commission about measures to

improve the Community's balance of trade with Japan. These include measures to sustain the recent shift in the balance of the Japanese economy from exports to domestic demand; the encouragement of Japanese manufacturing investment in the Community; the removal of the remaining barriers to access to the Japanese market; the promotion of business awareness of the opportunities in the Japanese market; and improvement of our business men's skills in the Japanese language.

While the United Kingdom's visible trade deficit with Japan remains high, its rate of growth declined to just 1 per cent. over last year compared with 20 per cent. in 1988; in 1989 United Kingdom exports to Japan almost doubled their rate of growth to over 30 per cent. while the rate of growth of our imports from Japan was more than halved to 9 per cent.

East-West Relations

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister what assessment she has made of the peace dividend accruing to the United Kingdom from changes in East-West relations.

The Prime Minister: The changes taking place in Europe have been made possible in good part by the strength and cohesion of NATO, which will remain the basis for our security. The negotiations in Vienna on conventional forces in Europe should lead to some reductions in NATO's forces. It will be for the Alliance itself to decide how these will be allocated between its members.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Jonathan Greenwood and Sara Coren

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement about the conduct of the Crown's case against Jonathan Greenwood and Sara Coren at Southwark Crown court on 23 January.

The Attorney-General: The legal issues arising from the case are under consideration.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Romania

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance has been given by Her Majesty's Government to Romania *(a)* directly and *(b)* indirectly since the revolution; and if each item can be costed.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have donated a consignment of medical supplies on 24 December and several items of medical equipment since then. We are treating a number of seriously injured young victims of the December fighting for major surgery, at a cost which has yet to be determined. We are contributing about £5·8 million to the food aid and medical supplies packages sent or agreed so far by the EC. The British Council has committed £100,000 for new assistance projects in the cultural field. Further help is under consideration.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs announced on 22 January that the existing know-how fund for Poland and Hungary would be widened to cover other countries of eastern Europe once they are firmly committed to reform. I hope that Romania will qualify for assistance in that context.

Eastern Europe

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how he proposes to ensure that an appropriate part of European Community financial support to east European countries is allocated to the needs of disabled people.

Mr. Maude: EC structural aid to eastern Europe is intended to create market economies and generate wealth to the benefit of all the population. In addition the Community has, responding to requests and needs, provided humanitarian, medical and food aid in particular circumstances, distributed through national authorities.

John McCarthy

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what initiatives the Government are taking in order to secure the release of John McCarthy following reports that he is alive and well; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Member to the Prime Minister's answer of 30 January to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown). We are following up the recent reports about Mr. McCarthy.

Lebanon

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government maintain relations with *(a)* the Syrian-backed Hrawi regime and *(b)* General Aoun's regime in Lebanon; and what information he has as to which regime controls the area in which the British embassy is situated.

Mr. Waldegrave: We maintain relations with President Hrawi and his Government, as the legitimate authority in Lebanon, and informal contacts with other political figures, including General Aoun. The British embassy is in the area controlled by General Aoun.

Syria

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any plans to renew diplomatic relations with Syria.

Mr. Waldegrave: We could not consider restoring diplomatic relations without firm evidence that Syria has given up support for international terrorism.

Lebanese Embassy

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the Syrian interests section of the Lebanese embassy in London is manned by Syrians or Lebanese citizens; and what proportion of the total staff of the Lebanese embassy are in this section.

Mr. Waldegrave: There are eight members of the Lebanese embassy in London with diplomatic status. Of

these, three are Syrian nationals who form the Syrian interests section. There are three British nationals in the British interest section of the Australian embassy in Damascus.

Visa Applications

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if, when evaluating the visa application of a foreigner married to a British citizen, British immigration officials assess the integrity of the British spouse; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what questions British immigration officials ask visa applicants who are married to British citizens, when deciding on the primary purpose of the marriage; and if he will make a statement;

(3) whether the desire of a foreigner married to a British citizen to be reunited with his or her spouse and children constitutes sufficient grounds for the granting of a visa; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: In considering an application for entry clearance from a foreign spouse of a British citizen, the entry clearance officer must be satisfied that the relevant requirements of the immigration rules are met. Depending on whether a visit or settlement was intended, these requirements are set out in paragraphs 22 and 50 of the Immigration Rules (HC 388).

Entry clearance officers have discretion to ask whatever questions are necessary to establish whether an applicant qualifies for admission under the immigration rules. However, in pursuing any particular line of questioning, entry clearance officers are instructed to be at all times alert to the sensitivities of applicants (and sponsors) and to treat them all with courtesy, tact and respect.

Environmental Concerns

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what activities the Government are pursuing through the United Nations to address world scale environmental concerns.

Mr. Waldegrave: We are pursuing through the United Nations, and its organs, a number of activities to protect the global environment. These include matters that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister raised when she addressed the United Nations General Assembly on 8 November 1989, not least preparations for the 1992 United Nations conference on environment and development and the work of the intergovernmental panel on climate change (established by the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Meteorological Organisation). In June we will host the second meeting of the parties to the Montreal protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer which, with its parent convention, is administered by the United Nations Environment Programme.

Namibia

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his assessment of the current political situation in Namibia.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Constituent Assembly has agreed that independence day will be 21 March. Agreement on the constitution is expected shortly.

British Exhibition, Kiev

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in which papers the advertisement on 24 January for Russian speakers for the British exhibition at Kiev was placed; why these were chosen; why it was decided to make the deadline for applications 26 January; how many applications he received; and whether he will take late applications.

Mr. Maude: The FCO placed advertisements for Russian speakers for the British exhibition at Kiev in *The Times Educational Supplement* of 12 January and in *The Independent* of 18 January. *The Independent* repeated the advertisement on 24 January. The two newspapers were chosen for their advertising rates and national circulation.

The deadline for applications was set in order to provide sufficient time to select candidates and to give those chosen adequate notice before they are required for the exhibition. The FCO has to date received 211 applications and will consider late applications from suitably qualified candidates.

ENVIRONMENT

Housing (Research)

89. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to conduct research into the causes of the present numbers of those sleeping rough or in poor-quality temporary accommodation but who are not at present legally classified as homeless.

Mr. Chope: Suitable questions to give further insight into the numbers are to be included in the next (1991) census and decisions will then be made on any necessary further research.

Homelessness

90. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to extend the priority need category of homeless to include those aged 18 years and under.

Mr. Chope: Our review of the homeless legislation concluded that the existing priority need categories were adequate and appropriate to cover the homeless in genuine need. Decisions are for local authorities; they must judge whether young people aged 18 or under are in priority need.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Enviroment if he will make a statement on progress in the allocation of £250 million for the homeless and the relief of homelessness.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 1 February 1990]:* Of the £250 million additional resources announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 15 November, £148 million will be made available for schemes to relieve homelessness in London and the south-east in 1990-91 and £102 million in 1991-92. Housing associations were invited to submit bids for 1990-91 to the Housing Corporation by 22 January and local authorities to my Department by 31 January. The applications are now being assessed and decisions will be issued before the start of the next financial year. A total of £112 million will be allocated to local authority schemes and £36 million to housing associations.

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps the Government are taking to reduce the problem of homelessness, especially among young people and those with a record of mental illness; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: Following our review of the homelessness legislation, additional resources of £250 million are being made available in those areas with the greatest homelessness pressures, in particular to reduce the numbers in bed and breakfast. Local authorities have a duty to secure accommodation for those homeless whom they deem to be vulnerable as a result of mental illness or other special reason, including young people, and some of the additional resources will go to assist these groups. The problems young homeless people face are often complex and are addressed by a range of Government policies. Departments are now looking at how these work together to ensure appropriate assistance is available.

Community Charge

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will introduce regulations to prevent the use of information by a charging authority for purposes other than those associated with the management or collection of the community charge which has been disclosed to a charging authority by a community charges registration officer for the purposes associated with the community charge; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: No, because such regulations are unnecessary. A charging authority may make use of information provided by a community charges registration officer only in accordance with its powers under the Local Goverment Finance Act 1988, and is bound by the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1984.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the level of non-payment of the poll tax in the first year it is due.

Mr. Chope: In the light of the very high level of registration achieved by almost all local authorities, improved arrangements for paying by instalments, and more flexible enforcement powers, the level of payment of the community charge should match or exceed that for domestic rates.

Social Services, Humberside

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the cost to Humberside county of implementing sections 5 and 6 of the Disabled Persons Act; and what was the extent of the allocation for this in central funding for Humberside.

Mr. Chope: The provision we have made in the settlement for local authority personal social services (PSS) takes account of the additional costs of implementing sections 5 and 6 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986. The PSS element of each authority's standard spending assessment is its share of the PSS provision and is calculated in accordance with section 3 of the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England), which was approved by the House of Commons on 18 January 1990.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the impact on the community charge on Humberside to *(a)* compensate for the cut in social services spending allocation for 1990-91 over 1989-90 while maintaining social services at the same level and *(b)* to meet the criticisms in the inspection of child care by social services.

Mr. Chope: Humberside county council's standard spending assessment (SSA) represents an appropriate level of spending for the council to provide a standard level of service consistent with the Government's view of the amount of expenditure which it would be appropriate for authorities generally to incur. The community charge in Humberside would be £278, before safety net adjustments, if the county and districts all spent at the level of their SSA.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was his Department's social services spending allocation for county Humberside for 1990-91; what was the grant-related expenditure allocation for 1989-90; and what are the reasons for the changes between the years.

Mr. Chope: The 1990-91 standard spending assessment (SSA) for social services for the county of Humberside is £60·234 million. The 1989-90 grant-related expenditure assessment (GREA) for social services in Humberside was £61·637 million.

There are several reasons for the difference in the two assessments. The GREA includes a small element for pre-1981-82 debt charges which is covered elsewhere in the SSA formula; the assessment formula has been substantially revised; and the information used in the assessment has been updated.

Housing Demand

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if any estimates have been made of the likely effects on the demand for houses and flats of the future decline in the population of marriageable age together with the effects of the continuing increase in both the number of single parents and the number of broken marriages; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: My Department has published estimates of the future number of households, most recently in "1985 Based Estimates of Numbers of Households in England". These estimates are derived from the official projections of the population, analysed by sex, marital status, and age. They therefore take account of the change in the population of marriageable age, and in divorce rates. They take account also of the proportion of never-married women who head lone-parent households. These demographic influences interact, so their effect on the number of households cannot be estimated individually. The number of households will be a strong influence on the future demand for separate dwellings, but there are other important influences as well, notably changes in income. No estimate has been made of total demand for separate dwellings. The Government have however accepted from the London and south-east regional planning conference a figure of 570,000 for the increase in the housing stock in the south-east region between 1991 and 2001.

Local Government Finance

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state the reasons why, following the publication of table 67 by his Department which illustrated community charges implied by levels of local authority spending then current for 1987-88 and for 1988-89, his Department changed the basis of its estimates for 1989-90 to include only income from rates and Government grants.

Mr. Chope: The illustrative charges for 1989-90 were calculated after the Government had made it clear that income from rates and grants was the likely basis of the expenditure assumption needed for safety nets in 1990-91. The 1989-90 illustrative charges were therefore calculated on this basis, which also gave a consistent comparison between actual average rate bills in 1989-90 and illustrative charges. Figures calculated on the previous basis were placed in the Library on 19 July 1989.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has issued the guidance, referred to in his written answer to the hon. Member for Taunton, *Official Report*, column 27 of 13 November 1989, on the boundary between domestic and non-domestic property; and whether he will place such guidance in the Library.

Mr. Chope: I hope to be able to issue the guidance later this month; a copy will be placed in the Library.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates he has made of the number of people who will be liable to pay standard community charge on unoccupied domestic property.

Mr. Chope: No estimates have been made of this particular category, but we intend to collect information about the standard charge in the regular statistical returns which authorities will be making under the new system.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) which local authorities have stated that they will provide relief from the standard community charge on unoccupied property for a period in excess of three months;

(2) which local authority councils have declared their intention to levy standard community charge at less than twice the personal community charge.

Mr. Chope: This information is not available centrally at present.

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what amount and proportion of the education component of the standard spending assessment for each authority benefiting from an area cost adjustment factor greater than one derives from the operation of that factor: and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The information requested is shown in the table.

Table showing the amount and proportion of the 1990-91 education standard spending assessment deriving from the area cost adjustment factor for authorities with a factor greater than one

Authority	*Amount of Education SSA deriving from the area cost adjustment in £ million* 1	*Percentage of Education SSA deriving from the area cost adjustment* 2
City of London	0·209	25·4
Camden	7·629	14·5
Greenwich	11·894	14·5
Hackney	13·278	14·5
Hammersmith and Fulham	6·594	14·5
Islington	9·285	14·5
Kensington and Chelsea	4·307	14·5
Lambeth	15·253	14·5
Lewisham	12·437	14·5
Southwark	12·315	14·5
Tower Hamlets	13·201	14·5
Wandsworth	12·168	14·5
Westminster	6·428	14·5
Barking and Dagenham	5·136	10·6
Barnet	9·356	10·6
Bexley	7·204	10·6
Brent	11·490	10·6
Bromley	8·434	10·6
Croydon	10·920	10·6
Ealing	10·687	10·6
Enfield	9·406	10·6
Haringey	8·426	10·6
Harrow	6·947	10·6
Havering	7·545	10·6
Hillingdon	7·343	10·6
Hounslow	7·307	10·6
Kingston-upon-Thames	3·854	10·6
Merton	5·011	10·6
Newham	10·467	10·6
Redbridge	7·568	10·6
Richmond-upon-Thames	3·825	10·6
Sutton	5·061	10·6
Waltham Forest	8·685	10·6
Bedfordshire	6·699	3·8
Berkshire	13·449	5·9
Buckinghamshire	10·349	5·0
East Sussex	6·443	3·8
Essex	24·520	5·3
Hampshire	17·299	3·8
Hertfordshire	23·001	7·8
Isle of Wight	1·394	3·8
Kent	20·315	4·4
Oxfordshire	5·781	3·8
Surrey	22·170	8·6
West Sussex	7·833	4·3
Isles of Scilly	0·406	42·9

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what reply the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities will be sending to the letter of 29 January on Manchester and the poll tax from the leader of Manchester city council; whether the Minister's claim that the city council seems intent on setting the highest poll tax it can get away with represents Government policy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I have not yet received any such letter. If authorities spend at the level of their standard spending assessments, the community charge everywhere before safety net adjustment and certain special grants would be about £278. Higher charges will be a consequence of authorities' spending decisions, and authorities will be accountable to their electorate for the level of community charge they introduce.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) further to his answer to the hon. Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) of 17 January, *Official Report*, columns *252-53*, if he will make it his policy to bring forward a community charge capping scheme between the February cycle of local authority meetings and the end of the financial year;

(2) if he will make it his policy to cap local authorities that propose a 1990-91 community charge which is more than 10 per cent. above the Government's target figures for charges.

Mr. Chope: I have nothing to add to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern) on 17 January.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice he has given local councils as they settle their community charges for the forthcoming financial year.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend has made it clear that if some of the horrendously high figures for the community charge being bandied about are in fact set next year, he will have no hesitation in capping the authorities concerned.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give his estimates of *(a)* grant towards local government spending to the Exchequer and *(b)* the total contributed or to be contributed by non-domestic rates for 1988-89, 1989-90, and 1990-91, in a manner consistent with the figures given in the reply of 15 November 1989, *Official Report*, column *242*.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* The available information requested is as follows:

£ million

	1988-89	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
All government grants[1]	17,940	18,545	20,365
Net non-domestic rate yield (including LRT levy)[2]	8,800	9,600	[3]10,500

[1] Figures are not available on a comparable basis to those given in the reply of 15 November 1989, *Official Report*, column *242*. Those figures were based on returns showing outturn on an accruals basis submitted by local authorities. The figures given above are the English component of those published in "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1990-91 to 1992-93" and include payments of Rate/Revenue Support Grant, current specific grants (both inside and outside AEF) and capital grants on a cash basis. The figures for 1989-90 and 1990-91 exclude grants in respect of polytechnics which were transferred from the local authority sector in April 1989.

[2] LRT levy was excluded from figures given in the reply of 15 November 1989. For 1988-89 and 1989-90 these amounts were estimated to be £75 million and £114 million respectively.

[3] The Distributable Amount for 1990-91, gross of the allowance for costs of collection and the City Offset. It is on a comparable basis with figures for earlier years, after taking into account the effects of transitional arrangements.

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the percentage and absolute increase in community charge for every 1 per cent. increase in expenditure incurred over the levels that are covered by central Government grant; and what is the level of charge for *(a)* Northampton and *(b)* Northamptonshire at that level of grant; and if he will tabulate the information also for every district/county in England and Wales.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* Assumed 1990-91 community charges to the nearest pound for every charging authority in England were placed in the Library on 11 January. The assumed charge for Northampton is about £294 after the safety net. County councils will not set community charges. The basis of calculation of the assumed charge is set out in the Revenue Support Grant Transition Report (England).

I have today placed in the Library a table showing for each charging authority in England the increase in community charge, in pound per adult and percentage terms, for a one percentage point increase in spending from the 1989-90 figure, over and above the 4·64 per cent. increase allowed in calculating assumed charges. This shows separately the effect of increases by precepting authorities, including county councils, and by charging authorities.

Gipsies

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many sites for gipsies, and for what numbers, are currently provided in the London borough of Bromley.

Mr. Chope: I understand there is presently one authorised site, providing accommodation for 22 families.

Angell Town Estate

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will approve proposals for estate action housing expenditure for the Angell Town estate.

Mr. Chope: The Department wrote to Lambeth on 1 February 1990 inviting the council to develop further its proposals for a scheme on this estate to be supported by estate action expenditure in 1990-91.

Palace of Westminster

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the damage to the fabric of the Palace of Westminster as a result of the recent storm on 25 January and of its implications for the programme of cleaning and restoration.

Mr. Chope: An assessment of the damage to the fabric of the Palace of Westminster by the recent storm was started as soon as the winds abated. Initial investigations suggest that major damage has been limited to the loss of one pinnacle on the central tower. In falling it caused some damage to roof areas and a window. Work requiring immediate attention has been put in hand.

Until the full results of the investigations are received I am unable to say whether this will have any impact in the programme of cleaning and restoration, but all the indications are that the programme for the work to the Victoria Tower will be unaffected.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has considered the effect on the eyesight of persons working in the Palace of Westminster resulting from diminished light availability because of dirty stonework on the inner courtyards.

Mr. Chope: The level of lighting, whether natural or artificial, provided for those working within the Palace of Westminster is considered sufficient to meet the required standards.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has considered the effect on the health of persons working in the Palace of Westminster resulting from dirty stonework on the inner courtyards.

Mr. Chope: The minimisation of health risks to persons working in the Palace of Westminster is always of paramount concern. I am not aware, however, of any evidence that there have been any health problems caused by the condition of the stonework in the inner courtyards.

Hertfordshire County Council

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out a table showing for each year since 1984-85 the expenditure of Hertfordshire county council in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* constant price terms.

Mr. Chope: The information is as follows:

Rate fund revenue account net current expenditure—Hertfordshire County Council

	Cash £ million	*Real*[1] *(1984-85 prices)* £ million
1984-85	326·6	326·6
1985-86	344·7	327·1
1986-87	378·2	347·2
1987-88	399·3	348·1
1988-89	476·1	387·0
1989-90[2]	498·8	378·9

[1] Using GDP Deflator.
[2] Polytechnics were transferred from the Local Authority Sector in April 1989.

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has yet received the manpower watch return for Hertfordshire county council for the third quarter of 1989.

Mr. Chope: These returns are collected by the Local Authorities' Conditions of Service Advisory Board (LACSAB) on behalf of the joint staffing watch (previously the joint manpower watch). I understand that Hertfordshire county council has not yet provided a return for the third quarter of 1989.

Glis Glis

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 25 January, *Official Report*, column *781*, if he will place in the Library details of the specific conditions applied to the licence for trapping glis glis and, when available, the written report on the licences required by him.

Mr. Trippier: I have placed in the Library a sample copy of one of the current licences to trap glis glis. I will write to the hon. Member with details of the returns from the local authorities when they are available.

Environmental Labelling

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to the reply given to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) on 9 January, *Official Report*, column *589*, (1) if he will estimate the cost of establishing and running the advisory group to study further an environmental labelling scheme and (2) (i) how many individuals will serve on the advisory body, (ii) how many civil servants will support the advisory body and (iii) will the members of the advisory body be *(a)* full or part-time and *(b)* salaried.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The answers are:

(1) no more than £10,000 in 1990-91 to cover travel and subsistence costs of the group's members;
(2) (i) the composition of the group is not yet finalised, but is expected to include some 12 members;
(2) (ii) support from officials is not expected to exceed the equivalent of half a full-time post;
(2) (iii) *(a)* part time; *(b)* unsalaried.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what will be the cost to business of complying with the Government's product eco-labelling scheme.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It is not possible to give any estimates of cost since we are still in the early stages of discussing an eco-labelling initiative at the EC level. We are clear, however, that companies' participation in an eco-labelling scheme should be on a voluntary basis, and any charges made will have to be commercially acceptable if their participation is to be secured.

Nirex (Waste Disposal Site)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information his Department has on Nirex's plan to establish a new site for waste disposal in the north; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In March last year the Government accepted Nirex's report on the development of a deep disposal facility for low and intermediate-level radioactive waste. A copy of the report is in the Library of the House. Nirex is currently awaiting the result of a planning application for the drilling of test boreholes at Dounreay. At Sellafield, the local planning authority has recently approved an application to drill a second investigatory borehole. Only when these site investigations are complete will Nirex be able to submit proposals for a substantive development.

Waste Management Conference

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department will be represented at the Waste Management 90 conference to be held in Tucson, Arizona, between 25 February and 1 March.

Mr. Trippier: We are not aware of this conference, but would be interested to see the details if the hon. Member would care to provide them.

Mortgage Rates

Mr. Clive Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the average gross mortgage rate of the building societies from March 1974 to May 1979; and what was the same rate from June 1979 to January 1990.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The estimated average gross mortgage interest rates of building societies for the periods March 1974 to May 1979 and June 1979 to October 1989 are 10·8 per cent. and 12·4 per cent., respectively.

Water Act 1989

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total value of land and assets privatised under the Water Act 1989; and what were the net proceeds of the sale.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Information on the assets of all the water holding companies was set out in the water share offers prospectus in November 1989. I will report the proceeds of the water share offers and associated costs to Parliament shortly.

Public Footpaths

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will bring forward proposals to increase significantly the severity of sanctions against developers who proceed with works which render public footpaths unusable without securing the necessary legal authority to stop up or divert the path.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Any failure of developers to observe the proper procedures in respect of public rights of way is to be deplored, but powers are already available to enable authorities to take appropriate action in such cases and we are therefore not convinced that further legislation is necessary.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what information he has as to the *(a)* quantities and *(b)* locations of low-level radioactive waste dumped in England outside of Nirex sites; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what is his policy on allowing the dumping of radioactive wastes on sites overlying major aquifers;

(3) what is his policy on permitting the dumping of radioactive waste in ordinary sites close to centres of population;

(4) what mechanism of public consultation is available before dumping of radioactive wastes can proceed on sites which have been given planning permission for domestic landfill.

Mr. Trippier: Any waste disposal site licensed by a waste disposal authority under the Control of Pollution Act 1974 may receive low-level radioactive waste where such a disposal method is authorised by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960. Such authorisations impose strict conditions and activity limits and are issued only after careful assessment is made of the environmental impact of proposed disposals, including any possible impact on water supplies, to ensure that doses to the public are below the maximum permissible limits as recommended by the International Committee on Radiological Protection. Consultation with local and other public authorities is required by the Act before authorisations are issued to non-nuclear premises where the disposal requires special precautions to be taken by any local or public authority.

The Department does not maintain a central record of the quantities of low-level radioactive waste disposed of through local disposal routes nor of specific disposal locations. However, a condition of authorisation requires waste producers to keep proper and detailed records relating to their disposals. These records as well as the premises or sites concerned are subject to scrutiny by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution inspectors and in cases where a disposal requires special precautions to be taken, both Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and local waste disposal authorities are notified by the operator of the nature and destination of individual consignments of radioactive waste due for disposal.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what notification he has received as to the quantities of radioactive waste to be dumped at Arpley Meadows, Warrington.

Mr. Trippier: The quantities of low-level solid radioactive wastes proposed to be disposed of at Walton Arpley landfill site are as follows:—

i. less than 3·5 gigabecquerels per annum of radionuclides of a half-life not exceeding one year; and

ii. less than 1·0 gigabequerels per annum of carbon 14 and tritium.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received over the disposal of low-level radioactive waste at Arpley Meadows, near Warrington.

Mr. Trippier: There have been four representations made to Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution of my Department on the proposals to authorise the disposal of low-level solid radioactive waste at Walton Arpley landfill site. No technical objections have been raised and my Department is fully satisfied that the proposals are sound.

Sewage Treatment

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many sewage treatment plants in England and Wales use the root-zone method to reduce river eutrophication.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The root-zone method of sewage treatment is claimed to be a cost-effective treatment of sewage for small communities. In the United Kingdom it is not primarly used to control the discharge of nutrients and is not noticeably better in this respect than conventional sewage treatment.

I understand that there are currently some 35 trial or test sites in England and Wales at which the process is being evaluated.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance is available for the National Rivers Authority and sewage undertakers on *(a)* controlling the level of phosphates entering rivers and lakes and *(b)* the maximum acceptable concentration of phosphates in rivers and lakes to prevent deleterious effects on waters of high wildlife interest.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The National Rivers Authority is responsible for the quality of rivers and lakes and for controlling discharges into these waters, and makes it own decisions on these matters. There are no national guidelines for rivers and lakes.

National Rivers Authority

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the proportion of the National Rivers Authority budget for 1990-91 which has been allocated for the purposes of promoting the conservation of flora and fauna which are dependent on the aquatic environment.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am informed by the National Rivers Authority that its 1990-91 budget identifies activities estimated to cost £1·282 million which are aimed specifically at conservation of flora and fauna. Further costs incurred in the course of carrying out tasks whose primary aim is not conservation cannot at present be identified.

English Heritage

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will give figures to show section 3A grant payments by English Heritage for 1984-85 to 1990-91 in cash and real terms; and if he will provide similar figures excluding payments to ex-Greater London council properties;

(2) if he will give figures to show the expenditure by English Heritage on the maintenance and repair of historic buildings from 1984-85 to 1990-91 in real terms using 1984-85 as the base year;

(3) if he will give figures to show the expenditure by English Heritage on conservation area and town scheme grants, respectively, in real terms from 1984-85 to 1990-91 using 1984-85 as the base year.

Mr. Trippier: Detailed expenditure figures for section 3A grants, historic building grants generally, and conservation area and town scheme grants are matters for English Heritage. I have asked the chairman, Lord Montagu, to write to the hon. Member.

National Heritage

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the annual grant to the national heritage memorial fund from his Department in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what is the budget figure for 1989-90 and the estimates to 1992-93.

Mr. Trippier: Grant-in-aid to the National Heritage Memorial Fund from the Department is as follows:

£ million

	1984-85	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1990-91*
Annual grant-in-aid	1·5	1·5	1·5	1·5	1·5	1·5
Special allocations	25·0	10·5	—	20·0	—	—

The Office of Arts and Libraries provides an equal amount of annual grant-in-aid to the fund. The special allocation in 1984-85 was to enable the fund to assist in securing the future of three important heritage properties for the nation: Kedleston hall, Nostell priory and Weston park. The special allocations in 1985-86 and 1986-87 were to assist the fund in meeting increased demand on their resources in those years. The latest public expenditure White Paper provides for continuing annual grant-in-aid of £1·5 million in 1991-92 and 1992-93, with a matching provision from the Office of Arts and Libraries.

Uniform Business Rate

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on which of the developments being carried out under the Channel Tunnel Act 1987 the uniform business rate will be payable.

Mr. David Hunt: Once the works are completed, the occupiers of the Channel tunnel and the land, structures and buildings associated with it will become liable to non-domestic rating in the usual way under the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on which of the developments proposed in the British Rail (No. 3) Bill, including the Borough Green loop, the uniform business rate will be payable.

Mr. David Hunt: All the works that British Rail proposes to occupy would form part of its rateable hereditament and contribute to the board's liability for rates.

Mr. Richard Shephard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the net inflow or outflow of uniform business rate revenue for each local authority in England.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 30 January 1990]:* I expect to receive shortly from local authorities their estimates of the likely amount of non-domestic rates which they will collect in 1990-91. Meanwhile I have placed in the Library the Government's own preliminary estimates of the amount which each charging authority in England will collect and the actual amount which each authority will receive from the national non-domestic rating pool. In addition, of course, authorities will receive revenue support grant so that (subject to the effect of the safety net) a standard level of service can broadly be provided everywhere in England for the same community charge. So authorities are compensated for any net outflow of business rate income to the extent necessary to enable them to provide this standard level of service.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received concerning the uniform business rate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend has received a great many representations about the uniform business rate and the non-domestic revaluation. The Government believe that there is general acceptance that the new system will remove the distortions caused by widely varying local poundages and outdated rateable values and will, once the transition is complete, make rates a much more predictable and stable element of business costs than has been the case in the past.

Thomas Harrison Bust

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will call for a report from the director of the Merseyside task force on its handling of the Thomas Harrison bust following its possession of the Lyceum club, Liverpool;

(2) on what basis his Department loaned the Thomas Harrison bust to the Post Office; and if he will make a statement;

(3) when his Department took out an insurance policy on the Thomas Harrison bust, formerly of the Lyceum club, Liverpool.

Mr. Trippier: I shall write to the hon. Member.

Government Buildings (Rates)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish his best estimates of the total amount of non-domestic rate to be paid on Government buildings in *(a)* 1989-90 and *(b)* 1990-91.

Mr. David Hunt: The amount of the contribution in aid of non-domestic rating paid in respect of Crown property in England is estimated as £572·3 million in 1989-90 and £631 million in 1990-91.

Marine Nature Reserves

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will list existing designated marine nature reserves and list the other areas under consideration for such designations.

Mr. Trippier: One statutory marine nature reserve at Lundy island has been designated so far. The Nature Conservancy Council has identified the following additional sites as being suitable for marine nature reserve status: Skomer Island and the Marloes Peninsula; Menai Straits; Loch Sween; St. Abbs Head, Bardsey Island and the Lleyn Peninsula; and the Isles of Scilly.

Archaeological Sites, London

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the activities of treasure hunters on archaeological sites in London.

Mr. Trippier: None. As elsewhere in the country, any person in London wishing to seek objects hidden beneath the surface of a scheduled archaeological site by means of a metal detector must first seek a licence for its use from English Heritage. The last such licence was issued in August 1988.

Environmental Protection (Training)

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department has figures for the number of people employed in training schemes leading to qualifications in environmental protection or environmental improvement techniques for each of the past five years.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Department does not hold figures on the number of people employed in the United Kingdom by a wide range of bodies, both public and private, on environmental protection and improvement activities.

Housing Statistics

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many dwellings were let by local authorities between 1 April 1988 and 31 March 1989 *(a)* to new secure tenants and *(b)* to new secure tenants who were homeless households (1) in inner London, (2) in outer London, (3) in non-metropolitan areas of the south-east, (4) in non-metropolitan areas outside the south-east, (5) in metropolitan areas outside London and (6) in England as a whole;

(2) how many households and how many homeless households, respectively, took up nominations by local authorities between 1 April 1988 and 31 March 1989 (1) in inner London, (2) in outer London, (3) in non-metropolitan areas of the south-east, (4) in non-metropolitan areas outside the south-east, (5) in metropolitan areas outside London and (6) in England as a whole;

(3) how many households local authorities accepted between 1 April 1988 and 31 March 1989 *(a)* as homeless and *(b)* as homeless and in priority need (1) in inner London, (2) in outer London, (3) in non-metropolitan areas of the south-east, (4) in non-metropolitan areas outside the south-east, (5) in metropolitan areas outside London and (6) in England as a whole;

(4) how many households were registered on local authority housing waiting lists on 1 April 1989 *(a)* in inner London, *(b)* in outer London, *(c)* in non-metropolitan areas of the south-east, *(d)* in non-metropolitan areas outside the south-east, *(e)* in metropolitan areas outside London and *(f)* in England as a whole;

(5) how many local authority dwellings *(a)* were vacant and available for letting on 1 April 1988 and *(b)* became available for letting between 1 April 1988 and 31 March 1989 (i) through new build, (ii) through acquisition or conversion and (iii) through other means (1) in inner London, (2) in outer London, (3) in non-metropolitan areas of the south-east, (4) in non-metropolitan areas outside the south-east, (5) in metropolitan areas outside London and (6) in England as a whole;

(6) how many dwellings were let by local authorities between 1 April 1988 and 31 March 1989 *(a)* to new non-secure tenants and *(b)* to new non-secure tenants who were homeless households (1) in inner London, (2) in outer London, (3) in non-metropolitan areas of the south-east, (4) in non-metropolitan areas outside the south-east, (5) in metropolitan areas outside London and (6) in England as a whole;

(7) how many dwellings were let between 1 April 1988 and 31 March 1989 *(a)* in total and *(b)* to homeless households (i) through the national mobility scheme; (ii) through the housing association liaison office and (iii) through other mobility schemes (1) in inner London, (2) in outer London, (3) in non-metropolitan areas of the south-east, (4) in non-metropolitan areas outside the south-east, (5) in metropolitan areas outside London and (6) in England as a whole;

(8) how many dwellings were let by local authorities between 1 April 1988 and 31 March 1989 to homeless households referred by other local authorities under the Housing Act 1985 part III, section 68 *(a)* in inner London, *(b)* in outer London, *(c)* in non-metropolitan areas of the south-east, *(d)* in non-metropolitan areas outside the south-east, *(e)* in metropolitan areas outside London and *(f)* in England as a whole.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* Following are estimates from local authorities' annual housing investment programme returns (HIP1) for April 1989:

Local authority lettings 1 April 1988 to 31 March 1989

	Inner London	*Outer London*	*Non-metropolitan areas in South East*	*Non-metropolitan areas outside South East*	*Metropolitan areas outside London*	*England*
Dwellings let to:						
New secure tenants	15,500	11,900	26,200	78,500	89,600	221,700
of which homeless households	9,400	7,200	7,400	18,500	19,300	61,800
New non-secure tenants	3,700	1,600	3,300	3,600	1,500	13,700
of which homeless households	3,000	1,500	2,800	2,600	600	10,400
Dwellings let through:						
National mobility or local authority mobility scheme (NMS/LAMS)	2,300	1,100	1,000	2,300	1,800	8,600
of which homeless households	1,000	200	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	1,200
Housing association liaison office (HALO)	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
of which homeless households	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Other mobility schemes	100	100	200	300	100	800
of which homeless households	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Dwellings let to homeless households referred by other local authorities under section 68, Housing Act 1985 between 1 April 1988 and 31 March 1989	300	200	100	200	200	1,000
Nominations to housing associations	2,000	1,300	1,400	5,300	7,800	17,800
of which homeless households	900	500	100	400	800	2,600
Total households accepted as homeless 1988-89	17,500	11,600	16,600	33,500	38,300	117,400
of which in priority need	16,400	11,300	15,800	31,800	31,800	107,200
Households on waiting lists at 1 April 1989	139,900	104,200	205,000	488,000	313,000	1,250,000
Dwellings vacant and available for letting on 1 April 1988	2,600	1,600	3,600	8,000	8,800	24,600
Dwellings coming into management during 1988-89 which were:						
(a) Newly built	900	800	6,400	6,300	1,700	16,200
(b) Acquisition etc.	1,100	800	2,000	4,400	4,700	13,000
Other dwellings which became available for letting	31,800	24,400	55,700	138,100	154,100	404,000
Total dwellings available for letting 1 April 1988 to 31 March 1989	36,500	27,600	67,600	157,000	169,300	457,900

[1] Less than 50.

Local Government Finance (Eastbourne)

Mr. Gow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what reply he has sent to the letter dated 14 December 1989 from the treasurer of Eastbourne borough council concerning the figure for the resident population of the borough for the purpose of calculating its standard spending assessment; and if he will make an amending report.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 1 February 1990]:* This letter was acknowledged and treated as a representation from the council about the intended contents of the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England). My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State considered the council's point, along with those of other authorities which had made representations, before reaching his decisions. Those decisions were embodied in the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England) laid before the House on 11 January and approved on 18 January. A copy of that report has been sent to Eastbourne borough council.

My right hon. Friend decided not to adopt the suggestion put forward by the council but to use population estimates produced by the Registrar General for England and Wales as he initially proposed. We have no plans to change this or to make an amendment report at present.

Correspondence

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth will receive a reply to his letter dated 27 November 1989 referring to Rugby borough council.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 1 February 1990]:* I have written to my hon. Friend today.

Mortgage Repossessions

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the numbers of mortgage repossessions taken by *(a)* building societies and *(b)* local authorities in each year since 1979.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 1 February 1990]:* The information is as follows:—

(a) Mortgage repossessions by building societies: United Kingdom

Year	*Number*	*As a percentage of loans at end of period*
1979	2,530	0·048
1980	3,020	0·056
1981	4,240	0·077
1982	5,950	0·105
1983	7,320	0·123
1984	10,870	0·171
1985	16,770	0·250
1986	20,930	0·296
1987	22,930	0·319
1988	16,150	0·215
1989[1]	6,350	0·083

[1] First half.

(b) Mortgage repossessions by local authorities: England

Year	*Number*	*As a percentage of loans at end of period*
1979-80	1,100	n/a
1980-81	1,000	0·14
1981-82	1,100	0·16
1982-83	950	0·14

Year	Number	As a percentage of loans at end of period
1983-84	840	0·13
1984-85	570	0·10
1985-86	630	0·13
1986-87	490	0·12
1987-88	330	0·10
1988-89	170	0·06

n/a = Not available.

In addition some 100 to 150 additional properties reverted to local authority ownership as a result of vesting.

Children at Risk

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby of 30 January, if he will list the factors taken into account in the children at risk index; and how they have operated in the case of the figure given in his answer for Humberside.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 2 Februrary 1990]:* The factors which are taken into account in calculating the children at risk index are as follows:

(i) the number of children aged under 18 years of age resident in each authority;
(ii) the proportion of children living in private households containing a lone parent;
(iii) the proportion of children dependent on a claimant receiving Supplementary Benefit or Income Support;
(iv) the proportion of children living in private housholds in rented accommodation.

The weight given to each of these indicators and full details of the children's social services standard spending assessment are given in the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England), a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby of 30 January on the Humberside and national average figures for children at risk, what factors have caused the SSA allocation for child care for Humberside to be lower than the preceding grant-related expenditure allocation.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 2 February 1990]:* I refer the hon. Member to my separate answer to him on 30 January at column *171*.

Archaeological Sites, London

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with the Metropolitan police about investigating thefts from scheduled archaeological sites in London.

Mr. Trippier: None. Neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State nor his advisers English Heritage have received any reports of thefts from scheduled archaeological sites in London. My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State has announced the Government's intention to seek legislation to strengthen controls over scheduled sites by making it an offence to remove any finds whether or not discovered by a metal detector. At present objects may be removed from a scheduled site without consent, if found on the surface. The general laws of trespass and theft apply to archaeological sites that are not scheduled as they do elsewhere.

Sewage Sludge

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the maximum levels of *(a)* mercury and *(b)* lead allowed in sewage sludge to be dumped at sea.

Mr. Curry: Current United Kingdom licences for disposal of sewage sludge to sea set a maximum total annual input of 2·7 tonnes of mercury and 248 tonnes of lead.

The quantities of these metals entering the North sea in sewage sludge dumping is only about 1 per cent. of the total inputs of these metals to the North sea, most of which result from river discharges from continental countries, atmospheric inputs and disposals of dredged spoil.

London Regional Transport

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each London local authority *(a)* the amount reduced from their grant in 1990-91 to fund London Regional Transport and *(b)* the amount of the levy upon them in 1989-90; and on what basis he has calculated the reduced grant figure.

Mr. Chope: The grant for 1990-91 of London local authorities has not been reduced to fund London Regional Transport (LRT). The cost of funding LRT which until 1989-90 fell on London ratepayers through the LRT levy will, from April 1990, be borne by the Exchequer; this is reflected in the total amount of revenue support grant for 1990-91. The LRT levy was 9·06p in 1989-90; I estimate that it will yield about £188·6 million.

The Standard Spending Assessments (SSAs) for 1990-91 of London boroughs and the City of London have been reduced by the equivalent of about £24 per adult to reflect the fact that these authorities do not provide support for public transport. The basis of this calculation is set out in the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England) laid before the House on 11 January. The total reduction is £121·275 million.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Property Services Agency and Crown Suppliers Bill

83. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he has any conveniently available figures for the costs of running the Property Services Agency and Crown Suppliers Bill Committee stage after 9 pm.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: It is not possible to identify separately such costs.

Recycled Paper

84. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Lord President of the Council what percentage of paper used for official duties in the House of Commons is recycleable.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: All the paper that is provided by Her Majesty's Stationery Office for official use in the House of Commons can be recycled. The Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee is considering ways in which recycled material can be used more widely for House stationery and parliamentary publications.

Pedestrian Crossing

85. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will ask Westminster city council to provide a further pedestrian crossing to facilitate safe crossing from Old Palace Yard and other Members' offices to the Palace of Westminster near the House of Lords entrance.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee is at present considering a proposal from Westminster city council for the installation of various traffic and pedestrian management schemes in and around Parliament square designed to speed up traffic flow. I understand that the installation of a pedestrian crossing from Old Palace Yard would run counter to these proposals.

Lancashire

86. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Lord President of the Council how many debates on Lancashire there have been in the last 12 months.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: In the 12 months to 31 January, four Adjournment debates related specifically to Lancashire.

Members' Staff (Employment Contracts)

87. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Lord President of the Council how many reminder notices have been sent by the Fees Office to hon. Members about the need for contracts of employment in respect of staff paid via the Fees Office.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Reminder notices were sent to all Members in March 1988. In November 1989 further reminder letters were sent to 333 Members in respect of 523 employees (secrataries and research assistants) in respect of whom statements of main conditions of employment, and so on, were still outstanding. Additionally, since March 1988, Members engaging new staff have, where necessary, been individually reminded of the requirement to provide such statements.

Westminster Hall

88. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will initiate a review of the uses of Westminster Hall.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: If the hon. Member has a specific proposal he should, in the first instance, address it to the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee.

Queen's Consent

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will list the Bills so far requiring the Queen's Consent this Session on *(a)* Second Reading and *(b)* Third Reading.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Of the Bills introduced in the Commons and printed so far this Session, the Reform of the House of Lords Bill will require the Queen's Consent on Second Reading: and the Agricultural Holdings (Amendment) Bill, the Enterprise and New Towns (Scotland) Bill, the Environmental Protection Bill, the Landlord and Tenant (Licensed Premises) Bill, the Property Services Agency and Crown Suppliers Bill, and the Social Security Bill will require the Queen's consent on Third Reading.

Members' Staff

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Lord President of the Council (1) how many research assistants are currently employed by hon. Members;

(2) how many secretaries are currently employed by hon. Members.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The total number of persons employed by hon. Members and paid directly from the Members' office costs allowance is currently 1,270. Since job titles ascribed to Members' employees vary considerably and do not conveniently fit into the categories specified, it is not possible to provide a meaningful breakdown.

Library (Beetles)

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will investigate whether there is any evidence of the Australian spider beetle Ptinus Tectus or the bread beetle Stegobium Paniceum in the books in the Library; and what steps he is taking to avoid damage to the books by these beetles.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The House of Commons Library has a continuous cleaning and conservation programme for its books, which up to now has afforded no evidence of infestation by beetles. However, in the light of current concern, Library staff have already been asked to be alert for any signs of beetle activity. Appropriate control measures would be taken immediately if any such evidence came to light.

Secondhand books acquired by the Library will be examined for any signs of paper decay before they are added to stock, and similar provisions will be adopted for older books borrowed for Members from other libraries.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

St. Luke's School, West Norwood

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what consideration he gave to the need to alter and extend St. Luke's school, West Norwood, when considering the building programme approved for Lambeth for 1990-91.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. Friend took careful account of the proposal put forward by Lambeth for a building project at St. Luke's school, West Norwood. Although we increased the amount available for new voluntary aided building works in 1990-91 by 17 per cent. compared with 1989-90, project bids exceeded the resources available. Priority was given first to projects for additional school places in areas of population growth, then to building work which governors have a statutory duty to undertake as a result of proposals approved under section 13 of the Education Act 1980 and, thirdly, to projects for the improvement or replacement of inadequate buildings.

The project at St. Luke's fell in the third category and was one of a number of projects in that category which could not be accommodated in the 1990-91 programme.

Oxburgh Report

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he has taken to implement the Oxburgh report on earth sciences.

Mr. Jackson: Implementation of the report on the rationalisation of universities' earth sciences departments is a matter for the Universities Funding Council, in consultation with the institutions concerned.

Salary Arrears

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science who will be responsible for discharging the Inner London education authority's responsibilities after 31 March 1990 in respect of any salary arrears due to *(a)* teachers in schools and *(b)* teachers in colleges of further education.

Mrs. Rumbold: In general, liabilities in relation to salary arrears of teachers in ILEA-maintained schools or colleges of further education will become the responsibility of the new inner London education authorities from 1 April.

Haberdashers' Aske's CTC

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what further advice or undertakings he has given in respect of the payment of transitional and capital costs for the proposed Haberdashers' Aske's city technology college as a result of his meeting with representatives of the Haberdashers' Company this week.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Member to the replies that I gave on 15 and 23 January 1990. Discussions with the Haberdashers' Company have followed the line adopted in these replies.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) when he anticipates receiving curriculum proposals for the Haberdashers' Aske's city technology college;

(2) when he anticipates receiving the results of a detailed feasibility study for the proposed Haberdashers' Aske's city technology college.

Mrs. Rumbold: In order to equip the Haberdashers' Aske's school to open as a city technology college (CTC) in September 1991, detailed studies will be required related to the adaptation of buildings and to the CTC's organisation and curriculum. Preliminary studies have been commissioned but are not yet complete.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he anticipates that a governing body for the proposed Haberdashers' Aske's city technology college will be formed.

Mrs. Rumbold: The timing of the formation of the governing body of the Haberdashers' Aske's city technology college is a matter for the Haberdashers' Aske's City Technology College Trust. My right hon. Friend expects that a governing body will be in existence for the opening of the college in September 1991.

Primary Schools

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what guidelines his Department gives local education authorities on the relationship between planning total primary school numbers and the rising five intakes in the autumn, spring and summer terms.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Department has issued no such guidance. It is up to local education authorities to decide when to admit children under five to schools, and to make plans for primary provision accordingly.

Voluntary-aided Status

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list those schools which have current applications for voluntary-aided status; and when he expects to make a decision on the applications.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The schools are listed in the table. My right hon. Friend will reach a decision on the proposals as quickly as is compatible with a full and careful consideration of all the issues involved. He has stated that it is his intention to come to a decision on statutory proposals within five months of publication wherever possible. Delays in some cases arise from factors outside the Department's control.

Proposals to establish new Voluntary Aided Schools (including amalgamations of existing schools)

Date published	*LEA*	*Name of Proposed School (if known)*
19 December 1989	Avon	New CE/Methodist Primary
12 February 1987	Barnet	Hasmonean (Jewish) Preparatory
24 April 1986	Brent	Islamia (Muslim) Primary
24 August 1989	Cheshire	St. Joseph's RC Secondary
28 September 1989	Cheshire	Macclesfield Tytherington CE Primary
6 September 1989	Cornwall	St. Petroc's CE Primary
1 November 1989	Derbyshire	Nagle RC Primary
13 September 1989	Devon	Devonport CE Comprehensive
15 April 1989	Kirklees	Zakaria Muslim Girls' High
12 July 1989	Leeds	13 new CE Primary and two new CE secondary schools
15 September 198	Liverpool	New CE Primary
20 January 1989	Norfolk	St. Mary's RC Primary
5 May 1989	Oxfordshire	St. Mary's CE Primary
19 October 1989	Salford	St. James's RC Primary
19 October 1989	Salford	St. Mary's RC Primary
3 August 1989	Sefton	Crosby RC Primary
13 December 1989	Trafford	New RC Secondary school
27 October 1989	Wakefield	St. Austin's RC Primary

Proposals to Change Status from Voluntary Controlled to Voluntary Aided

Date published	*LEA*	*Name of Proposed School (if known)*
4 October 1989	Cheshire	Davenham CE Primary
18 August 1989	Kingston-upon-Thames	St. Mary's CE Primary

Local Management Schemes

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table to show such information as he has to hand from the schemes of local management of schools submitted for his approval by education authorities under the headings *(a)* the value of the general schools budget; *(b)* the value of the mandatory exceptions; *(c)* the value of the aggregate schools budget; *(d)* *(b)* as a percentage of *(a)*; and *(e)* *(c)* as a percentage of *(a)*.

Mrs. Rumbold *[pursuant to her reply, 8 January 1990, c. 485]:* The following information has been taken from the local management of schools scheme submissions made by local education authorities to my right hon. Friend. The table gives the percentage figures requested; it is not possible to provide comparative cash figures because the information has been supplied using a variety of price bases.

The full information requested by my hon. Friend, relating to 1990-91 budgets, will be available in the spring from statements published by all local education authorities with approved schemes under section 42 of the Education Reform Act.

Local education authority	*Mandatory exceptions as percentage of general schools budget*	*Total discretionary exceptions as percentage of general schools budget*	*Aggregated schools budget as percentage of general schools budget*
Westminster	6·05	22·47	71·48
Barking	5·51	24·63	69·86
Barnet	10·58	21·02	68·40
Bexley	17·15	16·87	65·98
Brent	16·21	20·68	63·11
Bromley	15·86	19·30	64·84
Croydon	10·82	20·57	68·61
Ealing	6·45	20·03	73·52
Enfield	20·65	17·86	61·49
Haringey	n/a	n/a	n/a
Harrow	10·20	18·16	71·64
Havering	7·71	18·87	73·42
Hillingdon	20·43	20·67	58·90
Hounslow	14·98	22·40	62·62
Kingston	9·64	20·87	69·49
Merton	15·58	17·94	66·48
Newham	21·70	21·21	57·09
Redbridge	16·23	17·86	65·91
Richmond	11·12	20·57	68·31
Sutton	20·58	20·42	59·00
Waltham Forest	20·35	20·27	59·38
Birmingham	10·75	21·16	68·09
Coventry	19·75	21·37	58·88
Dudley	13·97	18·05	67·98
Sandwell	8·96	21·85	69·19
Solihull	14·75	20·37	64·88
Walsall	13·36	17·46	69·18
Wolverhampton	12·64	22·46	64·90
Knowsley	9·62	18·67	71·71
Liverpool	6·66	19·94	73·40
St. Helens	12·09	23·74	64·17
Sefton	7·79	15·62	76·59
Wirral	10·14	19·09	70·77
Bolton	10·99	18·13	70·88
Bury	11·21	20·60	68·19
Manchester	14·31	19·72	65·97
Oldham	12·67	23·04	64·29
Rochdale	14·80	19·24	65·96
Salford	14.15	19·95	65·90
Stockport	11·76	16·34	71·90
Tameside	10·53	20·92	68·55
Trafford	23·94	17·85	58·21
Wigan	7·01	17·50	75·49
Barnsley	7·03	24·46	68·51
Doncaster	5·78	24·48	69·74
Rotherham	8·59	19·15	72·26
Sheffield	11·95	22·76	65·29
Bradford	17·91	17·68	64·41
Calderdale	16·17	23·41	60·42
Kirklees	11·24	22·93	65·83

Local education authority	Mandatory exceptions as percentage of general schools budget	Total discretionary exceptions as percentage of general schools budget	Aggregated schools budget as percentage of general schools budget
Leeds	15·25	17·54	67·21
Wakefield	9·18	23·33	67·49
Gateshead	11·06	19·54	69·40
Newcastle	12·55	24·05	63·40
North Tyneside	9·32	21·80	68·88
South Tyneside	11·68	26·38	61·94
Sunderland	9·47	19·18	71·35
Isles of Scilly	n/a	n/a	n/a
Avon	10·91	23·49	65·60
Bedfordshire	15·86	16·58	67·56
Berkshire	14·77	16·98	68·25
Buckinghamshire	14·53	16·51	68·96
Cambridgeshire	13·69	22·18	64·13
Cheshire	8·54	21·02	70·44
Cleveland	9·46	20·35	70·19
Cornwall	12·57	21·87	65·56
Cumbria	11·58	27·13	61·29
Derbyshire	7·16	26·17	66·67
Devon	7·82	23·26	68·92
Dorset	10·13	22·74	67·13
Durham	8·19	22·90	68·91
East Sussex	9·74	23·44	66·82
Essex	11·10	17·93	70·97
Gloucestershire	9·81	20·88	69·31
Hampshire	16·33	16·07	67·60
Hereford and Worcester	12·58	19·87	67·55
Hertfordshire	9·49	23·25	67·26
Humberside	7·47	19·72	72·81
Isle of Wight	13·33	22·37	64·30
Kent	9·47	16·62	73·91
Lancashire	11·81	20·93	67·26
Leicestershire	11·60	21·55	66·85
Lincolnshire	10·17	16·60	73·23
Norfolk	8·09	19·05	72·86
North Yorkshire	6·67	23·95	69·38
Northamptonshire	11·30	16·46	72·24
Northumberland	9·52	22·42	68·06
Nottinghamshire	7·97	22·97	69·06
Oxfordshire	8·73	19·70	71·57
Shropshire	9·05	19·94	71·01
Somerset	13·72	20·32	65·96
Staffordshire	11·09	22·35	66·56
Suffolk	14·91	18·82	66·27
Surrey	6·45	22·68	70·87
Warwickshire	5·55	21·95	72·50
West Sussex	11·77	13·26	74·97
Wiltshire	12·34	18·10	69·56

n/a = Not available.

ENERGY

Sizewell B

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a further statement on the timetable for commissioning and the future of Sizewell B power station in Suffolk.

Mr. Baldry: The Government attach the highest importance to the completion and operation of Sizewell B by Nuclear Electric. The commissioning of the station will be a matter for the company.

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list all organisations which have advised or are now advising his Department on any aspect of the privatisation of electricity, giving in each case the dates of their involvement and, in each case, the aspect on which they advise.

Mr. Wakeham: The information is as follows:

Adviser	Area	From	To
Kleinwort Benson	Financial	1987	continuing
Touche Ross	Regulatory and Accounting	August 1987	continuing
Slaughter & May	Legal	August 1987	continuing

Adviser	Area	From	To
Professor Littlechild	Regulatory	November 1987	May 1989
James Capel	Lead Brokers	May 1988	continuing
Lowe Bell	Marketing and Public Relations	July 1988	continuing
Merz & McLellan	Technical	August 1987	continuing
Lloyds Bank	Receiving Bank and Registrar	August 1988	continuing
Deloitte Haskins & Sells	Reporting Accountants	1988	continuing
Price Waterhouse	Reporting Accountants	1988	continuing
Peat Marwick Mclintock	Reporting Accountants	1988	continuing
Binder Hamlyn	Reporting Accountants	1988	continuing
Ernst & Whinney	Reporting Accountants	1988	continuing
Coopers & Lybrand	Reporting Accountants	1988	continuing
Spicer & Oppenheim	Reporting Accountants	1988	continuing
Touche Ross	Reporting Accountants	1988	continuing
BMRB	Market Research	August 1988	continuing
Davis Polk & Wardwell	United States Lawyers	September 1988	continuing
Russell Reynolds	Headhunters Chair NEEB	December 1988	February 1989
Osler Renault	Canadian Lawyers	February 1989	continuing
Anderson Mori & Rabinowitz	Japanese Lawyers	March 1989	continuing
Goldman Sachs	United States Financial	December 1988	continuing
Wood Gundy	Canadian Financial	March 1989	continuing
Nomura	Japanese Financial	March 1989	continuing
Credit Suisse First Boston	European Financial	June 1989	continuing
Saxton Bampfylde	Headhunters	1989	1989
	DG Electricity Supply NORWEB	June 1989	October 1989
Price Waterhouse	Common Areas	1988	continuing
The VPI Group	Joint Marketing Advisers successor generation Comp's	February 1989	January 1990
Jones Lang Wootton	Property adviser	March 1989	continuing
UKAEA	AGR output	September 1989	October 1989
Nuclear Services Group	Decommissioning costs	1989	1989
Lamb and Edge	Property Valuers	June 1989	continuing
Grimley J. R. Eve	Property Valuers	June 1989	continuing
Gerald Eve	Property Valuers	June 1989	continuing
Knight Frank Rutley	Property Valuers	June 1989	continuing
Weatherall Green & Smith	Property Valuers	June 1989	continuing
Debenham Tewson & Cheshire	Property Valuers	June 1989	continuing
Hartnell Taylor & Cook	Property Valuers	June 1989	continuing
Connell Hallum & Brackett	Property Valuers	June 1989	continuing
Matthews & Goodman	Property Valuers	June 1989	continuing
Cook & Arkwright	Property Valuers	June 1989	continuing

Adviser	*Area*	*From*	*To*
Bernard Thorpe	Property Valuers	June 1989	continuing
Henry Butcher	Property Valuers	June 1989	continuing
Lloyd Northover	Design Consultants	January 1990	continuing
Coopers & Lybrand	Salary advisers	July 1989	continuing
Williams Lee	Printing Advice	April 1989	continuing
Dewe Rogerson	Marketing and Public Relations	February 1990	continuing

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list all the organisations known by his Department to have advised or now to be advising any parts of the electricity supply industry on any aspects of privatisation, giving in each case the dates of their involvement and the aspect on which they have advised.

Mr. Wakeham: This is a matter for the industry. I have therefore asked the Electricity Council, in respect of the area boards, and the CEGB, in respect of National Power, PowerGen and the National Grid Company, to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what co-ordination there is between the electricity industry and his Department on privatisation advertising.

Mr. Wakeham: Advertising by the industry to promote its goods and services is a matter for the industry itself. Currently there is no advertising for the forthcoming offers for sale. I have, jointly with the electricity supply industry, appointed Dewe Rogerson to develop and co-ordinate a marketing strategy and we shall consider the need for advertising in the light of this strategy.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the current estimate of the total fees which will be paid by his Department in the course of electricity privatisation.

Mr. Wakeham: Total costs of privatisation will be made available once flotation has been completed. Expenditure to the end of March 1989 amounted to £6·3 million and provision has been made for £30 million for the current year. Latest forecasts of requirements for 1990-91 will be published as part of the supply Estimates in March.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy why his officials have briefed the press that the value of the electricity supply industry for privatisation will be £7 billion; and how this valuation was arrived at.

Mr. Wakeham: The Government have not published estimates of the value of the electricity supply industry. It would be premature to do so, since the value will depend on many factors, including market conditions at the time of the sale.

Electricity Prices

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions he, or his officials, have had with the electricity supply industry about electricity price increases this year.

Mr. Wakeham: Ministers and officials have had many discussions with the industry on a wide range of subjects.

Coal-fired Power Station, Bilsthorpe

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, further to his reply on 29 January, *Official Report*, column 13, what information he has received from British Coal on the cancellation of the proposal to build a coal-fired power station at Bilsthorpe; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Decisions on the investment in the joint venture power station at Bilsthorpe are a matter for the partners involved. I am not aware of any decision to cancel the project.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Eastern Europe (Aid)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) whether he will provide updated public expenditure estimates for the Overseas Development Administration and for the component of overseas aid, in the light of Government commitment for economic assistance to eastern Europe, which were not fully included in table 2.1 of Cm 1002, "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1990-91 to 1992-93";

(2) whether the estimated total expenditure for the Overseas Development Administration will be increased in the light of recent commitments for economic assistance to eastern Europe; from which reserves any aid to eastern Europe will be paid for; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Table 2.1 of Cm. 1002 lists the provision of £5 million in respect of the original commitment of the Polish know-how fund of £25 million over five years. The expenditure implications of the specific new commitments to eastern Europe since the survey will be reflected in next year's public expenditure White Paper. For 1990-91 we expect to seek main Estimates provision for assistance to eastern Europe of £15 million to cover expenditure under the know-how fund. Supplementary Estimate provision for 1990-91 and later years may be sought when the public expenditure implications of other commitments, such as that for the Polish agricultural project, are clearer.

DEFENCE

Low-flying Exercises

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the minimum length of time within which aircrew can acquire the appropriate training and requisite skills necessary for participation in low-flying exercises; and whether the appropriate training and requisite skills specified for these exercises differ from those required for exercises which do not involve low flying.

Mr. Neubert: No specific length of time is set for aircrew to acquire the appropriate training and requisite skills necessary for participation in low-flying exercises. As aircrew progress through training, the exercises that are undertaken will depend on the experience level of the individual aircrew concerned and the stage of training that they have reached. Low-flying training is designed to ensure that the aircrew concerned acquire the skills needed to meet the particular demands of the low-level environment.

Nuclear Submarines

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he is planning to recall any of the Polaris submarines for safety checks of their nuclear reactors.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No submarines are being recalled from operational tasks. Following the recent discovery of a technical defect in one of our nuclear-powered submarines, all such vessels are, however, being inspected as a precautionary measure when they come alongside.

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he is planning to retire Britain's two Valiant class submarines.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: These vessels will be retired at the end of their useful operational life.

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the integrity of Royal Navy nuclear-powered submarines' reactor-cooling circuits.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not our practice to comment on specific features of the Royal Navy's nuclear-powered submarines. These vessels are, however, designed and operated in accordance with rigorous safety standards.

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessment has been made of the risk to Royal Navy submarine personnel from radiation leaks.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Government attach very high priority to the safety of the crews of Royal Navy nuclear-powered submarines, which operate in accordance with rigorous safety standards. All Royal Navy nuclear-powered submarines and personnel, where appropriate, are subject to stringent monitoring procedures.

Colin Wallace

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is the total number of documents relating to Colin Wallace which have been discovered; what were the dates when each was found; and when Ministers were notified on each occasion;

(2) what month early in 1989 the documents relating to Colin Wallace were discovered, by whom, where and when this information was given to Ministers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the information which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence set out in a letter dated 2 February 1990 to the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone), a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, in the light of the additional information which has now become available on the issues raised by Colin Wallace, he will reassess the answers provided by his Department's Ministers to the hon. Member for Southend, East on the complaints by Captain Fred Holroyd.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Papers recently found on Mr. Wallace do not affect answers given on the complaints made by Mr. Holroyd on his own behalf.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the nature of the file provided on behalf of Colin Wallace to his Department and to the Prime Minister's office late in 1984; and what was the nature of the inquiry then initiated.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The file contained a selection of background information concerning Mr. Wallace's allegations. These papers were considered by officials and a reply was sent to Mr. Holroyd from the Prime Minister's office.

HOME DEPARTMENT

AIDS

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress of his AIDS education programme among *(a)* prison officers and *(b)* prisoners.

Mr. Waddington: A resource package, "AIDS Inside", designed for prison officers has been in use since August 1987. The package is used in the initial training of new entrant prison officers and in the development training programmes of individual establishments. The target for governors in the present training year (ending 31 March 1990) is to deliver the package to all operational staff who have not received such training in earlier years. Refresher training will begin in 1991-92.

The latest phase of the prisoner education programme began in March 1989 with the introduction of the resource package, "AIDS Inside and Out". Governors have been set a stringent target for 1989-90 of delivering the package (or, failing that, showing the 20-minute video which is the core element of the package) to all willing prisoners who are in custody for four weeks or longer. They have been asked to say how they have progressed in meeting that target in their next annual report.

Crime (London)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total number of crimes in London in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1989.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested for 1979 is published in table 32 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales 1979", Cmnd 8098. The information for the whole of 1989 is not yet available but figures for the 12 months to the end of September 1989 are published in table 5 of Home Office Statistical Bulletin 43/89. Copies of these publications are available in the Library.

Archaeological Sites (Thefts)

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* arrests and *(b)* convictions there have been in the past year for the offence of theft from scheduled archaeological sites.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is not available.

Sentenced Prisoners

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of all sentenced prisoners who (i) emanated from an ethnic minority and (ii) are white were sentenced by *(a)* a Crown court and *(b)* a magistrates court during 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 25 January 1990]:* The information is given in the table:

Persons received under sentence into Prison Service establishments in England and Wales: by ethnic origin and court sentencing 1988

Court sentencing	*White*	*West Indian Guyanese African*	*Indian Pakistani Bangladeshi*	*Chinese Arab Mixed origin*	*Other not recorded (including refusals)*	*All receptions under sentence*
Crown Court	52	71	68	63	69	54
Magistrates' courts	48	29	32	37	31	46
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the percentage of sentenced prisoners in England and Wales who emanate from an ethnic minority for the latest available date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 25 January 1990]:* The latest readily available information is given in the table:

Population under sentence in prison service establishments in England and Wales on 30 June 1989: by ethnic origin

Ethnic origin	*Percentage*
White	83
West Indian, Guyanese, African	10
Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi	3
Chinese, Arab, Mixed origin	2
Other, not recorded (including refusals)	2
All sentenced persons in prison service establishment	100

Badgers

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions were instigated, and how many were successful, in the most recent year for which figures are available, in connection with badger baiting; what was the maximum penalty levied; if he plans to introduce any further controls; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 2 February 1990]:* In 1988, the last year for which information is available, there were 74 prosecutions under the Badgers Act 1973. There were convictions in 41 cases and the largest fine was for £700. It is not possible to say how many of these cases involved badger baiting.

Badger baiting may lead to an offence also under the Protection of Animals Act 1911, although no separate records are kept of such cases.

I am considering sympathetically a proposal by the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) and my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) to provide that a person convicted under the Badgers Act 1973 may be disqualified from keeping a dog. Otherwise there are no plans for further legislation relating to badger baiting.

Security Vetting

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are taken to ensure that job vetting by private, non-Government employers involving the

security services complies with the European Convention on Human Rights in providing an effective remedy to those adversely affected; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: The Security Service Act 1989 ensures that United Kingdom law relating to the Security Service is fully consistent with the European Convention on Human Rights.

Prison Population

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the prison population in England and Wales for the latest available date; and how many of those prisoners had been sentenced by: *(a)* a crown court and *(b)* a magistrates' court; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 25 January 1990]:* On 26 January 1990 there were 46,630 prisoners in prison service establishments in England and Wales.

Details of sentencing courts are published annually in prison statistics England and Wales (table 1.15 of the latest volume, for 1988 (Cm. 825)), copies of which are in the Library. The latest available information is for June 1989 and is given in the table.

Population under sentence in Prison Service establishments on 30 June 1989: by court sentencing

Court Sentencing	*Number*[1]
Crown Court	33,100
Magistrates' court	3,400
Other courts	100
Not recorded	1,500
Total sentenced population	38,000

[1] Provisional figures.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Company Accounts

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many companies still have not filed accounts with the Registrar of Companies in respect of their accounting years ended in *(a)* 1985, *(b)* 1986 and *(c)* 1987; and how many of those companies are engaged in the provision of financial services to the public.

Mr. Redwood: The number of currently live companies which have not yet filed accounts for each of the years in question is shown in the table.

1985: 13,710
1986: 26,223 (includes 1985)
1987: 57,350 (includes 1985, 1986)

It is not possible to identify how many of these companies are engaged in the provision of financial services to the public.

Company Law

Sir Trevor Skeet: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list European Community company law directives that have been enacted, considered and planned over the last decade with approximate dates of imposition.

Mr. Redwood: The following European Community company law directives have been adopted since 1980:

Directive	*Implementation date*
Directive revising the amounts expressed in ECU in the Fourth Company Law Directive	1984
Sixth Company Law Directive on the division of public liability companies	1 January 1986
Seventh Company Law Directive on consolidated accounts	1 January 1988
Eight Company Law Directive on the qualification of auditors	1 January 1988
Eleventh Company Law Directive on branch accounts	1 January 1992
Twelfth Company Law Directive on single member private limited companies	1 January 1990
Directive co-ordinating regulations on insider dealing	1 June 1992
Directive on the disclosure of information on major holdings in listed companies	1 January 1991
Directive on the accounts of banks	31 December 1990
Directive on the accounts of bank branches	1 January 1991

The following proposed directives have been considered since 1980, but have not yet been adopted, and no implementation dates have yet been set:

Proposed Fifth Company Law Directive on the structure and management of PLC's.
Proposed Tenth Company Law Directive on cross-border mergers of PLC's.
Proposed Thirteenth Company Law Directive on takeovers.
Proposal to amend the Fourth and Seventh Company Law Directives with respect to small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and to accounts in ECU.
Proposal to extend the Fourth and Seventh Company Law Directives to certain partnerships and unlimited companies.
Proposed Directive on employee involvement complementing the Proposed Regulation on the European Company Statute.

Media Ownership

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) when he expects the Office of Fair Trading to conclude its inquiry into media ownership;

(2) when he expects the Sadler inquiry to publish its findings.

(3) whether he will list the people appointed to assist Mr. Sadler on his inquiry into aspects of the media;

(4) whether the Sadler inquiry has commenced taking evidence; and if it will be taking evidence in public.

Mr. Redwood: I announced to the House on 14 December at column *750* that Mr. John Sadler CBE was to undertake an inquiry into standards of cross-media promotion and that the Director General of Fair Trading, who was conducting an inquiry into the competition aspects of these issues, had decided not to pursue it.

Mr. Sadler's inquiry is expected to last about a year. He will be assisted by officials of my Department.

Mr. Sadler is writing to a number of organisations likely to have an interest in his inquiry. He expects to issue shortly a press notice inviting other interested parties to send him their views. He is asking for written evidence by mid-March and expects to take oral evidence later in the year. The inquiry will not be taking evidence in public.

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the share of accountancy business taken by the seven biggest firms in *(a)* 1970, *(b)* 1980 and *(c)* 1989 in Britain, West Germany and France.

Mr. Redwood: The information requested is not available.

Telephones

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consideration he has given to encouraging the introduction to the United Kingdom of the option for telephone subscribers to install equipment which will identify the number from which an incoming call is being made.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 1 February 1990]:* The provision of calling line identification facilities is primarily a matter for the network operators; but I know that the Director General of Telecommunications, Sir Bryan Carsberg, is keeping the position under close review.

Japan (Trade)

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what obstacles remain to fair trade between the United Kingdom and the Empire of Japan; if he will list them and the action he intends to take to eliminate them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 30 January 1990]:* The Government have three main trade policy objectives with Japan. The first is to persuade the Japanese authorities to implement structural reforms to sustain the shift in the balance of their economy from export-led to domestic demand-led growth. At the OECD ministerial meeting and the G7 summit last year, it was agreed that structural reform would play an important part in efforts to reduce current account imbalances. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, during her visit to Japan last year, emphasised the need to eliminate structural rigidities in key areas of the Japanese economy such as agricultural support and protection, land use and taxation and the distribution system.

Secondly, we must secure the removal of barriers to access to the Japanese market for United Kingdom exporters. Few such barriers remain. Where they do, the Government campaign vigorously for their removal through the appropriate channels: bilaterally, through the European Community, and through the multilateral GATT system.

The principal areas in which further progress is needed are:

Leather and leather goods. Under the present tariff quota system, Community exports within a small quota attract duty of 20 to 27 per cent. and goods in excess of quota a duty of 60 per cent. Negotiations are in progress at Community level to secure improvements in access when the present EC-Japan agreement expires in 1991.

Food products, particularly sugar confectionery, biscuits and jam, which still attract high tariffs (between 20 and 35 per cent.). GATT Ministers have agreed that such tariff peaks should be dealt with in the Uruguay round.

Standards and testing requirements in sectors such as pharmaceuticals, and medical equipment sectors. Regular EC-Japan sectoral talks provide the main forum for negotiations to eliminate non-tariff barriers of this sort.

Financial services. British firms are looking for greater opportuities to participate in Japan's financial markets, particularly in the insurance and investment sectors.

The Government's approach has achieved significant results. Last April, for example, the Japanese Government removed discriminatory taxation on imported whisky; exports of Scotch to Japan in the first 11 months of 1989 show an increase of 75 per cent. in value compared with the same period in 1988.

Thirdly, we must ensure that the British business community is fully aware of the greatly increased opportunities in Japan, and of the strategic importance of the Japanese market. My Department's Opportunity Japan campaign was launched in 1988 to address this need. A target was set of doubling British exports to Japan in three years. The determined efforts of British exporters mean that we are well on the way to doing so: last year United Kingdom exports of goods to Japan increased by £525 million to £2·3 billion, an increase of 30 per cent. over 1988.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who will represent his Department at the Council of Ministers meetings; and what the agenda will be on *(a)* industry: 13 March and 28 May, *(b)* internal market: 22 February, 3 and 14 April and 20 June, *(c)* research: 26 February and 29 June, *(d)* telecommunications: 28 April and *(e)* tourism: 7 and 8 April.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 30 January 1990]:* At the moment it is intended that my Department should be represented at the Council of Ministers meetings as follows:

Industry—Mr. Hogg
Internal Market—Mr. Redwood
Research—Mr. Hogg
Telecommunications—Mr. Forth
Tourism—Mr. Forth

Representation plans are provisional at present. Even the dates are subject to change. In particular, if the Tourism Council agenda is mainly for the Department of Employment, the United Kingdom will probably be represented by Lord Strathclyde.

Agendas for Councils are not announced till about two weeks beforehand. The table shows the provisional agendas that are available from the work programme circulated by the Irish Presidency. At this early stage of the Presidency, these are no more than a rough guide to which issues are likely to be taken when.

INTERNAL MARKET COUNCIL
22 February 1990

Dossiers subject to outcome of discussion at Internal Market Council of 21-22 December 1989 i.e. either further discussion with a view to achieving a CP or possible FA in May-June

Second Life Insurance Directive
Public procurement (excluded sectors)
Directives on Veterinary Medicines
Directive on Electro-medical implantables
Certification
Right of Residence
Directive on Nutritional Labelling
Directive on Ionisation of Food Products
Directive on Package Travel
Binding tariff information regulation
Major trans-European networks
Computer Programmes
Public procurement; compliance Directive for excluded sectors—Presentation

Directives on Pharmaceuticals
packaging and labelling
wholesalers
Non-prescribed retail sales—Presentation

INTERNAL MARKET COUNCIL
3 April 1990

Directive on Insurance Annual Accounts
Motor vehicle insurance services
Nine amendments to Directive on Dangerous Substances

INTERNAL MARKET COUNCIL
8 May 1990

(Possible) Motor vehicle type-approval
Third Motor Insurance Directive
Non-automatic weighing instruments
Abolition of transit advice note (TAN)
Right of Residence
(Possible) Regulation for Community Trademark
Gas appliances

INTERNAL MARKET COUNCIL
20 June 1990

Pharmaceuticals
Motor insurance services
(Possible) Mobile machines
European Company Statute
Second general Directive on Mutual Recognition of Diplomas
Directive on bio-technological Inventions
Insurance annual accounts
(Possible) Overhaul of transit rules (Reg. 222/77)
Directive amending Directive 79/695 on free circulation
Directive on control of personal weapons

RESEARCH COUNCIL
26 February 1990

Adoption of 3rd Framework Programme
Adoption of the following programmes under the 2nd Framework Programme:
Human Genomes
Agricultural Research
Co-operation Agreements with EFTA countries on Science and Medical and Health Research
(Possible) Common Position on the following Programmes under the 2nd Framework Programme:
EURET (Transport)
SPES (Revision)
EUROTRA (Revision)

RESEARCH COUNCIL
29 June 1990

3rd Framework Programme (1990-1994)—Common Position on certain programmes.
2nd Framework Programme
EURET (A)
SPES (A)
EUROTRA (A)
Agreement with EFTA on B.C.R. and SPES Programmes (CP)
Commission Communication on Research Cooperation between the Community and Third Countries.

INDUSTRY COUNCIL
13 March 1990

Semi-Conductors (PD)
Textiles
Steel
Automobiles (PD)
Footwear
Shipbuilding

INDUSTRY COUNCIL
28 May 1990

Biotechnology (PD)
Audiovisual (PD)
Industrial Targeting in Electronics (PD)
SME Participation in Community R&D Programmes
SME Access to Public Procurement

TELECOMMUNICATIONS
25 April 1990

Directive on terminal equipment
Resolution on video-communications
Directive on Radio-paging
(Possible) Digital European Cordless Telecommunications
Postal matters
HDTV—agreed position for CCIR
P.M. Reports from the Commission to be noted:
Second Report on ISDN
Report on Broadband Integrated Telecommunications in Europe.

THE ARTS

Disabled People

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Minister for the Arts how he intends to improve access to arts venues for disabled people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: My aim is for the arts to be accessible to everyone. In December 1988 I gave £150,000 to the Carnegie Trust's Adapt Fund for the improvement of facilities for disabled people in arts venues. I acknowledge the important role which my hon. Friend is playing as chairman of this fund.

Both the Museums and Galleries Commission and the Arts Council employ a disability officer. The Arts Council recently published an arts and disability action plan to produce practical measures to increase disabled people's involvement in the arts, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

CIVIL SERVICE

Agencies

Mr. Watts: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service whether he can report any further developments in the agency system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: Work continues to progress well in preparing activities for agency status and in identifying further candidates. The Treasury minute (Cm. 964), replying to the PAC's 38th report and published on 31 January, confirmed the Government's view that the pace at which Departments launch agencies would speed up, with a total of at least 20 agencies launched by the summer, and with more to come.

Management Skills

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what training is given in management skills within the Civil Service.

Mr. Luce: Civil servants are trained in the full range of management skills they need to exercise in their work, including the management of people, finance and other resources. In 1988-89, some 82,600 civil servants undertook management training. Of this, 81 per cent. was provided directly by Departments, 7 per cent. was undertaken at the Civil Service college, and the remainder was provided externally.

Outside Posts

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what rules govern the acceptance by any senior civil servant of a post outside the Civil Service *(a)* during and *(b)* subsequent to his Civil Service career.

Mr. Luce *[holding answer 2 February 1990]:* The rules governing acceptance by senior civil servants of outside appointments during and after their Civil Service careers are set out in chapters 5 and 11, respectively, of the personnel management handbook, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

EMPLOYMENT

State-supported Training

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many persons were involved in state-supported training at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Eggar: The table shows the numbers of people who were on state-supported training schemes, funded through the Training Agency, at the end of November 1989:

Programme	*Numbers in training (November 1989)*
Employment Training (ET)	212,000
Youth Training Scheme (YTS)	127,900
Community Industry (CI)	6,000
Business Growth Training (BGT)	(1)

(1) The following figures are available for BGT for the month of November 1989;

Programme		*Numbers in training (November 1989)*
Option 1	1,226	kits issued
Option 2	28,974	filled training places
Option 3	133	contracts signed
Option 4	23	contracts signed
Option 5	17	contracts signed

Earnings

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, further to his letter of 11 January to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby replying further to his holding answer of 19 December, *Official Report*, 20 December, column *235*, whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table providing the same information for 1972-79 together with his best estimate of the numbers employed in 1979 in (i) each of the specified categories, (ii) manufacturing in the public sector and (iii) the private sector other than manufacturing; and if he will add an estimate of the increase in average earnings each year of manuals and non-manuals in the private sector less manufacturing based on the weighted average employment figures in the respective sectors.

Mr. Nicholls: Estimates of the increases in earnings for each year are provided in the table. Estimates of the numbers in employment for the categories requested are not available except for non-manual male employees in manufacturing, of which there were 1,377,000 employees in October 1979. The calculation requested in the final part of the question would not be meaningful for the reasons stated in my letter to the hon. Member.

Percentage increase in weekly and hourly earnings of full-time adult male employees[1]

April of each year	*Manual*				*Non-manual*			
	Public sector		*Not in public sector*		*Public sector*		*Manufacturing*	
	Weekly earnings percentage	*Hourly earnings percentage*	*Weekly earnings percentage*	*Hourly earnings percentage*	*Weekly earnings percentage*	*Hourly earnings percentage*	*Weekly earnings percentage*	*Hourly earnings percentage*
1973	15·7	[2]—	16·5	[2]—	8·4	[2]—	11·2	10·3
1974	15·4	14·8	13·9	14·3	15·1	15·3	11·9	12·5
1975	36·1	36·5	24·6	28·2	28·1	28·8	26·1	25·8
1976	15·7	17·9	17·6	17·6	22·4	24·8	17·8	18·0
1977	8·2	7·1	10·4	9·6	6·3	4·4	9·9	9·3
1978	11·7	10·3	13·4	12·9	9·2	9·3	15·9	15·5
1979	14·5	13·0	15·5	15·4	11·0	11·0	14·3	13·8

[1] Average gross weekly and hourly earnings, not affected by absence, for those aged 21 and over.
[2] Not available

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if the Government will publish guidelines showing increases in productivity to assist employers faced with pay claims to discount settlements in other industries which take into account increases in productivity; and if he will publish a table showing the percentage increase in median earnings of *(a)* full-time adult male manual workers in the motor vehicle industry and *(b)* the whole economy less manufacturing since 1972 and 1979, together with increases in output per head.

Mr. Nicholls: Productivity is clearly a vital influence on costs and competitiveness but it is for employers to regulate their own internal affairs. Only they can judge the level of pay settlements appropriate to all the relevant circumstances; and it is they who must bear the consequences of their decisions for competitiveness, investment and jobs.

The increase to April 1989 in the median level of gross weekly earnings of full-time adult manual male employees in the manufacture of motor vehicles and parts (SIC 35) was 511 per cent. from April 1972 and 148 per cent. from April 1979. Information on the median level of earnings for all full-time adult employees in the whole economy less manufacturing is not available.

The increase in output per head for SIC 35 between the second quarter of 1979 and the third quarter of 1989 was 49 per cent. Data on output per head for SIC 35 prior to 1978 are not available. The increase in output per head for the whole economy less manufacturing between 1972 and the third quarter of 1989 cannot be provided without incurring disproportionate cost. The increase between the second quarter of 1979 and the third quarter of 1989 was 12 per cent.

Factory Inspectors

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many factory inspectors were appointed in the past 10 years with the minimum qualifications of *(a)* higher national diploma, *(b)* polytechnic degree and *(c)* university degree.

Mr. Nicholls: The 276 factory inspectors recruited in the past 10 years were qualified to at least the levels specified, as follows:

a) higher national diploma—2
b) polytechnic degree—89
c) university degree—185

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the Health and Safety Executive factory inspectorate division budget for the year 1989-90.

Mr. Nicholls: The gross budget for 1989-90 allocated to the factories and agriculture inspectorate division was £37·6 million. The Health and Safety Commission's planned use of resources in 1989-90 was described in its "Plan of Work for 1989-90 and beyond", published on 3 May 1989.

Self-employment

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the total number of self-employed people in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Nicholls: In September 1989, the latest date for which estimates are available, the number of self-employed people in the United Kingdom was 3,141,000.

Economic League

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to meet the Economic League to discuss the lists it gives to employers concerning prospective employees.

Mr. Nicholls: My right hon. and learned Friend has no such plans.

Careers Service

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what criteria he uses to judge the success of the careers service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: The standards expected of the local education authority-delivered careers service in England are set out in the "Guidance for Local Education Authorities in England and Wales" issued jointly in 1988 by my predecessor and the Secretary of State for Wales. Annual objectives and numerical targets are a condition for receipt of direct grant under the careers service strengthening scheme.

The careers service inspectorate monitors annual performance against objectives and targets and carries out a full inspection of each service at about five-yearly intervals. Reports from the inspectorate provide the information on which I judge the effectiveness of individual services.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) announced last year that reports on inspections started after September 1989 will be published. Copies of previous reports, including a recent report on the excellent service in Bolton, are available in the Library.

Footwear and Textiles

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many jobs have been lost in *(a)* the footwear industry and *(b)* the textile industry since October 1989, by month; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: There are no figures for job losses or job gains. Latest estimates of the number of employees in employment relate to November 1989. These show falls of 300 (0·6 per cent.) and 200 (0·1 per cent.) respectively for the footwear and textile industries since October 1989.

Women Workers

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how his Department intends to encourage employers to address the needs of women returning to work.

Mr. Nicholls: My Department will continue the action that it has taken over many months to encourage employers to make recruitment and retention policies attractive to women. It is doing this primarily through:

(1) alerting employers to the need to recruit women at all occupational levels to help make up for the decline in the numbers of young people. The Training Agency/NEDO report "Defusing the Demographic Time Bomb" has been widely publicised.
(2) encouraging employers to consider introducing—career breaks—part-time work at all levels—flexible working hours—childcare.
(3) its example as an employer
(4) helping women get appropriate training thus enhancing their value to employers.
(5) supporting and publishing research into the female labour market, for example, on employers' recruitment and retention strategies.

Environmental Protection

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if his Department has any figures for the number of people employed in the United Kingdom on environmental protection and environmental improvement activities for each of the past five years.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested is not available, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many men were in employment in each standard planning region in the United Kingdom; and how many women were in full and part-time employment in June 1979 at the latest date for which information is available.

Mr. Nicholls: Table 1 shows the male civilian work force in employment for each region in September 1989. Table 2 shows the total female civilian work force in employment in June 1979 and September 1989.

Table 1
Civilian Workforce in Employment
Males, Unadjusted, Thousands

	September 1989
Greater London	2,289
South East	2,690
East Anglia	526
South West	1,146
West Midlands	1,345
East Midlands	1,019
Yorkshire and Humberside	1,176
North West	1,551
North	713
Wales	654
Scotland	1,246
Great Britain	14,355
Northern Ireland	328
United Kingdom	14,683

Table 2
Civilian workforce in Great Britain
Females, seasonally adjusted

Thousands

	Full time	*Part time*	*Total*
June 1979	5,801	3,982	9,783
September 1989	6,343	4,908	11,251
Change	542	926	1,468
Percentage change	9·3 per cent.	23·3 per cent.	15·0 per cent.

Liquidation (Costs)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what contribution his Department makes to the administration costs of settling redundancy claims, holiday pay, pension schemes, etc., when his Department pays the redundancy liabilities of the workers of a liquidated company; and how these costs rate against the claims of unsecured trade creditors in settling the liquidation.

Mr. Nicholls: My Department makes various statutory redundancy and insolvency payments to employees through the employer's representative, usually the receiver or liquidator dealing with the insolvency, who acts as the Department's agent. The Department pays a fee for this work. The general administration costs of the insolvency are recovered by the employer's representative from the proceeds of the insolvency in priority to claims by creditors. Statutory claims by employees are settled as soon as the employer's representative has processed them, normally within a few weeks of the closure of the company.

Under-sevens Project

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment by which date the "Working with Under Sevens and their Families" project is required to complete its work.

Mr. Nicholls: By 31 July 1990.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much time will be available for consultation with the professionals and others involved in the implementation of the recommendations of the "Working with Under Sevens and their Families" project.

Mr. Nicholls: Consultation with the professionals and others who will be involved in the implementation of project outputs is an integral part of the project and therefore ongoing.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the remit of the "Working with Under Sevens and their Families" project in which the Training Agency has had an input.

Mr. Nicholls: The purpose of this project is to develop nationally recognised standards of competence and associated assessment systems as the basis for national awards for care staff working with the under-sevens and their families.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether funding will be made available to implement the recommendations of the "Working with Under Sevens and their Families" project.

Mr. Nicholls: Government funding is available for all projects within the standards programme, to contribute to the cost of promoting the uptake of the standards and qualifications which emerge from them.

YTS Trainees

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, if he will make a statement on the use of YTS trainees on the MV Marine.

Mr. Nicholls: No. There were no YTS trainees on the MV Marine.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Taxation

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) on 18 January, *Official Report*, column *341*, if he will estimate the net revenue forgone by the Exchequer in *(a)* 1988-89 and *(b)* 1989-90 as a result of the reductions in personal income tax for higher rate payers to 40 pence in the pound introduced in the Finance Act 1988, in the light of the Government's receipts since then.

Mr. Lilley: My reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay on 18 January (*Official Report*, column *341*) referred to the estimate of the direct costs of abolishing the income tax rates above 40 per cent. given in the 1988 Financial Statement and Budget Report.

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the percentage of total general Government taxes, and social security contributions derived from *(a)* direct taxation and *(b)* indirect taxation in each country of the EEC for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Lilley: Statistics on the composition of tax revenue in EC member countries are published by the OECD in "Revenue Statistics of OECD Member Countries 1965-88".

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the level of tax revenues incurred from *(a)* individuals, *(b)* corporate bodies and *(c)* public organisations in (i) 1979 and (ii) 1989.

Mr. Lilley: Taxes on income and capital gains, local authority rates and national insurance contributions can be allocated as follows:

	1979-80 £ billion	*1988-89 £ billion*
Persons	30·8	75·8
Companies	18·4	46·3

It is not possible to distinguish taxes paid by public corporations from those paid by companies as a whole. Nor is it possible to allocate other taxes (for example, VAT) to persons or companies.

Inflation and Interest Rates

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were *(a)* the rates of inflation and *(b)* the levels of interest rates in each country of the EEC, Japan, and the United States of America, for the most recent dates available.

Mr. Ryder: Following is the information requested:

Inflation and short term interest rates in the EC, US and Japan.

	12 month inflation rates excluding estimates of home-owners' costs[1]	*Short-term nominal interest rates*[2]
United Kingdom[3]	6·1	15·1
United States of America	4·7	8·3
Japan	2·9	7·0
Germany	3·1	8·1
France	3·6	11·1
Italy	6·5	6·2
Belgium	3·6	8·8
Denmark	4·8	12·0
Greece	14·0	21·0
Ireland	4·2	12·1
Luxembourg	3·8	10·5
Netherlands	0·9	8·8
Portugal	11·7	12·5
Spain	7·0	15·5

[1] Inflation figures are for November 1989, except for United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, Denmark and Belgium (December) and Ireland (Q4).

[2] Interest rates refer to close 31 January, except Spain, Greece and Denmark (1 February), Ireland (January) and Portugal (October).

[3] United Kingdom figure is for RPI excluding mortgage interest payments; figures for other countries exclude estimates of owner occupiers' housing costs as appropriate.

Publicity

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total publicity and advertising expenditure, including for privatisation, by all Government Departments and public bodies in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1989.

Mr. Ryder: Information on publicity, including advertising, is not held centrally and is a matter for individual Departments.

Banks (Third World Debt)

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the revised Bank of England guidelines to banks on their provisions for Third world debt.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 2 February 1990]:* The revised matrix guidelines are a supervisory tool to assist banks in fixing provisioning levels against exposure to countries experiencing debt-servicing and repayment difficulties. Responsibility for formulating the matrix rests with the Bank of England.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what extent the Inland Revenue will take account of Third world debt provision by banks in allowing them tax relief.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 2 February 1990]:* Provisions by banks against Third-world debts are allowable for tax only to the extent that such debts are shown to be irrecoverable.

Civil Service (Closed Shop)

Sir Norman Fowler: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what closed shop arrangements exist in the Civil Service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Major *[holding answer 2 February 1990]:* There are no closed shop arrangements in the Civil Service.

Civil servants are free to choose whether or not they wish to join or remain a member of a trade union.

European Community Budget

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list in a separate tabulation for each of the last three years, including the estimate for 1989, the receipts and contributions to the EEC budget under each of the major headings value added tax, agricultural levies CE7, fourth resource, agricultural receipts, social fund receipts etc., setting out the net contribution/receipt, followed by the notional shape of the cost of central Community institutions allocated on a population basis leading to an amended net contribution/receipt as calculated by addition/subtraction of this notional value.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 31 January 1990]:* Full information about the net contributions or receipts of each of the member states is not available. It is, therefore, not possible to show the notional impact on net positions of allocating the cost of central Community institutions in line with population shares.

WALES

Rural Schools (Closures)

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of rural schools closed in Dyfed, Powys, Clwyd and Gwynedd since 1979.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Separate figures relating only to schools in rural areas are not held. The following table shows the net change in the number of primary and secondary schools other than maintained special schools in the areas requested.

Net change by school year	*Local education authority*			
	Dyfed	*Powys*	*Clwyd*	*Gwynedd*
1979-80	+1	—	−2	−1
1980-81	−2	−2	−1	—
1981-82	−6	−4	−3	—
1982-83	−5	−3	−2	−1
1983-84	−5	—	−6	—
1984-85	−3	−2	−1	—

Net change by school year	Local education authority			
	Dyfed	Powys	Clwyd	Gwynedd
1985-86	−6	−2	−1	—
1986-87	−7	−2	—	—
1987-88	—	−1	+1	−2
1988-89	−5	—	−1	−2

Local Government Finance

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the number of extra staff employed by Welsh district authorities to administer and collect the poll tax in each named district.

Mr. Grist: The information requested is not held centrally.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of local authority expenditure in 1990-91 he estimates will be met by community charge payers.

Mr. Peter Walker: If local authorities budget in line with the settlement that I have announced for 1990-91, after allowing for community charge benefit and transitional relief, community charge payers should expect to contribute 14 per cent. of local authorities' expenditure for that year.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will give the average business rate to be paid by (i) commercial and (ii) industrial premises in each Welsh district in 1990-91;

(2) if he will set out the average rateable value for *(a)* commercial and *(b)* industrial premises in each Welsh district following revaluation together with the average figure for each category prior to revaluation and the percentage increase as a result of the 1989 revaluation.

Mr. Walker: The information requested is shown in the following table:

Commercial and industrial rating information[1]

	Commercial					Industrial				
	Average Rateable Value			1989-90 Average Rate Bill	1990-91 Average Rate Bill	Average Rateable Value			1989-90 Average Rate Bill	1990-91 Average Rate Bill
	1973 Value £	1989 Value £	Percentage Increase	£	£	1973 Value £	1989 Value £	Percentage Increase	£	£
Alyn and Deeside	706	6,421	809	2,042	2,234	4,871	29,269	501	14,091	13,944
Colwyn	681	6,102	796	2,043	2,192	1,371	9,678	606	4,115	4,071
Delyn	598	6,333	960	1,728	2,013	1,589	12,889	711	4,593	4,854
Glyndwr	384	3,764	880	1,130	1,268	1,708	10,004	486	5,029	5,014
Rhuddlan	866	7,625	780	2,494	2,764	1,377	8,051	485	3,965	3,978
Wrexham Maelor	872	7,709	784	2,591	2,815	4,430	24,370	450	13,159	12,897
Carmarthen	577	6,746	1,070	1,626	1,986	1,031	9,062	779	2,909	3,135
Ceredigion	463	4,851	948	1,271	1,507	516	4,263	726	1,417	1,498
Dinefwr	292	3,409	1,069	797	950	1,580	16,593	950	4,320	4,705
Llanelli	574	6,230	985	1,733	1,984	3,711	23,469	532	11,203	11,065
Preseli Pembrokeshire	505	4,775	845	1,368	1,592	6,185	53,344	763	16,748	19,475
South Pembrokeshire	546	5,098	834	1,517	1,717	8,959	87,870	881	24,902	32,037
Blaenau Gwent	401	3,386	746	1,143	1,218	3,521	21,920	523	10,049	9,767
Islwyn	463	3,940	751	1,283	1,395	2,669	15,520	482	7,392	7,160
Monmouth	752	8,669	1,052	2,113	2,463	3,510	25,454	625	9,856	10,027
Newport	1,217	9,272	662	3,359	3,580	9,205	53,115	477	25,402	24,925
Torfaen	894	6,797	660	2,586	2,721	3,463	17,718	412	10,017	9,650
Aberconwy	649	6,391	884	1,817	2,107	1,270	7,804	515	3,554	3,673
Arfon	524	5,772	1,002	1,451	1,711	1,107	7,625	589	3,066	3,177
Dwyfor	555	5,354	865	1,545	1,805	320	3,093	867	891	1,022
Meirionnydd	389	3,514	803	1,096	1,214	432	3,857	793	1,216	1,287
Ynys Mon	410	4,131	908	1,134	1,318	3,174	16,739	427	8,778	8,510
Cynon Valley	418	3,291	688	1,218	1,277	4,148	28,540	588	12,097	11,968
Merthyr Tydfil	663	5,585	743	1,995	2,090	3,596	30,716	754	10,829	11,090
Ogwr	800	7,378	822	2,491	2,714	2,775	18,280	559	8,639	8,456
Rhondda	395	3,373	753	1,206	1,261	2,176	12,226	462	6,639	6,427
Rhymney Valley	537	4,749	785	1,667	1,778	3,194	20,255	534	9,918	9,709
Taff Ely	1,028	9,178	793	3,111	3,401	4,727	30,220	539	14,307	14,206
Brecknock	281	3,166	1,028	749	895	985	10,004	916	2,629	2,806
Montgomeryshire	476	4,517	848	1,183	1,363	1,253	6,301	403	3,112	3,062
Radnorshire	333	3,671	1,004	834	1,017	1,335	8,902	567	3,350	3,459
Cardiff	1,494	13,079	776	3,594	4,140	2,817	19,623	597	6,778	7,214
Vale of Glamorgan	786	7,842	898	1,953	2,343	3,668	27,049	637	9,118	9,686
Port Talbot	682	6,151	803	2,184	2,289	16,261	94,979	484	52,102	50,535
Lliw Valley	401	4,084	918	1,301	1,455	3,829	20,415	433	12,413	12,197
Neath	627	6,197	888	2,043	2,195	4,291	30,780	617	13,978	14,020
Swansea	1,060	10,225	864	3,540	3,883	2,366	13,461	469	7,899	7,612
Total Wales	757	6,979	822	2,124	2,377	3,482	22,403	543	10,080	10,138

[1]For properties shown on the Valuation list at 31 December 1989.

A large increase in the average rate bill for industrial properties in South Pembrokeshire is due to the large upward revaluation of the Milford Haven oil refinery complex.

The average rateable values requested are not representative of the majority of premises. Inevitably they are weighted towards the upper end by the existence of a few companies with very large properties—viz British Steel

at Port Talbot. A more appropriate measure would have been the median rateable values. That information is not available.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the figures and percentages for the income of each Welsh district for the latest year for which figures are available broken down into the following categories: central Government grant, domestic rate, business rate, mixed hereditament rate, income from fees and charges.

Mr. Peter Walker: The information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will give the general rate for each Welsh district in 1989-90 broken down into its component parts of county precept and community and district council levies;

(2) what was the *(a)* domestic rate, *(b)* hereditament rate and *(c)* business rate for each Welsh district in 1989-90;

(3) what was the average rate paid by (i) commercial and (ii) industrial premises in each Welsh district in 1989-90.

Mr. Peter Walker: The information requested is published in table 9.3 of Welsh Local Government Financial Statistics No. 13, 1989.

Health Promotion Authority

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what allocation of resources is to be made to the Health Promotion Authority for Wales for the financial year 1990-91.

Mr. Grist: Subject to parliamentary approval, £2·257 million will be made available for allocation to the HPAW in 1990-91. The allocation will be conditional upon satisfactory completion of annual performance review. It represents a further and substantial additional commitment of resources to HPAW over the £2·057 million allocated in 1989-90.

School Buildings

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he intends to commission a survey comparable to the "Survey of School Buildings 1986" by the Department of Education and Science.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: No. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave on 19 December 1989, when I said that in the context of my efficiency initiative local authorities had prepared reports on energy and property management and had further action in hand. The property review recommends the setting up of appropriate records in regard to age and condition of buildings including schools.

Contaminated Land

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to update and supplement the register of land contaminated by industrial and landfill activities in Wales.

Mr. Grist: The survey to locate contaminated sites in Wales was conducted for the Welsh Office and the Welsh Development Agency in 1982-83 and updated in 1987-88. Further updates will be considered as appropriate.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether the computer facilities at his Department enable local authorities in Wales to receive information on the contaminated land sites in their area.

Mr. Grist: Yes. The information is available to local authorities and other inquirers on request.

Health Workers' Wages

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will indicate the figure and the proportion of the total budget for each health authority in Wales spent on *(a)* wages of consultants, *(b)* wages of junior hospital doctors, *(c)* wages of nursing staff, *(d)* wages of managers and administrator and *(e)* wages of cleaners and ancillary staff.

Mr. Grist: The information which the hon. Gentleman has asked for is not available centrally in the form requested, since budgets are determined locally by each authority from the resources which my right hon. Friend allocates to them and from the proceeds which they realise from cost improvement and income generation schemes. However, the information requested, expressed as a proportion of total expenditure, can be obtained from the authorities' most recent annual accounts as follows:

Health Authorities' Salaries and Wages Expenditure: 1988-89[1]

Health Authority	Consultants[2]		Junior Doctors		Nursing Staff		Managers and Administrators[3]		Ancillary Staff[4]	
	Salaries and wages expenditure (£000)	Percentage of total HA expenditure	Salaries and wages expenditure (£000)	Percentage of total HA expenditure	Salaries and wages expenditure (£000)	Percentage of total HA expenditure	Salaries and wages expenditure (£000)	Percentage of total HA expenditure	Salaries and wages expenditure (£000)	Percentage of total HA expenditure
Clwyd	5,186	4·7	6,273	5·7	42,772	39·0	6,969	6·4	8,114	7·4
East Dyfed	3,530	5·3	4,423	6·7	24,582	37·0	4,417	6·6	4,987	7·5
Gwent	5,409	4·2	6,626	5·1	49,425	38·4	8,086	6·3	10,531	8·2
Gwynedd	2,680	4·1	3,988	6·2	23,943	37·0	4,392	6·8	5,614	8·7
Mid Glamorgan	6,265	4·2	9,464	6·3	62,660	41·8	9,298	6·2	12,718	8·5
Pembrokeshire	1,282	4·9	1,885	7·2	8,525	32·5	1,642	6·3	1,544	5·9
Powys	291	1·0	1,208	4·0	13,244	44·3	1,797	6·0	2,381	8·0
South Glamorgan	8,165	4·8	12,520	7·3	53,487	31·2	12,762	7·4	13,551	7·9
West Glamorgan	5,157	4·5	6,387	5·6	40,158	35·1	6,725	5·9	9,408	8·2
WHCSA	—	—	7	0·0	—	—	5,209	19·7	65	0·2
WALES	37,965	4·3	52,781	5·9	318,796	35·9	61,297	6·9	68,913	7·8

[1] NHS staff and non-NHS staff (Agency etc.).
[2] Medical and Dental consultants.

[3] General Managers, Administrative and Clerical staff, and chairman's remunerations.
[4] Ancillary staff includes cleaners.
Source: Health Authorities' Annual Accounts for 1988-89.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will indicate the figure and the proportion of the total wages budget for each health authority in Wales spent on *(a)* wages of consultants, *(b)* wages of junior hospital doctors, *(c)* wages of nursing staff, *(d)* wages of managers and administrators and *(e)* wages of cleaners and ancillary staff.

Mr. Ian Grist: The information which the hon. Gentleman has asked for is not available centrally in the form requested since budgets are determined locally by each authority from the resources which my right hon. Friend allocates to them and from the proceeds which they realise from cost improvement and income generation schemes. However, the information requested, expressed as a proportion of total expenditure, can be obtained from the authorities' most recent annual accounts as follows:

Health authorities' salaries and wages expenditure: 1988-89[1]

Health authority	Consultants[2]		Junior doctors		Nursing staff		Managers and administrators[3]		Ancillary staff[4]	
	Salaries and wages expenditure £000	Percentage of total salaries and wages expenditure	Salaries and wages expenditure £000	Percentage of total salaries and wages expenditure	Salaries and wages expenditure £000	Percentage of total salaries and wages expenditure	Salaries and wages expenditure £000	Percentage of total salaries and wages expenditure	Salaries and wages expenditure £000	Percentage of total salaries and wages expenditure
Clwyd	5,186	6·3	6,273	7·6	42,772	51·7	6,969	8·4	8,114	9·8
East Dyfed	3,530	7·1	4,423	8·9	24,582	49·3	4,417	8·9	4,987	10·0
Gwent	5,409	5·7	6,626	7·0	49,425	52·3	8,086	8·6	10,531	11·1
Gwynedd	2,680	5·4	3,988	8·1	23,943	48·5	4,392	8·9	5,614	11·4
Mid Glamorgan	6,265	5·3	9,464	8·1	62,660	53·3	9,298	7·9	12,718	10·8
Pembrokeshire	1,282	7·1	1,885	10·5	8,525	47·4	1,642	9·1	1,544	8·6
Powys	291	1·3	1,208	5·3	13,244	57·8	1,797	7·8	2,381	10·4
South Glamorgan	8,165	6·5	12,520	10·0	53,487	42·7	12,762	10·2	13,551	10·8
West Glamorgan	5,157	6·4	6,387	7·9	40,158	49·9	6,725	8·4	9,408	11·7
WHCSA	—	—	7	0·1	—	—	5,209	61·7	65	0·8
Wales	37,965	5·9	52,781	8·1	318,796	49·1	61,297	9·4	68,913	10·6

[1] NHS staff and non-NHS staff (agency etc.).
[2] Medical and dental consultants.
[3] General managers, administrative and clerical staff, and chairman's remunerations.
[4] Ancillary staff includes cleaners.
Source: Health Authorities' Annual Accounts for 1988-89.

Water Supply

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the water supply problems which arose or were imminent in Wales during 1989; and what steps he intends to take to ensure that such problems do not arise in future.

Mr. Grist: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave him on 25 October 1989, c. *451-52*.

Arts Funding

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the impact upon arts funding in Wales by *(a)* local authorities tax and *(b)* business sponsorships consequent upon the implementations of the uniform business rate.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: I do not expect the community charge or the uniform business rate to have any effect on the funding of the arts in Wales.

Opencast Mine, Bannel Bridge

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will visit Bannel bridge, Clwyd;
(2) if he will visit Bucrley, Clwyd;
(3) if he will visit Megs Lane, Clwyd;
(4) if he will visit Spon Green, Clwyd.

Mr. Peter Walker: Not in the immediate future.

Health Service (Income Generation)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a list of full-time Health Service employees who are directors of, or who work for, companies operating in areas related to their work in the National Health Service where there are opportunities for income generation.

Mr. Grist: This information is not available.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if Mid Glamorgan health authority has sought his advice about the conflict of interest which has arisen from the involvement of two full-time Health Service employees as majority shareholders and company secretary and chairman of Healthcare Diagnostics Ltd. based at the innovation centre on the Mid Glamorgan science park, Bridgend.

Mr. Grist: No. This is primarily a matter for the health authority to satisfy itself that there is no conflict of interest arising when any of its employees become involved in activities which could affect their terms of employment with the NHS.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what guidelines he has issued in addition to DHSS Circular PM(79) 11 (November 1979), with its attached standard contract, for dealing with potential conflicts of interest when full-time National Health Service employees are involved as directors, shareholders,

workers, or all three, in private companies operating in areas related to their work in the National Health Service where there are opportunities for income generation;

(2) whether he will issue guidelines to prevent full-time National Health Service employees from being involved in any capacity in a private company operating in the same field as that in which they are employed in the National Health Service where there are opportunities for income generation.

Mr. Grist: The Department is currently considering the possibility of issuing advice on general principles of good conduct within the NHS which will include aspects such as the declaration of interests in cases where staff may have a private pecuniary interest in a firm contracting to provide a service.

Ynys-y Fro Reservoir

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will investigate the growth of blue-green algae at Ynys-y fro reservoir, Newport, in the summer of 1989.

Mr. Grist: This is a matter for the National Rivers Authority, which is conducting investigations into the cause of algal blooms last year.

HEALTH

Milk Tokens

91. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he next intends to review the working of the welfare milk token scheme.

Mr. Freeman: Operational matters such as the workings of the welfare milk token scheme are kept under constant review to ensure that they are as efficient and effective as possible.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further representations he has received concerning the working of the welfare milk token scheme.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) on 23 January at column *682* and to the record of the debate on the regulations introducing the change on 29 January at columns 113-32.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about alleged underfunding of *(a)* North East Thames regional health authority and *(b)* Waltham Forest district authority; and what response he has made.

Mr. Freeman: We have received a number of representations about financial allocations to North East Thames regional health authority, and Waltham Forest district health authority, including one from the hon. Member, to which I replied on 31 January 1990.

Environmental Medicine Foundation

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth of 22 January, *Official Report*, column *555*, if an application has been received for funds from his Department from the Environmental Medicine Foundation.

Mr. Freeman: No application has been received in the Department of Health.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the criteria used by his Department for making funds available to organisations such as the Environmental Medicine Foundation.

Mr. Freeman: The Medical Research Council (MRC) is the main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research in the United Kingdom. The Department of Health funds health and personal social services research which meets departmental objectives in public health. The criteria employed are the relevance and scientific promise of the work proposed. The then Minister for Health, the late Lord Trafford, wrote to the chairman of the foundation last year, advising it of the role of the MRC in funding medical research, and of the availability of facilities in the United Kingdom for analysing low concentrations of chemicals in human tissue.

Disabled Persons

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidance his Department gave to local authorities concerning money allocated for the implementation of sections 5 and 6 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what money has been, and will be, made available to local authorities for the implementation of sections 5 and 6 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 in the years 1988-89, 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92;

(3) whether the money made available to local authorities for the implementation of sections 5 and 6 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 was ring-fenced; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: We agreed with the local authority associations in 1987 that the additional costs of implementation of sections 5 and 6 of the Act were in the region of £5 million in 1988-89 and £19 million in 1989-90, rising to around £24 million in a full year. These amounts have been taken into consideration in determining the level of central Government support to local authorities for the appropriate year. They have not been ring-fenced or separately identified, as is the case with the vast majority of our support for local authorities. Our guidance to local authorities on implementation of sections 5 and 6 included a reminder that the resource implications had been agreed and taken into account in public expenditure discussions.

Doctors and Nurses

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will identify the number of doctors and nurses employed in each regional health authority *(a)* now and *(b)* in June 1979.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The number of doctors and nurses employed in each regional health authority now and in 1979 are given in the table. Validated figures are available only in September each year.

NHS staff in post by regional health authority at 30 September each year

Whole-time equivalent[1]

Regional health authority	*Medical and Dental*[2]		*Nursing and Midwifery*[3]	
	1979	*1988*	*1979*[4]	*1988*
Northern	2,530	2,820	23,940	27,770
Yorkshire	2,690	2,910	26,980	30,330
Trent	3,160	3,990	32,500	38,280
East Anglia	1,360	1,720	12,830	16,140
North West Thames[5]	3,430	3,530	26,800	27,830
North East Thames	3,640	4,270	30,930	34,480
South East Thames	3,300	3,730	29,040	30,480
South West Thames	2,460	2,600	23,820	23,780
Wessex	1,970	2,160	19,660	23,680
Oxford	1,760	2,080	14,730	17,010
South Western	2,350	2,700	23,620	27,300
West Midlands	3,870	4,540	36,350	42,160
Mersey	2,000	2,280	20,960	22,180
North Western	3,490	4,220	32,160	37,530
England[5,6]	38,990	44,750	358,450	403,880

[1] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten (10) whole-time equivalent.

[2] Includes medical/dental locums.

[3] Includes qualified nurses, learners, unqualified staff and agency staff.

[4] Figures not adjusted to take account of reduction of nurses working hours (from 40 to 37·5 per week) during 1980-81.

[5] Excludes 80 whole-time equivalents medical and dental consultants for 1988 because of insufficient information.

[6] Includes staff at the Dental Estimates Board, Prescription Pricing Authority, London Postgraduate Special Health Authorities, and Family Practitioner Committees.

Source: Annual census of NHS Medical and Non-Medical Manpower.

Hospital Building

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his replies of 16 January, *Official Report*, columns *194-95*, if he will set out the value of each hospital building project listed in the answers.

Mr. Freeman: The construction cost at tender of each of the hospital building projects listed is as follows:

Currently under construction

Region	*Scheme*	*Cost £*
Northern	Royal Victoria Infirmary, Scheme 1, Phase 5	23,268,389
Northern	Wansbeck General Hospital, Scheme 1, Phase 1	21,087,977
Trent	Lincoln County, Phase 2	20,113,508
North West Thames	Westminster and Chelsea Hospital	178,158,900
South East Thames	Hastings, District General Hospital, Main Phase 1	27,475,536
South West Thames	Mid Sussex, Phase 1	21,052,954
Wessex	Bournemouth District General Hospital, Phase 2B	23,815,773
Wessex	Salisbury District Hospital Phase 1	26,750,945
South Western	Royal Devon and Exeter, Wonford	20,079,803
North Western	Ormskirk District General Hospital, Phase 1	19,461,538
Completed since 1979		
Trent	Queens Medical Centre Development, Phase 2	18,577,215
North West Thames	St. Mary's W2, Phase 1B	20,521,915
North East Thames	Homerton Hospital, Phase 1	14,178,756
South West Thames	St. Georges Block H, Phase 2A	18,004,089
Wessex	Bournemouth District General Hospital, Phase 1A	14,636,811
West Midlands	Walsall, Phases 4A and 4B	14,679,257
West Midlands	City General, Stoke, Surgical Accommodation	14,724,874
West Midlands	Telford District General Hospital, Phase 1	18,536,334
West Midlands	Bromsgrove Redditch District General Hospital, Phase 1 Contract 2	15,285,938
Mersey	North Sefton District General Hospital, Southport, Phase 1	16,623,819

AIDS

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department received an application for a grant for 1990-91 from AIDS care education and training; and when this will be approved.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will approve the AIDS care education and training application for a grant under section 64 for the current financial year.

Mr. Freeman: ACET sent its application for section 64 funding for 1990-91 to the Department on 11 January 1990. A decision will be given as soon as consideration of the application is completed.

Durham Health Authority

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the total spending allocated to Durham district health authority for each year since 1979, and then adjusted for inflation.

Mr. Freeman: Allocations to district health authorities are a matter for the regional health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of Northern regional health authority.

Drug Promotion

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has any plans to halt the increase in drug promotion by companies.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Expenditure on promotion by pharmaceutical companies supplying the NHS with drugs within the terms of the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme is limited by that scheme. For the companies in aggregate it is limited to 9 per cent. of sales revenue.

Junior Doctors (Working Hours)

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will announce the outcome of recent studies on junior doctors' hours of work.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In 1985 the Department commissioned Dr. Robin Dowie of the British Postgraduate Medical Federation to undertake research into patterns of hospital medical staffing. She has completed an interim report on junior doctors' hours of work, which is published today. A copy will be placed in the Library.

The report covers the period before we launched two initiatives on junior doctors' hours of work. It cannot, therefore, be expected to reflect progress made during the last couple of years or so.

In our first initiative, launched in June 1988, we asked health authorities to take further action to reduce the onerous rotas worked by some junior doctors. Good progress has been made on this.

Reports from regions show that about 27 per cent. of all junior doctors were on rotas worse than one in three in 1988. By September 1990, around one in eight junior doctors will undertake duties which are onerous.

In the second initiative, which began in July 1989, we announced the establishment of nine pilot studies across six regional health authorities aimed at reducing average hours of duty to our long-term aim of 72 per week.

Another important feature of our drive to reduce the working hours of junior doctors is the appointment of 100 extra hospital consultants, as announced in the White Paper "Working for Patients". I announced details of the allocation of the first 35 of these posts in October last year, and hope to be in a position to announce the allocation of the remaining 65 by the end of this month.

I will be meeting representatives of the British Medical Association on Wednesday this week to discuss what further action is now appropriate. We are determined to see further progress in reducing the onerous rotas worked by some junior doctors.

With the rapid pace of scientific and medical advances it is even more important than ever for junior doctors not to be tired when carrying out their duties. Progress depends largely on the commitment and co-operation of the medical profession. This week's talks with the British Medical Association will be a good beginning.

Foetuses

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will place a copy of the research carried out for the Department on the law and practice in other countries on in vitro fertilisation, embryo research, abortion and the use of foetal tissue in research and treatment in the Library.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have today arranged for a copy of this research report to be placed in the Library. It was commissioned by the Department of Health in recognition of the need for up-to-date, accurate information on these subjects. In particular, the introduction of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill has focused attention on the approach taken in other countries to the questions raised by the Bill. The study was undertaken by Dr. Jennifer Gunning, until recently secretary of the Interim Licensing Authority.

The report is a survey of the legislation and current practice in a number of countries. It does not attempt to analyse the merits of any particular approach and no conclusions are drawn. It will be of value to hon. Members here in the debates on the subject.

Regional Health Authorities (Expenditure)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much each regional health authority *(a)* budgeted and *(b)* spent on (i) genito-urinary medicine and (ii) AIDS in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not held centrally and I cannot add to the reply that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury on 12 January 1990 at columns *776-77*.

Toxoplasmosis

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pregnant women were tested for toxoplasmosis in 1989.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally.

Great Ormond Street Hospital

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was the final cost of the work to make safe the cardiac block at Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children;

(2) who bore the cost of the work to make safe the cardiac block at Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children.

Mr. Freeman: The total works cost of the remedial works was £21·1 million. The cost of this work was borne centrally by the Department (70 per cent.) and by the University Grants Committee (30 per cent.). Litigation receipts of £8 million resulting from settlements in this case have been paid into the Consolidated Fund.

Correspondence

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to reply to the letter he has received from the hon. Member for Uxbridge dated 16 January concerning the case of Mr. W. A. Taylor.

Mr. Freeman: I have now written to my hon. Friend.

Residential Care (Bolton)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many elderly people were in residential care in the Bolton area in *(a)* local authority and *(b)* privately run homes in 1979 and 1989.

Mr. Freeman: Information for 1979 and 1988 is given in the table; information is not yet available for 31 March 1989.

Number of residents aged 65 and over in homes for the elderly and younger physically handicapped, Bolton

As at 31 March	*Local authority homes*	*Registered private homes*
1979	681	19
1988[1]	588	[2]500

[1] All 1988 figures are provisional.

[2] Includes 9 residents whose age was not known accommodated in homes primarily catering for elderly people.

Kuru and Creutzfeldt-Jakob Diseases

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the incidence in the United Kingdom in each of the last 10 years of reported cases of Kuru and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, respectively; and whether there is any explanation for changes in their incidence.

Mr. Freeman: Kuru does not occur in the United Kingdom; on Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Mr. Davis) on 2 February.

NHS Employees (Outside Interests)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a list of full-time National Health Service employees who are directors of, or who work for, companies operating in areas relating to their work in the National Health Service where there are opportunities for income generation.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what guidelines he has issued in addition to DHSS circular PM (79) 11 [November 1979], with its attached standard contract, to deal with the potential conflicts of interest where full-time National Health Service employees are involved as directors, shareholders, workers, or all three, in private companies operating in areas related to their work in the National Health Service where there are opportunities for income generation;

(2) whether he will issue guidelines to prevent full-time National Health Service employees being involved in any capacity in a private company operating in the same field as that in which they are employed in the National Health Service where there are opportunities for income generation.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Health authorities as employers are responsible for ensuring that their employees' private interests do not conflict with those of the authority. It is for them to decide how this is achieved. The model contract of employment which the Department has issued for health authority general managers includes a stipulation that the employee must declare to the authority any financial interest or relationship which may affect the authority's policies or decisions. We are considering whether further guidance is needed in this field.

Free Milk

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will list those local education authorities which have made an application under the Welfare Food Act 1988 for the provision of free milk for under-fives in local education authority nursery units and classes.

Mr. Freeman: The following 24 local education authorities have been approved (under the Welfare Food Regulations 1988) to participate in the scheme to receive reimbursement of costs for the supply of milk to children under five in nursery schools and classes:

Avon County Council
London Borough of Bexley
London Borough of Brent
Derbyshire County Council
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Durham County Council
London Borough of Hounslow
Inner London Education Authority
Kirklees Metropolitan Council
Leicestershire County Council
Liverpool City Council
Manchester City Council
City of Newcastle upon Tyne
North Tyneside Council
North Yorkshire County Council
Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
St. Helens Metropolitan Borough Council
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Sheffield City Council
Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
Staffordshire County Council
Wakefield Metropolitan District Council
Metropolitan Borough of Wirral

In addition, the following six local education authorities have indicated they will be applying for approval to participate in the scheme:

Birmingham City Council
Cambridgeshire County Council
Hereford and Worcester County Council
Oxfordshire County Council
Metropolitan District of Sefton
London Borough of Sutton

Family Practitioner Committees (Expenditure)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give, for the last year for which figures are available, the total for England and Wales and a breakdown for each family practitioner committee of *(a)* the number of general practice premises and *(b)* the amount directly reimbursed to unrestricted principals in general practice for the cost of providing premises under the rent and rates scheme.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* Information on the number of general practice premises is not collected centrally. Expenditure by family practitioner committees in England in 1988-89 on direct reimbursements to general medical practitioners under the rent and rates scheme is set out in the table. Information in relation to family practitioner services in Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Direct Reimbursements to General Medical Practitioners for Rent and Rates Costs, 1988-89

Family Practitioner Committee	£
Avon	1,530,724
Barking and Havering	852,785
Barnet	901,554
Barnsley	345,840
Bedfordshire	1,032,585
Berkshire	2,246,091
Birmingham	1,666,604
Bolton	247,554
Bradford	720,774
Brent and Harrow	1,397,754
Bromley	695,912
Buckinghamshire	1,723,275
Bury	175,821
Calderdale	304,813
Cambridgeshire	1,505,494
Camden and Islington	1,044,917
Cheshire	1,535,343
City and East London	1,471,921
Cleveland	733,423
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	911,570
Coventry	480,872
Croydon	601,840
Cumbria	633,392
Derbyshire	1,531,595
Devon	2,180,958
Doncaster	342,820
Dorset	1,647,729
Dudley	358,425
Durham	1,090,251
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	1,517,446
Enfield	1,166,622

Family Practitioner Committee	£
Essex	3,779,781
Gateshead	301,954
Gloucestershire	1,294,082
Greenwich and Bexley	930,232
Hampshire	3,096,826
Hereford and Worcester	949,429
Hertfordhire	3,389,963
Hillingdon	430,269
Humberside	1,427,404
Isle of Wight	221,649
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	1,441,861
Kent	3,326,975
Kingston and Richmond	844,628
Kirklees	456,509
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	1,451,237
Lancashire	1,389,213
Leeds	1,492,844
Leicestershire	1,467,513
Lincolnshire	1,095,256
Liverpool	555,297
Manchester	659,697
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	1,061,783
Newcastle	518,812
Norfolk	1,810,574
Northamptonshire	1,087,571
Northumberland	403,850
Nottinghamshire	1,532,486
Oldham	138,171
Oxfordshire	1,027,203
Redbridge	1,154,744
Rochdale	271,419
Rotherham	303,989
Salford	306,683
Sandwell	519,122
Sefton	472,078
Sheffield	923,439
Shropshire	628,777
Solihull	384,447
Somerset	1,128,053
Stafford	1,168,285
Stockport	389,362
St. Helens	546,256
Suffolk	1,507,019
Sunderland	226,703
Surrey	2,200,146
Sussex, East	1,406,463
Sussex, West	1,567,749
Tameside	308,597
Trafford	282,560
Tyneside, North	330,536
Tyneside, South	197,803
Wakefield	686,481
Walsall	477,386
Warwickshire	1,053,852
Wigan	373,235
Wiltshire	987,911
Wirral	404,224
Wolverhampton	432,634
Yorkshire North	1,749,904
England	92,569,630

Notes:

1. Payments under the rent and rates scheme comprise direct reimbursements for rent, rates, notional rent, cost rents and local authority economic rents applicable to surgery premises.

2. Expenditure figures based on FPC annual accounts prepared on an income and expenditure basis.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about the impact upon those engaged in milk distribution from the discounting of welfare milk tokens; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman *[pursuant to his reply, 23 January 1990, column 682]:* I regret that the reply contained an error.

The second sentence in the second paragraph should read:

"Milk Tokens will continue to be issued in respect of pregnant women and children under five in families receiving income support and to handicapped children aged five to 16 who, because of their handicap, are not registered at a school."

Residential Care

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to increase financial provision for residential care to cover fully the cost of such care.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* I have been asked to reply.

No. It has never been the policy of the Government to undertake to meet all fees, however high, charged by independent residential care homes.

Mr. Eastham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about the actual costs of residential care and the sums provided to cover such care.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* I have been asked to reply.

We receive a considerable number of representations from a variety of interested organisations and individuals.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Meat and Bone Meal

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total amount of meat and bone meal exported from the United Kingdom by the United Kingdom rendering industry for each of the last two years for which figures are available.

Mr. Curry: Exports of flours, meals and pellets, of meat or meat offal, greaves, for the last two years that figures are available are as follows:

	Tonnes
1987	12,299
1988	13,228

Source: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise Overseas Trade Statistics.

Flours and meals of meat and offals, greaves, unfit for human consumption

Country	December		Year to date	
	Kgs	*Value £*	*Kgs*	*Value £*
FR France	244,030	33,916	3,459,750	590,839
BE Belgium-Luxemburg			1,889,862	215,350
NL Netherlands			805,086	139,435
DE Federal Republic of Germany	23,000	6,468	73,000	20,557
IE Irish Republic	158,645	20,109	2,092,155	332,794

Country	December Kgs	December Value £	Year to date Kgs	Year to date Value £
DK Denmark			21,490	7,500
PT Portugal			500,000	113,000
MT Malta	40,100	5,334	260,260	30,741
ML Mali			20,020	2,523
NG Nigeria			16,714	6,354
GA Gabon			17,160	2,351
KE Kenya			80,060	8,967
ZM Zambia	9,000	2,862	9,000	2,862
ZA South Africa			5,000	3,035
CY Cyprus			18,000	3,600
SA Saudi Arabia			3,024,540	420,369
HK Hong Kong			70	476
NZ New Zealand			6,426	1,000
EC total	425,675	60,493	8,841,343	1,419,475
Non-EC total	49,100	8,196	3,457,250	482,278
All countries total	474,775	68,689	12,298,593	1,901,753

United Kingdom Exports (CDT) General Trade December 1988
Flours, Meals and Pellets, of Meat or Meat Offal: Greaves

Country	December Kilograms	December Value (£)	Year to Date Kilograms	Year to Date Value (£)
FR France	2,012,225	363,330	7,222,394	1,270,181
BE Belgium-Luxembourg	—	0	273,620	39,974
NL Netherlands	93,180	19,711	1,826,385	370,451
DE Federal Republic of Germany	59,520	22,019	558,530	205,357
IT Italy	14,000	3,430	3,7650	9,370
IE Irish Re; ublic	322,740	41,545	2,554,832	358,260
PT Portugal	—	0	80,000	18,310
SE Sweden	19,000	5,100	76,000	18,600
MT Malta	19,800	3,479	299,220	48,293
GH Ghana	—	0	16,050	6,138
ZA South Africa	—	0	5,000	3,645
LB Lebanon	60,000	13,920	60,000	13,920
IL Israel	18,000	6,035	92,000	38,271
SA Saudi Arabia	—	0	4,950	1,777
LK Sri Lanka	—	0	121,000	44,080
EC Total	2,501,665	450,035	12,553,411	2,271,903
Non-EC Total	116,800	28,534	674,220	174,724
All Countries Total	2,618,465	478,569	13,227,631	2,446,627

United Kingdom exports (CDT) general trade
November 1989
Flours, meals and pellets, of meat or meat offal; Greaves

Country	November Kilograms	November Value (£)	Year to date Kilograms	Year to date Value (£)
FR France	1,766,660	315,084	14,636,818	2,537,789
BE Belgium/Luxembourg	554,750	75,363	1,604,710	258,782
NL Netherlands	1,002,060	155,593	5,863,449	1,186,838
DE Federal Republic of Germany	40,020	15,180	538,365	135,503
IT Italy	—	0	72,500	20,068
IE Irish Republic	140,520	54,200	813,987	179,256
DK Denmark	18,630	9,370	60,381	17,395
MT Malta	—	0	200,210	32,931
LR Liberia	—	0	2,785	1,898
NG Nigeria	—	0	100,000	27,000
KE Kenya	—	0	49,980	14,134
LB Lebanon	—	0	341,750	68,350
ZA South Africa	—	0	20,160	3,790
IL Israel	888,100	190,004	2,546,845	624,987
SA Saudi Arabia	484,440	76,563	3,461,878	622,136
LK Sri Lanka	—	0	20,000	6,380
TW Taiwan	—	0	200,000	58,000
PR Puerto Rico	—	0	19,580	2,895
QQ Curacao	—	0	760	3,462
EC Total	3,522,640	624,790	23,590,210	4,335,631

Country	November Kilograms	November Value (£)	Year to date Kilograms	Year to date Value (£)
Non-EC Total	1,372,540	266,567	6,963,948	1,465,963
All Countries Total	4,895,180	891,357	30,554,158	5,801,594

Note: Latest available data for 1989.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what European quality standards apply to the production of meat and bone meal.

Mr. Maclean: Standards for meat and bone meal are laid down in EC directives which are enacted in the United Kingdom by the Feedingstuffs Regulations 1988. These require that the product should be substantially free of hair, bristle, feathers, horn, hoof, skin and blood and of the contents of stomach and viscera; and technically free of organic solvents.

Agriculture Industry

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the amount borrowed and *(b)* the consequent liability for interest of the agricultural industry in each year since 1978.

Mr. Curry: The figures are as follows:

	Total liabilities[1] in £ million at year end	Interest paid net of interest received[2] in £ million
1978	3,400	184
1979	4,150	318
1980	4,650	464
1981	5,400	468
1982	6,300	501
1983	7,300	494
1984	7,650	569
1985	8,250	704
1986	8,350	700
1987	8,550	637
1988	9,250	690
1989	not yet available	949 (forecast)

[1] Total liabilities include trade credit, most of which will not incur interest.

[2] Interest paid excludes interest paid on loans taken out for land purchase.

Bovine Somatotropin

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the study by the European Community Commission into the economic and social implications of the use of bovine somatotropin.

Mr. Maclean: The report (doc 8975/89) the Commission presented in October identified a number of issues which could arise were BST to be licensed and which it considered to need more study. The Commission has work in hand and a further report is expected this autumn.

Food Surpluses

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will raise at the next meeting of the Agriculture Council the sums being spent on the disposal of food surpluses.

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend is well aware of the considerable success the United Kingdom Government have had in bringing about reform of the common agricultural policy (CAP), in particular through the measures agreed in February 1988. These reforms are beginning to bear fruit. Surplus stocks are a fraction of what they have been; expenditure is well below the financial guideline. In negotiations in the Council of Ministers of the Commission's price proposals, we will be seeking to ensure that this progress towards a more rational and sustainable CAP is maintained.

Turkeys

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he is taking to protect the traditional farm fresh turkey sold unEviscerated.

Mr. Maclean: We have ensured that the EC Commission is in no doubt about the importance we attach to our right to permit farmers to market unEviscerated poultry. We shall oppose any proposal which might seek to prohibit this.

Pollution (Farms)

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what forms of assistance are available to farmers seeking to deal with on-farm pollution problems.

Mr. Curry: My Department offers a free initial visit to farmers by an ADAS expert and grants to meet 50 per cent. of the cost of new investment to handle, store and treat farm waste.

Basking Sharks

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total catch in United Kingdom waters of basking sharks in 1989.

Mr. Curry: There is no requirement on United Kingdom fishermen to report catches of basking sharks but these are thought to be minimal. Norway may take basking sharks in United Kingdom waters as part of the annual EC-Norway fisheries arrangements, but catches in 1987, 1988 and the first part of 1989 were nil.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has any proposals to control catches of basking sharks by issuing licences.

Mr. Curry: No. The data available indicate that there has been no decline in the stock in Community waters since 1978.

National Fruit Collection

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will play a co-ordinating role in relation to the responsibilities for science in relation to the decision to move the national fruit collection from Brogdale to Wye college.

Mr. Maclean: The arrangements for moving the national fruit collection to Wye college and for its subsequent maintenance there will be covered by a contract between the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the college. This will include any Ministry-funded scientific work in the collection. A small advisory group of independent scientists will oversee compliance with the contract. We see no need for further co-ordination.

Live Cattle Imports

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all those countries currently enforcing bans or partial bans on live cattle imports from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: Member states of the European Community, Australia, Austria, Finland, Israel, New Zealand, Sweden and the United States of America.

Non-governmental Organisations

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the meeting between non-governmental organisations represented by Tony Juniper, Peter Knights, Dave Currey, Peter Wilkinson, Karen Bradbury, Colin Booty and David Williams and officials of his Department on 30 January.

Mr. Maclean: Officials from my Department and the Department of the Environment had a useful exchange of views with these representatives on the trade in wild-caught birds and possible measures to reduce mortality among imported birds.

Lead-contaminated Feed

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to lift restrictions on the movement and sale of cattle affected by lead-contaminated feed; and what progress has been made in meeting compensation claims.

Mr. Maclean: I announced further measures on 1 February which will ease livestock restrictions. We shall continue our comprehensive research programme with a view to lifting all restrictions as quickly as possible, consistent with the need to ensure that the food chain remains fully protected.

There is no provision for statutory Government compensation in the event of incidents of this kind. The National Farmers Union is, however, advising its members on the subject of compensation.

Scrapie

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will prohibit the sale of meat for human consumption from sheep that are suspected of having scrapie.

Mr. Curry: No, because scrapie has been present in this country for at least two centuries without any evidence to suggest that it has been, or can be, a risk to humans. Nor has research over 20 years identified any such risk.

Sheep

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his Department's procedure to ensure that the Economic Community sheepmeat premium is paid annually in respect of eligible sheep.

Mr. Curry: The annual ewe premium provided for by the EC sheepmeat regime is paid annually to eligible claimants.

Food Irradiation

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any further representations concerning the irradiation of food.

Mr. Maclean: I receive letters about food irradiation as about other topical matters.

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a further statement on the Government's policy towards the irradiation of food.

Mr. Maclean: The Government are taking steps to permit the use of food irradiation as one additional measure in the comprehensive range of policies aimed at protecting public health through enhancing the safety of food. On obtaining the necessary powers, the Government would propose to introduce a licensing system with official monitoring by qualified inspectors. Comprehensive labelling provisions are also proposed that would leave consumers free to decide for themselves whether they wish to choose foods whose safety is protected by this process.

Milk

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has of the cost of the distribution of *(a)* welfare milk and *(b)* milk supplied to customers in general; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Milk prices were de-controlled at the beginning of 1985 and my Department no longer collects this type of information.

Animal Feedstuffs

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what United Kingdom regulations govern the declaration by manufacturers and wholesalers of ingredients on the labels of compound animal feedstuffs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: At present manufacturers of feedingstuffs must give detailed nutritional information such as protein, oil and fibre content and guarantee the safety of the finished feed. Manufacturers may also voluntarily declare the ingredients used. However, an amendment to the relevant EC directive was agreed at the Agriculture Council on 22 January, which will make it obligatory for ingredients to be shown in descending order of importance or in categories of similar ingredients.

Salmonella

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the risk of a pasteurised egg containing salmonella enteriditis.

Mr. Curry: It is not possible to pasteurise an egg.

Pasteurisation is applied in egg-processing plants to broken-out bulk liquid egg. Only a moderate heat treatment can be applied during the process, otherwise the functional properties of the liquid egg are destroyed. The risk of contamination remaining at the end of the process depends on the degree of contamination of the raw product prior to pasteurisation. This is why processing plants cannot accept raw product which is likely to be heavily contaminated.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Michael: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will outline his statutory responsibilities and those of his Department in relation to food poisoning.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 2 February 1990]:* My statutory responsibilities in relation to food poisoning are set out in the Food Act 1984, the Animal Health Act 1981 and the Food and Environmental Protection Act 1985.

SCOTLAND

Toll-free Bridges

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the toll-free bridges built from public funds in the Highlands and Islands since 1965.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Since 1965, approximately 125 significant road bridges have been built from public funds in the Highlands and Islands. If the hon. Member would care to identify the type of bridge which interests him I should be pleased to provide him with a list.

Skye Toll Bridge

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the prospective designers and operators of a Skye toll bridge have so far been required to consult any environmental bodies before submitting plans and costs.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Skye bridge working group has already consulted the Royal Fine Art Commission for Scotland (RFACS) and is in touch also with the Countryside Commission for Scotland, the Nature Conservancy Council and the National Trust for Scotland. The views of these bodies will be conveyed to the three tenderers once they have been selected. The tenderers will be required to provide an environmental impact statement for each of their designs and, as usual, to give RFACS an opportunity to comment on their detailed designs before their tenders are formally submitted to the Scottish Development Department.

Communications Infrastructure

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the policy of his Department on the provision of future fixed link improvements in communications infrastructure being provided *(a)* from public funds and *(b)* by the private sector.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I assume the hon. Member's interest is in major roads and road bridges. We are committed to further improving the trunk road network in Scotland, and plan to increase public expenditure on new construction during 1990-91 by some 25 per cent. over the current year. As indicated in "New Roads by New Means", the financing of roads is no longer a matter solely for Government, however, and there will from time to time be ad hoc opportunities for privately financed schemes. The Scottish Development Department is willing to discuss with the private sector any such schemes which are brought forward.

Labour Clubs (Dundee)

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Tayside on progress on the criminal investigations arising out of alleged irregularities in the running of the Labour clubs in Ardler, Menzieshill and Whitfield, Dundee, commenced in November 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The investigation of crime is the responsibility of my noble Friend, the Lord Advocate.

The procurator fiscal at Dundee has reported regularly to Crown counsel on the progress of investigations by him and Tayside police.

Given that inquiries are not yet concluded it would not be appropriate for further details to be given at this time.

Doctors and Nurses

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will identify the number of doctors and nurses employed in Scotland *(a)* now and *(b)* in June 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is shown in the table:

	1979	*1989*
Doctors	9,839	[1]10,833
Nurses	66,339	[2]75,213

[1] As at 30 September 1988.
[2] Provisional, as at 30 September 1989.

Sheep Farming

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask he Secretary of State for Scotland how many sheep farmers in each of the Scottish regions have 1,000 ewes or over; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the table:

Farm units with 1,000 or more breeding ewes June 1989
Scottish regions and Island areas

Region/Island area	*Number of farm units with 1,000 or more breeding ewes*
Borders	141
Central	40
Dumfries and Galloway	105
Fife	2
Grampian	14
Highland	79
Lothians	23
Strathclyde	145
Tayside	76
Orkney	4

Region/Island area	Number of farm units with 1,000 or more breeding ewes
Shetland	8
Western Isles	2

Local Government Finance

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of the community charge table for each district council and regional council for 1989 and what it would have been if it had been uprated in line with inflation for the 1990-91 year.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is set out in the table. The 1989-90 charges have been uprated by the January RPI figure (7·7 per cent.).

	Community Charge 1989-90 (inc. water charge) £	Community charge 1989-90 increased by current RPI £
BORDERS	205·00	220·79
Berwickshire	31·00	33·39
Ettrick and Lauderdale	42·00	45·23
Roxburgh	42·00	45·23
Tweeddale	43·00	46·31
CENTRAL	213·00	229·40
Clackmannan	87·00	93·70
Falkirk	46·00	49·54
Stirling	97·00	104·47
DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY	206·50	222·40
Annandale and Eskdale	47·00	50·62
Nithsdale	39·00	42·00
Stewartry	37·00	39·85
Wigtown	40·00	43·08
FIFE	238·00	256·33
Dunfermline	55·00	58·24
Kirkcaldy	60·00	64·62
North East Fife	82·00	88·31
GRAMPIAN	219·00	235·86
Aberdeen City	85·00	91·55
Banff and Buchan	56·70	61·07
Gordon	44·00	47·39
Kincardine and Deeside	32·00	34·46
Moray	42·00	45·23
HIGHLAND	200·00	215·40
Badenoch and Strathspey	35·00	37·70
Caithness	25·00	26·93
Inverness	26·00	28·00
Lochaber	37·00	39·85
Nairn	28·00	30·16
Ross and Cromarty	39·00	42·00
Skye and Lochalsh	25·00	26·93
Sutherland	6·00	6·46
LOTHIAN	305·00	328·49
East Lothian	69·00	74·31
Edinburgh City	87·00	93·70
Midlothian	59·00	63·54
West Lothian	54·00	58·16
STRATHCLYDE	219·00	235·86
Argyll and Bute	58·00	62·47
Bearsden and Milngavie	79·00	85·08
Clydebank	78·00	84·01
Clydesdale	82·00	88·31
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	56·00	60·31
Cumnock and Doon Valley	57·00	61·39
Cunninghame	59·00	63·54
Dumbarton	79·00	85·08
East Kilbride	99·00	106·62
Eastwood	63·00	67·85
Glasgow City	87·00	93·70
Hamilton	72·00	77·54
Inverclyde	72·00	77·54
Kilmarnock and Loudon	50·00	53·85
Kyle and Carrick	89·00	95·85
Monklands	74·00	79·70
Motherwell	86·00	92·62
Renfrew	76·00	81·85
Strathkelvin	80·00	86·16
Tayside	241·00	239·56
Angus	52·00	56·00
Dundee City	83·00	89·39
Perth and Kinross	58·00	62·47

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of local authority expenditure in 1990-91 he estimates will be met by community charge payers.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Until details of local authorities' budgets are available it is not possible to estimate what proportion of their expenditure in 1990-91 is to be met by community charge payers. The proportion indicated in budget returns for the current year is 21 per cent.

Private Rented Accommodation

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has made an estimate of the increase in central Government subsidy to housing benefit caused by private landlords who have failed to reduce their rents following the replacement of rates by the poll tax.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There has been no such increase.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will cause a study to be carried out on the number and proportion of private landlords who have not reduced rents following the abolition of rates; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Effective remedies are available to regulated tenants and assured tenants who believe their landlords are continuing to include an element for domestic rates in their rental charge. A study on the lines suggested would serve no useful purpose.

Hill Farms, East Kilbride

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number of designated hill farms within the constituency of East Kilbride.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of agricultural holdings classified as less favoured within the constituency of East Kilbride is estimated to be 247. The figure is, however, approximate since parish boundaries (on which records of holdings are based) do not necessarily coincide exactly with constituency boundaries.

Lothian Health Board

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the name of the accountants instructed by the chief executive of the Scottish Health Service to examine the accounting methods of Lothian health board referred to in his reply to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central on 31 January.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: KPMG Peat Marwick McLintock.

Grant-aided Colleges

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many extra students there will be at the grant-aided Scottish colleges in each of the next five years;

(2) pursuant to his answer of 18 December 1989, whether he will now say how many students are and will be enrolled at each of the Scottish grant-aided colleges in the years 1989-90, 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Mr. Lang: As I stated in my written answer of 18 December 1989, *Official Report*, columns *50-51*, projected student numbers will be set out in the Scottish commentary on public expenditure to 1992-93, which will be published shortly.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the three-year running cost settlements that have been provided for each of the Scottish grant-aided colleges; and how much extra money has been provided through fee income and for extra student numbers.

Mr. Lang: I shall announce allocations of grant-in-aid for 1990-91 shortly and provide colleges with provisional grant allocation figures for the following two years in due course. The colleges' tuition fee income will depend on the numbers of students enrolled and the levels of fee they charge.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were *(a)* the academic staff numbers and *(b)* the student numbers in each of the Scottish grant-aided colleges in each of the last five years.

Mr. Lang: The figures are given in the table:

	Academic staff[1,2]					*Students*[1]				
	1984-85	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*
Central institutions										
[3]Robert Gordons Institute of Technology	283·0	292·0	301·0	311·0	311·0	3,194	3,229	3,328	3,291	3,483
Dundee Institute of Technology	162·5	168·5	171·5	174·5	174·5	2,075	2,095	2,114	2,044	2,010
Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art	98·0	98·0	98·0	98·0	98·0	1,057	1,045	1,065	1,099	1,108
Edinburgh College of Art	104·0	104·0	102·0	100·0	100·0	1,060	1,070	1,070	1,065	1,069
[4]Queen Margaret College	125·0	122·0	122·0	122·0	122·0	1,227	1,305	1,391	1,401	1,513
[5]Napier Polytechnic of Edinburgh	—	441·0	451·0	462·0	462·0	—	4,830	5,022	5,372	5,703
Scottish College of Textiles	53·0	53·0	54·0	55·0	55·0	641	595	605	616	615
Queens College Glasgow	81·0	81·0	74·0	81·0	81·0	850	845	847	904	987
Glasgow School of Art	100·0	100·0	100·0	102·0	102·0	1,163	1,038	1,069	952	973
Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama	60·5	60·5	60·5	60·5	60·5	394	399	376	419	436
[6]Glasgow College of Technology	—	343·5	347·5	350·5	350·5	—	4,066	4,088	3,878	4,174
[6]Paisley College of Technology	239·5	246·5	250·5	255·5	255·5	3,045	2,924	3,065	3,146	3,354
[7]Leith Nautical College	63·0	53·5	—	—	—	683	483	—	—	—
Colleges of education										
[8]Aberdeen	92·0	87·0	—	—	—	756	747	—	—	—
Craigie	38·5	40·0	39·0	39·0	39·0	332	334	357	403	367
[8]Dundee	77·0	73·0	—	—	—	608	609	—	—	—
[9]Dunfermline	47·0	45·0	—	—	—	366	374	—	—	—
Jordanhill	278·0	271·0	268·0	244·0	244·0	2,332	2,229	2,439	2,324	2,260
Moray House	169·5	170·0	207·0	208·0	208·0	1,402	1,480	1,849	2,016	1,992
St. Andrews	102·0	97·0	96·0	91·0	91·0	841	836	862	873	827
Northern	—	—	158·0	151·0	151·0	—	—	1,420	1,451	1,400

[1]Staff and student figures are expressed as full-time equivalents.
[2]The staff figures represent the approved complements.
[3]Excludes the Off-shore Survival Centre and the Off-shore Health Centre.
[4]Excludes the Business Development Centre.
[5]Napier Polytechnic of Edinburgh and Glasgow College of Technology joined the Central Institution sector on 1 September 1985.
[6]Excludes the Non-Destructive Testing Centre.
[7]Leith Nautical College transferred to the local authority sector with effect from 1 August 1987.
[8]Merged to form Northern College of Education on 1 April 1987.
[9]Merged with Moray House College of Education on 1 April 1987.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the total budgets for each of the Scottish grant-aided colleges in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Lang: The gross current expenditure in each of the colleges is set out in the table:

Grant-aided colleges gross current expenditure

£ million

Grant aided colleges	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82[1]	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89
Central Institutions										
Napier Polytechnic of Edinburgh[3]	—	—	—	—	—	—	[2]9·582	[2]17·351	[2]19·497	22·136
Glasgow College of Technology[3]	—	—	—	—	—	—	[2]7·629	[2]13·070	[2]14·039	17·039
Robert Gordon's Institute of Technology	5·881	7·126	5·192	8·841	9·941	10·421	[2]11·123	[2]12·096	[2]13·471	14·669
Paisley College of Technology	5·080	6·531	5·080	8·222	8·697	9·277	[2]9·920	[2]10·690	[2]11·466	12·556
Dundee Institute of Technology	3·110	4·184	3·645	5·045	5·427	5·856	[2]6·215	[2]6·747	[2]7·319	8·077
Scottish College of Textiles	1·080	1·399	1·087	1·759	1·946	2·336	2·279	2·363	2·513	3·891
Queen Margaret College	2·536	3·221	2·778	3·489	3·657	3·874	4·214	5·069	5·582	6·416
Queen's College Glasgow	1·634	2·205	1·823	2·582	2·793	2·923	3·185	3·317	3·536	3·878
Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art	2·205	2·712	1·963	3·084	3·298	3·434	3·582	3·781	4·148	4·423
Edinburgh College of Art	2·436	2·886	2·226	3·475	3·733	3·815	4·075	4·249	4·333	4·629
Glasgow School of Art	2·138	2·719	1·998	3·172	3·309	3·545	3·717	3·880	4·275	4·438
Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama	1·043	1·383	1·129	1·518	1·643	1·762	1·874	2·010	2·533	2·913
Leith Nautical College[4]	1·249	1·581	1·197	1·830	1·887	1·822	1·840	—	—	—
Colleges of Education										
Aberdeen College of Education[5]	2·415	2·881	3·110	3·231	3·263	3·344	3·393	3·496	—	—
Callendar Park College of Education[5]	1·029	1·246	0·510	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Craigie College of Education	1·041	1·177	1·242	1·295	1·284	1·364	1·458	1·576	1·735	2·105
Craiglockhart College of Education[6]	0·751	0·911	0·429	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Dundee College of Education[8]	2·186	2·609	2·786	2·870	2·879	2·936	3·129	3·094	—	—
Dunfermline College of Physical Education[9]	1·271	1·591	1·744	1·774	1·838	1·845	1·955	1·970	—	—
Hamilton College of Education[5]	1·537	1·789	0·880	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Jordanhill College of Education[7]	6·251	7·798	8·765	10·588	10·149	10·366	10·770	11·302	10·698	11·318
Moray House College of Education	3·934	4·772	5·823	6·055	5·988	6·059	6·484	6·606	8·878	9·243
Northern College of Education	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	6·934	7·383
Notre Dame College of Education[6]	2·102	2·449	1·101	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
St. Andrew's College of Education	—	—	2·129	3·705	3·689	3·832	3·852	3·844	3·939	4·251

[1] Represents spending over 9 month period due to change in financial year.
[2] Figures include grant allocated under the switch to technology programme.
[3] Napier Polytechnic of Edinburgh and Glasgow College of Technology became central institutions on 1 September 1985.
[4] Leith Nautical College transferred to the local authority sector.
[5] College dissolved on 15 September 1981.
[6] Merged to form St. Andrew's College of Education on 15 September 1981.
[7] Includes funding for Jordanhill College School until 31 March 1987.
[8] Merged to form Northern College of Education on 1 April 1987.
[9] Merged with Moray House College of Education on 1 April 1987.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether it is his planned intention to raise the staff-student ratio beyond 11·5:1 in Scottish grant-aided colleges in future years.

Mr. Lang: I expect the overall student:staff ratio in the grant-aided colleges to reach 11·5:1 in session 1989-90. For the future I envisage that staff and student numbers will be a matter for the colleges themselves in keeping with their responsibility for achieving the best use of the resources available to them.

Self-governing Schools

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much he has budgeted for ballots, the preparation of formal proposals for self-governing status, and transitional and special purpose grants for schools which may become self-governing in 1990-91.

Mr. Lang: The provision to be made for this expenditure will be published in the Supply Estimates for 1990-91 to be laid before the House in the next few weeks.

Technology Academies

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how the £3·8 million budgeted for technology academies in 1988-89 was spent;

(2) whether any money was budgeted and spent on technology academies prior to 1987-88.

Mr. Lang: No provision for expenditure on technology academies was made in either 1987-88 or 1988-89. There is provision of £4·25 million for this purpose in the Estimates for the current financial year.

Education Expenditure

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) pursuant to his answer of 14 December 1989, *Official Report*, column *808*, whether he will now say by how much his education budget will increase in cash and percentage terms in the years 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93, excluding the costs of student maintenance;

(2) pursuant to his answer of 14 December 1989, *Official Report*, column *808*, whether he will now say how much money will be spent on student grants in Scotland in 1989-90, 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93;

(3) pursuant to his answer of 14 December 1989, *Official Report*, column *808*, whether he will now say how much money will be spent on student loans in Scotland in 1990-91, 1991-92 and 1992-93;

(4) pursuant to his answer of 18 December 1989, *Official Report*, column *53*, if he can now say what his spending plans are for the postgraduate student allowance scheme for the years until 1992-93.

Mr. Lang: As stated in the answers I gave the hon. Member on 14 December 1989 at column *808* and 19 December at column *149*, my detailed expenditure plans will be set out in the Scottish commentary on public expenditure to 1992-93 which will be published shortly.

Water Supply (Disconnections)

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the latest figures for the number of people who were disconnected from their water supplies in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally. A water authority (regional or islands council) would disconnect a domestic household's supply only for operational reasons. These would include repairing leaks, making connections and lining pipes.

Charing Cross Clinic

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will act to ensure that Greater Glasgow health board does not proceed with its plans to close Charing Cross clinic which provides a comprehensive range of alcohol and drug recovery services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The level and pattern of services to be provided for people with alcohol and drug problems is primarily a matter for health boards to determine in consultation with local authorities and the voluntary sector and in the light of their assessment of local needs and circumstances.

I understand that Greater Glasgow health board has issued a consultative document proposing the closure of Charing Cross clinic and relocation of the services provided there. The board will be considering the responses it receives to the consultation document. Thereafter, if the board wishes to proceed with the closure of the clinic, the approval of my right hon. and learned Friend will be required.

Steel Foundry, Bathgate

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the actions of the Scottish Office in relation to the North British steel foundry in Bathgate.

Mr. Lang: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman.

Roads, Ayrshire

Mr. McKelvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland why the Government's expenditure plans, Cm 1015, include no reference to the £100 million road programme for the upgrading of Ayshire roads which he announced in July 1989.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have taken the opportunity to give the hon. Member a full reply to this question in the letter I sent to him on Friday 2 February.

Nuclear Electricity

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to ensure that Scottish Power and Hydro-Electric enter into contracts with Scottish Nuclear Ltd. for the sale of nuclear electricity in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: Negotiations about the terms and conditions of the nuclear energy agreement are taking place.

Waiting Lists (Inverclyde)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is *(a)* the total waiting list, *(b)* the longest time any patient had to wait and *(c)* the numbers waiting by number of months' wait for the ear, nose and throat department at the Inverclyde royal hospital over the last four years for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 25 January 1990]:* The information available is set out in the tables:

(a) In-patient waiting list at 31 March.

Year	Numbers on Waiting List
1986	358
1987	462
1988	[1]253
1989	[1]245

(b) Waiting time for those discharged during the year.

Year	Longest Waiting time (Months)	Mean Waiting Time (Months)[2]
1985	46·5	3·4
1986	36·8	2·8
1987	54·4	3·4
1988	55·5	3·4

(c) Number of people on the waiting list by time spent on the waiting list at 31 March[3]

	1988 Number	1989 Number
under 3 months	104	141
3 and under 6 months	50	33
6 and under 9 months	38	16
9 and under 12 months	25	26

	1988 Number	1989 Number
12 months and over	36	29
Total	253	245

[1] The altered statistical system on which these figures are collected is explained in ISD Statistical Bulletin 1/88.

[2] The figures in this column relate to admissions while those at Vol. 149 No. 6137 of the official report were confined to operations.

[3] The altered statistical system on which these figures are collected is explained in ISD Statistical Bulletin 1/88. The information is not available for earlier years.

Lothian Health Board

Mr. Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is the projected shortfall in the finances of Lothian health board for the current financial year; and if he will take any steps to supplement the board's finances in order to ensure the continuing provision of patient care;

(2) what are the terms of reference of the review that Mr. Don Cruickshank is to conduct into the financial crisis of Lothian health board; when he expects that review to be completed; and if he will publish Mr. Cruickshank's report.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 26 January 1990]:* Lothian health board has indicated that its expenditure in 1989-90 will exceed its revenue allocation by some £9 million. However, the interests of patient care remain paramount and there is no question of crisis closures, or reductions in patient services as a result of the current financial difficulties.

An independent review initiated by the chief executive, NHS in Scotland has examined the board's financial management of its affairs.

Dangerous Animals

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has any plans for legislation concerning the control of dangerous animals, whether kept as domestic pets, or for guarding of premises.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 2 February 1990]:* My right hon. and learned Friend has no such plans at present. There is already a considerable body of relevant legislation, including the Guard Dogs Act 1975, the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 and certain provisions relating to dangerous and annoying creatures in the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982, which is currently under review. Most recently the Dangerous Dogs Act 1989 significantly enhanced the powers of the courts to deal with dog owners who fail to exercise proper control over their animals. These provisions, together with the judicious use of byelaws as advocated in our consultation paper, "Action on Dogs", offer considerable scope for more effective control of dangerous animals.

Trials (Delays)

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he has any plans to reform the organisation of Scottish courts to ensure that cases are no longer abandoned because of delays in convening a trial.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 2 February 1990]:* No. The information available centrally indicates that less than 0·5 per cent. of all cases reported to procurators fiscal are not proceeded with due to court delays, predominately minor cases in the district courts.

Scottish Wildcats

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will bring forward legislation to ensure that Scottish wildcats are protected from extinction.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 2 February 1990]:* The Scottish wildcat (Felis silvestris) was added to schedule 5 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 under the Variation of Schedules Order 1988. It is an offence intentionally to kill, injure or take any wild animal included in the schedule. Following an increase in recent years, the numbers of wildcats have stabilised.

Procurator Fiscal

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the number of cases requiring the services of the procurator fiscal coming before *(a)* the sheriff and district courts at Rothesay for the 12 months prior to 30 September 1988 and *(b)* the sheriff courts at Dunoon and Rothesay and the district courts at Dunoon, Rothesay and Inveraray for (i) the year ended 31 December 1988 and (ii) the year ended 31 December 1989.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 2 February 1990]:* The figures are as follows:

	12 months prior to 30 September 1988	1988	1989
Rothesay Sheriff Court Cases	390	313	298
Rothesay District Court Cases	45	42	68
Dunoon Sheriff Court Cases		867	625
Dunoon District Court Cases		41	120
Inveraray District Court Cases		35	61

TRANSPORT

Highway Authorities

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list in the *Official Report* those highway authorities to which supplementary credit approval has been allocated for 1990-91, together with the size of the approvals and the purpose for which they are intended.

Mr. Atkins: The information requested is given in the table:

Supplementary credit approvals in 1990-91

Authority	SCA £ million	Scheme
Berkshire	0·239	Reading IDR urban traffic control
East Sussex	0·660	Brighton bypass-Hangleton link
Hampshire	5·910	Blackwater valley route (north)
Kent	4·560	Thanet way dualling
Kent	0·996	A256 Dover-Sandwich
Kent	0·102	A260 Barham-Folkestone
Kent	4·195	A2070 Brenzett-Ashford
Surrey	1·804	Runfold diversion and BVR A31-A323
Surrey	0·759	Blackwater valley route northern section
Surrey	0·183	Urban traffic control

Authority	SCA £ million	Scheme
Avon	0·491	Urban traffic control
Devon	0·407	Urban traffic control Scoot phase 3
Birmingham	0·744	City urban traffic control
Coventry	0·767	Foleshill Holbrooks bypass
Coventry	0·058	Urban traffic control
Coventry	0·013	IDA
Walsall	2·693	Black country route
Wolverhampton	2·111	Black country route
Warwicks	0·328	Bedworth bypass extension
Manchester	0·187	Urban traffic control
St. Helens	0·340	Urban traffic control
Sefton	0·282	Urban traffic control
Wirral	0·220	Urban traffic control
Sunderland	0·007	IDA
Barnsley	0·132	Urban traffic control
Rotherham	3·435	IDA
Sheffield	0·270	Urban traffic control
Sheffield	0·392	IDA
Bradford	0·127	Urban traffic control
Bradford	0·018	IDA
Kirklees	0·006	IDA
Leeds	0·088	Urban traffic control
Humberside	0·210	IDA
Leicestershire	0·081	Redland quarry to Quorn/ Mounts orrel bypass link
Bedfordshire	0·132	Urban traffic control in Luton
Essex	0·373	Braintree bypass
Norfolk	2·782	Trowse bypass
Norfolk	0·107	Urban traffic control in Norwich
Ealing	1·710	Hayes bypass
Enfield	6·480	North south route
Haringey	2·780	North south route
Hillingdon	4·917	Hayes bypass
Hounslow	0·279	Hayes bypass contract 4
Merton	1·150	Beddington/Mitcham relief road

"IDA" means road schemes qualifying for grant under Section 13 of the Industrial Development Act 1982.

Bus Lanes

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to review the present regulation on bus lanes in London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Decisions on bus lanes in London are primarily for London boroughs. Departmental advice published in circular 2/87 "Traffic Management Guidance in London", is that buses be given priority where benefits to passengers exceed the costs to other traffic. We are reviewing currently requirements for the signing of bus lanes and technical advice on implementation of bus priority measures more generally.

Buses

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many bus operators and how many miles of bus route there were in 1989; and what the figure was in 1985.

Mr. Portillo: These data are not available. However, local bus mileage outside London increased by 18 per cent. between 1985-86 and 1988-89, with 84 per cent. of the 1988-89 mileage being operated on a commercial basis.

London Transport (Sexual Attacks)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many sexual attacks have occurred on London Transport vehicles in each of the past three years; what action he is taking to stop these attacks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The number of reported "sexual offences" on London Underground trains and stations in 1987, 1988 and 1989 were 334, 451 and 632 respectively. Figures for crimes on trains are not recorded separately. The category "sexual offences" covers a range of incidents from indecent exposure to rape. The British Transport police are now targeting this type of crime and detection rates have increased by 94 per cent. since 1988. In addition, a programme of passenger security measures is being introduced on the Underground, financed by £15 million Government grant. Crime against passengers on London buses is dealt with by the Metropolitan police and London Regional Transport does not maintain a central statistical record of such incidents. There has been no serious crime reported on the Docklands light railway since it opened in 1987.

London Underground (Escalators)

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many London Transport escalators have been out of service during the past two months.

Mr. Portillo: This is a matter for London Regional Transport. I am asking the chairman to write to my hon. Friend.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had about the co-ordination of entry clearance for individuals and luggage with the transport arrangements for travellers on the proposed Channel tunnel.

Mr. Portillo: For travellers on Eurotunnel shuttle trains, the concession agreement specifies juxtaposed frontier controls. All the formalities of both countries will be carried out at the terminal of departure.

For BR/SNCF trains going beyond London, the Channel Tunnel Act specifies on-train controls provided that satisfactory arrangements are made to provide facilities for the control authorities.

Discussions between the frontier control authorities, Eurotunnel and British Rail about the detailed arrangements appropriate to the Channel tunnel in these two cases are continuing.

For international trains to London, discussions between BR and the control authorities are under way and an announcement is expected shortly.

M1 (De-acceleration Lanes)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if de-acceleration lanes will be provided on the M1 south bound at its junction with the M25.

Mr. Atkins: The layout of this junction will be examined by Hertfordshire county council under its design commission from the Department for the proposed

widening of the M1 from junction 6a (M25) to junction 10 (Luton airport). This is one of the many new schemes announced in the White Paper, "Roads for Prosperity", published in May 1989.

Speed Limits

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to introduce legislation that will make it easier to introduce lower speed limits.

Mr. Atkins: Lower speed limits in suitable residential areas could have a significant effect in reducing road casualties, particularly among children. I am discussing with the local authority associations and the police guidelines for the establishment of 20mph zones and hope shortly to issue a consultative document. Action by local authorities on these lines will not require legislation.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his Department's policy with regard to the extension of existing 30mph speed limits commensurate with urban developments.

Mr. Atkins: Most urban developments have street lighting, where a 30mph limit automatically applies. It is open to local highway authorities to introduce a 30mph limit on their other roads if, in their view, that would enhance road safety.

Noise Insulation

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will amend existing noise insulation regulations to enable eligibility for insulation to be based on a noise criteria level alone.

Mr. Atkins: No. The cost of insulating all properties receiving a noise level at or above 68 dB(A)L10 18 hour would be prohibitive. It was estimated in 1983 that it would cost about £2 billion.

British Transport Police

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list *(a)* the national staffing levels for British Transport police and *(b)* the staffing levels for British Transport police for the West Yorkshire passenger transport authority area, for each year since 1979.

Mr. Portillo: The figures for national staffing levels for British Transport police officers and civilian staff are as follows:

Year	*Police officers*	*Civilian staff*	*Total*
1979	1,899	182	2,081
1980	1,948	186	2,134
1981	2,138	194	2,332
1982	2,128	196	2,324
1983	2,052	194	2,246
1984	1,961	186	2,147
1985	1,817	184	2,001
1986	1,834	186	2,020
1987	1,846	183	2,029
1988	1,830	194	2,024
1989	1,856	247	2,103

Note: The change in the total between 1983 and 1985 reflected the termination of policing arrangements between Associated British Ports and the BTP.

Data for officers engaged solely on policing the West Yorkshire passenger authority area are not available, but figures for officers stationed at Leeds and Bradford, involving an area which approximates to that of the PTA, are as follows:

Year	*Police officers*	*Civilian staff*	*Total*
1979	53	2	55
1980	51	2	53
1981	54	2	56
1982	50	2	52
1983	52	2	54
1984	51	2	53
1985	53	2	55
1986	56	2	58
1987	53	2	55
1988	52	2	54
1989	55	2	57

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take action to ensure that heavy goods vehicle licensing authorities must take into account deficiencies in the public highway system giving access to a proposed operating centre when determining applications for new licences.

Mr. Atkins: Responsibility for traffic and safety matters on the public highway rests with the appropriate highway authority. It would be wrong to confuse this with the functions of a licensing authority for goods vehicle operator licences.

Traffic, Wakefield

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action will be taken to reduce traffic congestion on roads within Wakefield metropolitan district during the proposed widening of the A1 in West Yorkshire.

Mr. Atkins: To minimise traffic delays on the A1 it is intended that two lanes of traffic in each direction will be maintained for most of the construction period associated with the widening works. In this way it is anticipated that conditions on other roads, including those in Wakefield metropolitan district, will be substantially unchanged.

M1-M62 Link

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what stage his proposal to build a new link between the M1 and M62 to the west of Leeds has now reached.

Mr. Atkins: Civil engineering consultants were commissioned on 1 February 1990 to investigate possible route alignments for this proposed new link road.

Road Deaths, Dorset

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has on the figures on road deaths in rural Dorset; and what assessment he has made of the extent to which there is a relationship between fatal road accidents and inadequate roads.

Mr. Atkins: Over the past five years, an average of 35 people have been killed each year on non built-up roads in Dorset. On average, 12 of these were on minor roads, the remainder on major roads.

The Department is very aware of the need for safe roads, and in January 1988 introduced a new skidding resistance standard for trunk roads. By providing the highest levels of skidding resistance where they are most needed, it is expected that 1,800 road casualties, including 75 fatalities, will be saved each year on trunk roads.

Local authorities have followed the Department's lead by incorporating the standard within their own code of good practice for highway maintenance.

Motor Insurers Bureau

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many complaints he has received about the operation of the Motor Insurers Bureau for each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will give his reasons for his decision to allow the Motor Insurers Bureau to be regulated by a voluntary agreement;

(3) if he will make a statement about the operation of the Motor Insurers Bureau;

(4) if he will review the voluntary agreement operated between his Department and the Motor Insurers Bureau; and if he will make a statement;

(5) what representations he has received about the operation of the Motor Insurers Bureau.

Mr. Atkins: The Motor Insurers Bureau provides a central fund to compensate accident victims of uninsured and untraced drivers. It carries out its obligations under the terms of its agreements with the Secretary of State. The agreements have been revised from time to time since the bureau was formed in 1946.

These arrangements have worked satisfactorily. Last year the bureau received some 15,000 applications under the agreements and paid some £28 million in compensation. The Department receives some 30 inquiries or representations a year about specific cases or the bureau's operations generally. Most of these originated from one firm of solicitors.

I have no plans to review the agreements.

Hunt Trespass

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many actions for trespass were initiated by British Transport police in 1989; and how many were against members of hunts;

(2) how many incidents of hunt trespass on British Rail property were reported to British Transport police in 1989; and what action was taken.

Mr. Portillo: This Department has no figures readily available. These are detailed matters for British Rail and the British Transport police.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he plans to take following the death of Mr. Joseph Cunningham, Master of the Cleveland Foxhounds, who was killed by a train on 25 January when trespassing on British Rail property; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: I naturally regret Mr. Cunningham's death. This will be subject to investigation at a coroner's inquest, and I will take note of any recommendations the coroner might have.

Ferry Road, Cardiff

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will authorise a public inquiry into the public safety, health, nuisance and amenity considerations pertaining to the proposed excavation of the controlled household refuse tip established at Ferry road, Cardiff, and its proposed transportation by rail.

Mr. Portillo: No. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 19 January. Environmental considerations are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether any of the owners of the land along the line of British Rail's preferred Channel tunnel rail link route are among the third parties to which he referred in his reply to the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling of 16 January, *Official Report*, column *152*.

Mr. Portillo: I had in mind the negotiations which will need to take place with Eurotunnel, SNCF and SNCB before the joint venture can be established.

Dock Workers

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has had any recent representations from any of the former dock labour scheme ports about reintroducing a workers' registration scheme; and if he will make a statement about employment at former scheme ports.

Mr. McLoughlin: We have had no such representations. There have been many changes in employment practices in former dock labour scheme ports, as overmanning, restrictive practices and rigid demarcations have been eliminated and numbers employed generally reduced, making the ports more efficient. Some shippers are now using their own employees to load and unload ships. Some former stevedoring firms have closed down, but some new ones have been started up.

Car Parking Signs

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what regulations govern the maximum size of public signs denoting car parking within cities, towns and villages; and if he will give details of the relevant dimensions.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 2 February 1990]:* Car parking signs which are off the highway are subject to permission by local planning authorities under the Control of Advertisement Regulations. There is no legal limitation as to their size.

Car parking signs which are located within the highway are covered by the Road Traffic Regulations Act 1984 and the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 1981. The traffic speed on a road will determine the height of the letters used on the sign. Practical considerations and the amount of information to be included will determine its overall size.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Community Care Grants

14. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the level of spending on community care grants by the social fund in Leeds, West.

Mr. Scott: Information on local office social fund allocations and expenditure, including those for Leeds, West, is in the Library.

Pensioners (Income)

15. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security by how much pensioners' incomes from savings changed over the period *(a)* 1974 to 1979 and *(b)* 1979 to date.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given earlier today to my hon. Friends the Members for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) and for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell).

19. **Mr. Cormack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security by how much pensioners' incomes from occupational pensions have risen since 1979.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: A measure of this Government's success is that between 1979 and 1986 pensioners received a 56 per cent. increase in income from their occupational pensions.

45. **Sir Anthony Meyer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average income of a retired couple with savings just sufficient to disqualify them from all means-tested benefit including housing benefit.

Mr. Scott: A wide range of factors are involved in calculating income-related benefits and I regret it is not possible to give a precise answer to the question. If my hon. Friend has a particular case in mind and cares to write to me I will respond.

50. **Mr. Conway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security by how much pensioners' incomes from occupational pensions have risen since 1979.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The latest available information shows that pensioners' average total net incomes increased by 23 per cent. in real terms between 1979 and 1986. This compares very favourably with the previous Government's record when, between 1974 and 1979, previous average total net incomes rose by only 3 per cent. Increases in income from occupational pensions have contributed considerably to this improvement. Pensioners had experienced a 56 per cent. increase in real terms in the level of their occupational pension during this Government's first seven years of office.

Source: Family Expenditure Survey.

68. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security by how much pensioners' incomes from savings changed over the period *(a)* 1974 to 1979 and *(b)* 1979 to date.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The latest available information shows that pensioners' average total net incomes increased by 23 per cent. in real terms between 1979 and 1986. This compares very favourably with the previous Government's record when, between 1974 and 1979, previous average total net incomes rose by only 3 per cent. Increases in incomes from savings have contributed considerably to this improvement. In 1986 a total of 70 per cent. of pensioners had income from savings. These pensioners had seen the value of their savings income increase in real terms by 64 per cent. during this Government's first seven years of office, whereas under the previous Labour Government between 1974 and 1979 savings fell by 16 per cent.

Mr. Jack: To ask the the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the value of income support and housing benefit paid to pensioners whose sole income in 1989 was the state pension.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I regret that the information requested for 1989 is not yet available. However, estimated expenditure in 1988-89 was £700 million for income support and £1,290 million for housing benefit. The housing benefit estimate includes retirement pensioners who were also receiving income support.

Homelessness

21. **Mr. Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, if he has any plans to amend the benefit regulations covering homeless 16 and 17-year-olds

Mr. Scott: Our overall policy for young people remains correct and in the best interests of young people. As a result of the administrative improvements announced last November all young people are now interviewed about their claims and automatic consideration is given to the severe hardship provisions in every case where there is no entitlement under normal rules. In addition we are in the process of consulting voluntary groups about new instructions for our staff and the design of a leaflet for 16 and 17-year-olds.

Disability Benefits

22. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will make it his policy in any future review of disability benefits to consult disability organisations.

Mr. Scott: We are always willing to take account of comments made by organisations of and for disabled people in considering changes to benefits. Our proposals for major changes in the balance and structure of disability benefits have been made in the light of the views and comments of many organisations. And we shall continue to take into account the views of interested organisations in the course of our detailed work on the proposals, in particular the new disability allowance and the disabled employment credit.

47. **Mr. Alfred Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a further statement on his proposals for disability benefits.

Mr. Scott: We have recently announced major proposals to improve social security help for people with disabilities. Our strategy is to improve the balance and structure of benefits for disabled people who are unable to work, in particular to do more for those disabled from birth or early in life, and to improve the help given to those disabled people who can and want to work. The changes we propose to make include a new disability allowance for

people of working age and below to extend help with the extra costs of being disabled; a new disability employment credit to make it easier for disabled people to take up jobs; and an increase of up to £10 a week in severe disablement allowance. Our proposals will give extra help to some 850,000 people and their net effect will be to add, by 1993-94, some £300 million to the £8·3 billion that is currently spent on benefits for long-term sick and disabled people and their carers.

Disability Allowance

23. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people he anticipates will benefit from the introduction of the disability allowance.

37. **Mr. Hayes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people he anticipates will benefit from the introduction of the disability allowance.

62. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people he anticipates will benefit from the introduction of the disability allowance.

67. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people he anticipates will benefit from the introduction of the disability allowance.

Mr. Scott: We estimate that about 150,000 people will receive the new lower rate of the mobility component of the disability allowance and 140,000 people the new lower rate of the care component. We shall also be working to ensure that everyone who receives the disability allowance benefits from improved arrangements for the administration of the benefit.

Social Fund

24. **Mr. Sillars:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he last reviewed the working of the social fund loan scheme.

38. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he last reviewed the working of the social fund loan scheme.

Mr. Scott: As I said earlier today in reply to the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing), we continuously monitor the working of the social fund. Interest-free loans have proved to be an effective way of targeting the available money so as to help the greatest number of people. Indeed, the flexible way in which the social fund operates has enabled us to reallocate some of the money recovered from loans to help those offices coming under pressure.

Long-term Disablement

25. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security by what proportion spending on benefits for long-term sick and disabled people has increased over the last decade; and how he anticipates recent announcements will affect such expenditure over the next three years.

Mr. Scott: The improvements in benefits for disabled people announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security on 10 January will result in increases in expenditure of an extra £88 million net in 1990-91; £141 million net in 1991-92; and £214 million net in 1992-93. This was on top of a real increase in spending on people who are long-term sick or disabled of nearly 100 per cent. over the last decade.

32. **Sir Bernard Braine:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a further statement on the measures he is introducing to help long-term sick and disabled people who are disabled from birth or early in life.

55. **Sir David Price:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a further statement on the measures he is introducing to help long-term sick and disabled people who are disabled from birth or early in life.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he is introducing to help long-term sick and disabled people who are disabled from birth or early in life.

Mr. Scott: I refer my right hon. Friend and my hon. Friends to my answer earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell).

49. **Mr. Gow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security by what proportion spending on benefits for long-term sick and disabled people has increased over the last decade; and how he anticipates recent announcements will affect such expenditure over the next three years.

Mr. Scott: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague).

Pensions

26. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received concerning restoration of the link between earnings and retirement pensions; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We have received a total of 1,941 representations between 11 January 1989 and 9 January 1990 on pensioners' incomes, the majority of which concerned the link with earnings. We have no plans to restore the link; the Government do not accept that uprating retirement pension in line with earnings is the key factor in improving pensioners' incomes. Between 1979 and 1986 pensioners' average total net income increased by 23 per cent. in real terms.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received on the future of small self-administered pension schemes.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd) on 20 December 1989 at column *304*.

Young People (Accommodation)

27. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what benefits are available for young people aged under 18 years who leave home to help them find accommodation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Discretionary social fund crisis loans are available to young homeless people for rent in advance and essential items of furniture where this is the only

means of avoiding a serious risk to the health and safety of the applicant. In addition young people likely to receive income support on leaving institutional, residential or local authority care are one of the priority groups for community care grants and may be eligible for start-up grants to help them to establish themselves in the community.

Income Support

28. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will launch an inquiry into the reasons why eligible claimants are not receiving income support.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We have no plans to do so. If my hon. Friend has a particular case in mind perhaps he could write to me giving full details.

Social Fund

29. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about the refusal of loans to claimants without sufficient income by social fund officers.

Mr. Scott: The percentage of people whose applications for a social fund loan have been refused because of inability to repay is very low—1·2 per cent. of the decisions in the year 1989-90 to date. We do not consider that it would be helpful to allow people in these circumstances to put themselves further into debt. Money advice is offered in these cases.

41. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how the additional social fund allocations to individual local offices for 1989-90 were calculated.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) on 31 January 1990 at columns *194-95*.

46. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of social fund expenditure for 1990-91 by *(a)* grants and *(b)* loans for London offices and the amount spent in the last full year for which single payments were applied.

Mr. Scott: Allocations to individual local offices are being considered and will be announced in due course. Details of single payment expenditure for 1987-88 are available in the Library.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the cash limit for social fund loans and grants from his Department's offices in Scotland for 1989-90 and the amount expended by 1 January in the current year.

Mr. Scott: Information about the national and regional social fund budget allocations for loans and grants and monthly levels of expenditure by region and local office is available in the Library.

Housing Benefit

30. **Mr. Madel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many representations he received in 1989 about the operation of the current rules on housing benefit; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We receive correspondence on a range of issues, including housing benefit, both from hon. Members and their constituents. I regret that information is not available in the form requested.

Child Benefit

31. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received on the level of child benefit; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We have received a number of representations from hon. Members, organisations and individuals expressing a variety of views.

Disabled People

33. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received concerning the costs faced by people with disabilities other than care and mobility attendance costs.

Mr. Scott: We have received copies of the studies on the extra costs of disability carried out by the Disablement Income Group (DIG), the Royal National Institute for the Blind and the Spastics Society. The findings, based on a small number of case studies, suggested that extra costs incurred as a result of disability were higher than the averages found by the surveys of disability carried out by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. In addition, we have received a number of letters from organisations representing visually impaired people concerning the level of extra costs incurred as a result of seeing disabilities.

34. **Mr. Hannam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he is introducing to make it easier for disabled people to take up employment.

44. **Mr. Ward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he is introducing to make it easier for disabled people to take up employment.

72. **Mr. Donald Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he is introducing to make it easier for disabled people to take up employment.

74. **Dame Jill Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he is introducing to make it easier for disabled people to take up employment.

Mr. Scott: In October, we announced two measures to improve incentives to rehabilitation in employment: an increase of £6·50 in the therapeutic earnings limit in invalidity benefit and severe disablement allowance, and the extension of invalidity benefit and severe disablement allowance to people who undertake an employment rehabilitation course. In addition to these measures we plan to introduce, from April 1992, a disability employment credit which will help disabled people take up and return to employment by providing assistance with low earnings similar to that given to families through family credit. We estimate that about 50,000 people might be entitled to this new benefit.

Single Parent Families

35. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the latest figure he has for the number of single parent families in Britain in receipt of social security benefits.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Virtually all lone parent families receive child benefit, but many also receive other benefits. The table sets out the most recent information for the main income-related benefits and for one parent benefit.

Numbers receiving Social Security Benefits

	Number	*Date*
Income support[1]	722,000	May 1988
Family credit	120,000	September 1989
Housing benefit	650,000	May 1988
One parent benefit	696,000	January 1990

[1] *Income Support:* Figure does not include prisoners' partners.

Notes:

1. *Number of lone parent families:* OPCS estimates that in 1986 there were 1,010,000 lone parent families in Great Britain.
2. Claimants can be entitled to more than one benefit.

Sources:

Income Support—Annual Statistical Enquiry 1988.
Family Credit—Departmental Statistics.
Housing Benefit—Housing Benefit Management Information System 1988.
One Parent Benefit—Departmental Statistics.

Retirement Age

36. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he is taking to secure a common state retirement age for men and women.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Government are fully committed to the principle of equal treatment. We are currently considering the issue of equalising state pension ages. This is a complex issue requiring careful study. We will not make precipitate decisions.

Shelter

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has received any representations from Shelter; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We have had no recent representations though we are aware of the Shelter report, "Hard Times", published last November.

Severe Weather Payments

40. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about the current arrangements for severe weather payments.

Mr. Scott: Social fund cold weather payments are made for any seven-day period when the average temperature is 0 deg. Celsius or below.

In order to obtain information on temperature, each of the Department's local offices is linked to one of 62 national climatological message (NCM) stations around the country. The NCM stations used are broadly representative of the climate conditions in the main centres of population and are able to provide the necessary data speedily. These arrangements work well. In the two months to 31 December 1989, cold weather payments totalling £73,500 were made.

Community Charge

42. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the amount in the proposed level of income support from April 1990 to take account of 20 per cent. of the average community charge.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Income support levels were adjusted in April last year to include help towards the average minimum contribution to the community charge that recipients would be expected to pay. The amounts included were £1·15 a week for single people aged 18 to 24, £1·30 a week for single people aged 25 or over and £2·30 a week for couples. These amounts now form part of the overall benefit levels which will be uprated from April this year.

Departmental Service

43. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of recent improvements in the speed of service provided by his Department; and to what he attributes such improvements.

75. **Mr. Richard Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of recent improvements in the speed of service provided by his Department; and to what he attributes such improvements.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Since the Government reforms were introduced in 1988, the social security system has become simpler for claimants to understand and easier for staff to operate. As a result there have been very real all-round improvements in standards of service to the public. In 1989-90 the average time taken to clear income support claims and the average time income support callers spend in our offices have both improved by 24 per cent. compared with average processing and waiting times before the reforms.

Funerals

48. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he has any plans to review the present arrangements concerning payment of grant towards the work of interment where the deceased person leaves a sum insufficient to meet these costs.

Mr. Scott: No.

Occupational Pensions

51. **Mr. Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures are being introduced to increase the protection for members of occupational pension schemes.

52. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures are being introduced to increase the protection for members of occupational pension schemes.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: To improve benefit security for members of occupational pension schemes, we have brought forward four legislative proposals. First, we are strengthening the protection for early leavers that we introduced in 1985, by requiring schemes to revalue all future early leavers' preserved pension rights. Pension rights which go beyond the guaranteed minimum pension will be revalued in line with prices, up to a maximum of 5 per cent. a year. Secondly, where a pension scheme winds up, the same revaluation requirement is also to apply to future pensions and to pensions in payment. Thirdly, again on wind-up, any deficiency in a scheme's assets to meet

scheme liabilities, including these new liabilities, is to become a debt on the employer. Fourthly, we are introducing a new ceiling on self-investment which will allow pension schemes to hold no more than 5 per cent. of their assets in the employer's business. This will not apply to small self-administered pension schemes where directors control the investment of their own pension savings.

To improve the range of help and advice available to individual pension scheme members, we are introducing a pensions ombudsman and improved tracing services—based on a register of pension schemes—to help individuals discover which company is responsible for pension rights acquired in previous employment. There will also be amendments to the disclosure regulations to improve information available to scheme members.

Computers

53. **Miss Emma Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress has been made in the implementation of his Department's computerisation programme.

59. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress has been made in the implementation of his Department's computerisation programme.

61. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress has been made in the implementation of his Department's computerisation programme.

69. **Mr. Page:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress has been made in the implementation of his Department's computerisation programme.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Department of Social Security's highly complex £1·7 billion strategy for the computerisation of the social security benefit payment system is proceeding as planned. The pilot exercise in 23 local offices has been completed and the systems are being introduced nationally office by office.

National Insurance

54. **Mrs. Rosie Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to meet the shortfall projected for the national insurance fund in 1990; and whether the Government have any plans to consider the payment of national insurance as a financial contribution separate from general taxation.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The latest report by the Government Actuary shows the estimated balance in the national insurance fund at the end of the current financial year to be well above his minimum recommended level. His estimates also show the balance remaining at a satisfactory level during 1990-91 even though expenditure is expected to exceed income. The balance is declining but the Social Security Bill currently before Parliament contains measures which will help to maintain a prudent working balance in the fund in future years.

Although class 1 and class 4 national insurance contributions are generally collected by Inland Revenue together with PAYE income tax, they are paid into the national insurance fund and are not accounted for separately.

Married Women (Pensions)

56. **Mr. O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will consider a payment of additional pension to married women who when working paid insurance contributions but do not receive any additional pension; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We have no plans to change existing arrangements. Married women in employment who pay full rate national insurance contributions on earnings over the lower earnings limit (currently £43 a week) do contribute to the state earnings-related pension scheme and earn additional pension. Married women who have contracted out of the state earnings-related pension scheme contribute either to an occupational pension scheme or an appropriate personal pension. Those married women who continue to pay reduced rate national insurance contributions do not contribute to the state earnings-related pension scheme.

Private Nursing Homes

57. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what research his Department has carried out into the extent to which it is possible to provide nursing care for the elderly in private homes within the amounts allowed in income support.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: As part of the Department's annual review of income support limits for people in independent residential care homes and nursing homes, many interested individuals and organisations submit evidence on costs and charges in such homes which we take into consideration along with other information available from the Department's own sources. The Department has commissioned a number of studies into this area, the best known of which was by Ernst and Whinney, published in 1986 and revised in 1987.

Elderly People

58. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the Government's record of support for elderly people; and what is the comparable position in other European Community countries.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I regret that it is not possible to provide comparisons between European Community countries because of widely differing pension arrangements. For example, earnings-related pensions in other member states are normally based on an individual's own earnings, which means that low earners receive low pensions. In the United Kingdom an individual who contributes to the state earnings-related pension scheme has his or her entitlement revalued in line with average earnings. The United Kingdom is unique among European Community countries in paying a pension to a woman based on her husband's contributions and a dependency addition for a wife under 60 years of age. In France and West Germany, percentage deductions are made from pensions as contributions to state health care; whereas in the United Kingdom no such deductions are made. I am pleased to provide the following comments on the Government's record of support for elderly people.

The Government have always attached the highest priority to the interests and needs of elderly people, and

will continue to do so. We would particularly point to the improving economic circumstances of pensioners brought about by the wide range of successful Government policies aimed at creating a stable economic environment.

This success led to an increase in average pensioners' total net income of 23 per cent. in real terms between 1979 and 1986. The increases during the same period of the value of income from savings of 64 per cent. and occupational pensions of 56 per cent. are particularly encouraging. This demonstrates the vital importance to elderly people of the economic policies that the Government have pursued, and will continue to pursue. We think it fair to say that the elderly are not an homogeneous group with wholly common interests and circumstances and our policies recognise this. For example, we are conscious that not all pensioners have benefited from sources of incomes other than their state pension. In recognition of that the package of measures introduced last October directed an extra £200 million towards 2·6 million individuals in greatest need—the less well-off, elderly and disabled pensioners on income support and housing benefit. However, many people wish to continue in work beyond pension age and the abolition of the retirement pension earnings rule, also last October, allows them the freedom to choose to do so and receive their pension.

In addition, many pensioners may benefit from the changes to personal taxation to be made from this coming April

These are, we believe, all good examples of the sound policies which have enabled pensioners to share in the increased wealth of the nation.

Finally, the depth of our commitment may be measured by the levels of spending on the provision of benefits and services for the elderly; spending on social security benefit rose by 24 per cent. in real terms between 1979 and 1989-90; spending on health services for the elderly rose by 29 per cent. between 1978 and 1987 and spending on social services for the elderly rose by 21 per cent. between the same dates. This Government are committed to continuing to look after the interests of elderly people.

Maintenance

60. **Dame Peggy Fenner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to bring forward proposals resulting from his review of the maintenance system.

65. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to bring forward proposals to impose tighter controls on the payment of maintenance by divorced and separated fathers.

70. **Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to bring forward proposals resulting from his review of the maintenance system.

73. **Mr. Stanbrook:** To ask the Secretary of of State for Social Security when he expects to bring forward proposals resulting from his review of the maintenance system.

Dr. Michael Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to bring forward proposals resulting from his review of the maintenance system.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Government are very concerned about the number of lone parent families on benefit who receive little or no maintenance. This situation is certainly not unique to the United Kingdom and we are examining systems operating abroad to see if there are any lessons for us there. In addition, the survey which we are setting in hand with my noble and learned Friends the Lord Chancellor and Lord Advocate and my right hon. and learned Friends the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Scotland will provide full and up-to-date information about the effectiveness of the current maintenance system. This will then give us a sound and firm base for setting the way forward.

Approximately 12,000 cases will be examined in a sample of courts and DSS local offices to gather data on the amounts of maintenance which courts order absent parents to pay, what is actually paid and when, details of the absent and custodial parents' means, and the cost of the current system in terms of court costs, DSS staff costs and benefit spending. Information taken from individual cases will be treated in full confidence in the normal way as for any research. The survey, which will first be piloted, will be completed in the summer. We certainly intend to act as quickly as possible to improve maintenance arrangements. What we do and when will depend on the results of the survey, and if radical reforms are indicated we would want to consult widely.

In the meantime, as we announced last week, we are taking action to improve the maintenance collected under the existing system. In 1988-89 the DSS recovered £155 million from absent parents. In 1989-90 the target is £180 million and we look set to achieve it. From next year, we expect to increase that figure to over £200 million by changing our procedures. We intend to strengthen the basis on which local offices assess absent parents' ability to pay maintenance. At present we do not expect the maintenance paid to reduce an absent parent's income below, in broad terms, income support level plus full housing costs plus 25 per cent. of net earnings. We are reducing that 25 per cent. margin to 15 per cent. Where a reasonable agreement cannot be reached the final decision on the amount payable will rest, as it does now, with the courts.

Family Credit

63. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the outcome of his Department's advertising campaign to increase the uptake of family credit.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The first stage of the campaign in spring 1989 was a considerable success. Over the nine weeks during which TV adverts were shown over a quarter of a million family credit claims were received, about twice as many as in the nine weeks beforehand. Independent research carried out before and after the advertising showed a marked increase in awareness of family credit, with prompted awareness increased to 87 per cent., and in comprehension which demonstrated that the advertising had been successful in correcting misconceptions concerning some aspects of eligibility.

By the end of September 1989 the caseload had risen to around 320,000 compared with about 280,000 before the advertising began.

Further TV and press advertising began in November 1989 and the weekly level of claims since then is averaging

more than 40 per cent. above the level at the same time in the previous year. Further research is taking place on awareness and comprehension levels but the results are not yet available. The effect on the caseload will not be known until all the claims received since the further advertising began have been dealt with.

Since April 1989, when the publicity first began, well over 800,000 claims have been received and about 520,000 of these have been new claims rather than existing recipients renewing their award. Nearly half a million awards have been made altogether and, currently, approaching 65 per cent. of all claims are successful.

Estimates of the effect on the percentage take-up level cannot be made until information becomes available from the 1989 family expenditure survey about the total eligible population in that year.

Young People (Income Support)

64. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he has any plans to provide income support to those aged 16 to 17 years who are unable to gain employment or a vacancy on YTS through no fault of their own.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: There is no need for a young person aged 16 to 17 to be without money. Young people have the positive options of remaining in education, getting a job or joining the YTS. If they are unable to obtain employment then the offer of a YTS place is guaranteed. There are sufficient YTS places throughout the country for all who want one.

Income support is available to vulnerable groups, such as lone parents and the disabled. There is also the discretionary provision which enables income support to be paid in cases of severe hardship.

We continue to monitor the situation. The legislative changes introduced in July 1989 and the administrative improvements announced in November demonstrate our willingness to respond when a need arises, as did my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's undertaking to the Social Services Committee on 31 January to look at the way the system works for young women who are pregnant.

Fuel Charges

66. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what discussions or representations he has had with pensioners' organisations regarding the level of fuel charges; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I am not aware of any recent discussions or representations on this subject.

Departmental Expenditure

71. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the latest estimate of total expenditure by his Department for 1989-90.

Mr. Scott: As announced in the Autumn Statement, total DSS expenditure in 1989-90 is estimated to be £52·6 billion. Further details are given in chapter 14 of the public expenditure White Paper (Cm. 1014) published on 30 January 1990.

Residential Care

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the procedures adopted by his Department to ensure that the element in the allowance for people in residential and nursing care which is earmarked for pocket money is controlled by the claimant.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) on 30 January at column *123*.

Vibration White Finger

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will initiate a general review of benefit claims for the industrial disease vibration white finger to identify those where disablement benefit has been wrongly refused; and if he will ensure each claim is met in full.

Mr. Scott: No. Decisions on claims and how much is payable are made by independent adjudication officers. Claimants have a right to appeal against, or to a review of, those decisions.

Correspondence

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth will receive a definitive response to his letter of 3 October 1989 referring to Mrs. D. I. Allen, following the receipt of an interim reply dated 26 October 1989.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: My noble Friend Lord Henley replied to my hon. Friend's letter today.

Benefits

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people received social security benefits in each year from 1979 to the latest date available; and what was the percentage increase from 1979 in each case.

Mr. Scott: I regret that information in the form requested is not available and an estimate could be provided only at disproportionate cost, as information on numbers receiving benefit is collected separately for each benefit, and claimants may receive more than one benefit at any one time. An estimate of the numbers of claimants receiving each of the main benefits for the years 1978-79 to 1988-89, and the percentage increase since 1979, are shown in the table.

Estimated numbers receiving social security benefits at any one time 1978-79 to 1988-89[1,2]

thousands

	1978-79	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
Retirement pension	8,530	8,680	8,880	9,015	9,115	9,210	9,350	9,400	9,575	9,685	9,710	9,825
Widows' benefits	495	490	475	460	445	440	425	410	400	385	370	370
Unemployment benefit	570	550	960	1,120	1,090	1,020	1,020	955	1,005	815	600	415
Sickness benefit	560	490	435	445	395	170	180	160	100	105	105	105
Invalidity benefit	600	620	620	660	700	760	825	865	935	1,010	1,100	1,185
Industrial disability benefit	200	200	195	195	190	185	260	265	285	300	325	340

	1978-79	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90
Industrial death benefit	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	25	30	30
Maternity allowance	100	115	120	125	125	110	120	115	110	30	15	15
Non-contribution RP	65	55	50	50	45	40	35	35	40	35	35	35
War pension	385	370	360	345	330	315	305	295	280	270	265	255
Attendance allowance	265	285	315	350	390	445	490	555	605	670	730	796
Invalid care allowance	5	5	5	5	10	10	10	10	25	80	100	110
Severe disability allowance	—	—	—	—	—	—	245	245	265	265	270	265
Non-cont invalidity pensions	150	165	175	180	195	210	225	—	—	—	—	—
Mobility allowance	95	140	185	210	265	315	390	420	460	515	560	615
Income support	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	4,310	4,075
Supplementary benefit[3]	3,020	2,920	3,110	3,725	4,165	4,435	4,665	4,765	5,095	5,020	—	—
Child benefit[4]	13,480	13,330	13,160	13,145	12,890	12,660	12,430	12,375	12,175	12,040	12,010	12,140
Family credit	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	280	315
Family income support	85	80	95	125	165	200	205	205	215	220	—	—
Housing benefit[5,6]												
rent rebate	1,210	1,205	1,330	1,590	3,050	3,735	3,745	3,710	3,720	3,665	3,125	3,115
rent allowance	225	220	240	250	260	1,015	1,080	1,150	1,180	1,195	965	1,040
rate rebate	3,055	3,065	3,350	3,700	5,320	7,020	7,230	7,020	7,050	6,875	5,150	4,480

Percentage change from 1978-79 Numbers in each year[12]

	1979-80 per cent.	1980-81 per cent.	1981-82 per cent.	1982-83 per cent.	1983-84 per cent.	1984-85 per cent.	1985-86 per cent.	1986-87 per cent.	1987-88 per cent.	1988-89 per cent.	1989-90 per cent.
Retirement pension	2	4	6	7	8	10	10	12	14	14	15
Widows' benefits	−1	−4	−7	−10	−11	−14	−17	−19	−22	−25	−25
Unemployment benefit	−4	68	96	91	79	79	68	76	43	5	−27
Sickness benefit	−13	−22	−21	−29	−70	−68	−71	−82	−81	−81	−81
Invalidity benefit	3	3	10	17	27	38	44	56	68	83	98
Ind. disability benefit	0	−3	−3	−5	−8	30	33	43	50	63	70
Ind. death benefit	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	−17	0	0
Maternity allowance	15	20	25	25	10	20	15	10	−70	−85	−85
Non-contributory RP	−15	−23	−23	−31	−38	−46	−46	−38	−46	−46	−46
War pension	−4	−6	−10	−14	−18	−21	−23	−27	−30	−31	−34
Attendance allowance	8	19	32	47	68	85	109	128	153	175	200
Invalid care allowance	0	0	0	100	100	100	100	400	1,500	1,900	2,100
Severe disability allowance[7]						*	0	8	8	10	8
Non-cont. Inv. Pensions	10	17	20	30	40	50					
Mobility allowance	47	95	121	179	232	311	342	384	442	489	547
Income support[7]										*	−5
Supplementary benefit	−3	3	23	38	47	54	58	69	66		
Child benefit	−1	−2	−2	−4	−6	−8	−8	−10	−11	−11	−10
Family credit[7]										*	13
Family income supp.	−6	12	47	94	135	141	141	153	159		
Housing benefit											
rent rebate	−0	10	31	152	209	210	207	207	203	158	157
rent allowance	−2	7	11	16	351	380	411	424	431	329	362
rate rebate	0	10	21	74	130	137	130	131	125	69	47

Notes:

[1] *Source:* Public Expenditure White Papers 1984-1990.

[2] Beneficiaries may be receiving more than one benefit at any one time.

[3] Includes housing benefit supplement recipients (some 440,000 in 1987-88) who are also included in the figures for housing benefit recipients.

[4] Numbers of children in families receiving child benefit, including those also receiving one parent benefit.

[5] Figures up to 1981-82 relate only to the rebate and allowance scheme for those not receiving supplementary benefit. Thereafter the figures reflect the partial introduction of the housing benefit scheme from November 1982 and full start in November 1983.

[6] There is a significant overlap: most households getting help with rent also receive a rate rebate.

[7] * denotes the first year of a new benefit. Percentage increases in subsequent years are increases since the first year.

Homes for the Elderly

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will meet representatives of the Royal United Kingdom Beneficient Association to discuss Government grants for nursing and rest homes for the elderly.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: As I indicated to my hon. Friend on 24 January at columns 1024-32, on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, I am happy to meet him and representatives of RUKBA in the near future about social security issues for elderly people in homes.

Disability Employment Credit

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give details of the research on which his Department bases its estimate that 50,000 people might be entitled to the proposed disability employment credit, and that the gross cost of the new benefit would be some £80 million.

Mr. Scott: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) on 26 January at column *908*.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the guidelines which will be issued to medical staff assessing the capacity for work of claimants under the proposed disability employment credit system.

Mr. Scott: We propose that entitlement to a disability employment credit will be subject to periodic medical evidence of partial capacity for work. We are considering the precise way in which the scheme will operate.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if his proposals for a disability employment credit will benefit people who are able to work only two or three days a week.

Mr. Scott: Our proposals for a disability employment credit envisage that the benefit will be available to disabled people who are able to work only part time or who may not be able to work at full capacity. We are considering the precise way in which the scheme will operate.

Family Incomes

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, further to his reply to the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) of 15 December 1989, *Official Report*, columns *855-56*, if he will publish the equivalent scales used for calculation of the equivalent incomes with *(a)* a married couple and *(b)* a single person as the reference point.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 1 February 1990]:* The information is held in the tables. These equivalence scales are the same as those used in "Households Below Average Income".

(i) Taking married couples as the reference point

	Equivalence value
(1) If head of the household is married	
Number of additional adults in the household	
0	1.00
1	1·42
2	1.78
More than 2 where number of adults = n	1·78 + (0·36[1](n-2)
(2) If head of the household is single	
Number of additional adults in the household	
0	0.61
1	1·07
2	1.49
More than 2 where number of adults = n	1·49 + (0·36[1](n-2)
(3) Total number of children in household	
Age of child	
<2	0·09
2-4	0·18
5-7	0·21
8-10	0·23
11-12	0·25
13-15	0·27
>15	0·36

(The value is multiplied by the number of children in the age band.)

[1] The total values, when added together, give the total equivalence scale for each family. This will always be the total of (1) or (2) plus (3). For example, a married couple with two children aged 9 and 11 would have an equivalence scale of (1.00 + 0·23 + 0·25) = 1·48.

(ii) Taking single person as the reference point

	Equivalence value
(1) If head of the household is single	
Number of additional adults in the household	
0	1·00
1	1·75
2	2·44
more than 2 where number of adults = n	2·44 + (0·59[1](n-2)
(2) If head of the household is married	
Number of additional adults in household	
0	1·64
1	2·33
2	2·92
more than 2 where number of adults = n	2·92 + (0·59[1](n-2)
(3) Total number of children in household	
Age of child	
< 2	0·15
2-4	0·30
5-7	0·34
8-10	0·38
11-12	0·41
13-15	0·44
> 15	0·59

The value is multiplied by the number of children in the age band.

[1] The total values, when added together, give the total equivalence scale for each family. This will always be the total of (1) or (2) plus (3). For example, a married couple with two children aged 9 and 11 would have an equivalence scale of (1·64 + 0·38 + 0·41) = 2·43.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 6 February 1990

CIVIL SERVICE

Parking

Mr. Jack: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what guidance he issues to Government Departments on the provision of sufficient on-site car parking places for civil servants.

Mr. Luce: The provision of on-site car parking places for civil servants is a matter for individual Departments. Central guidance is not issued by my Department.

Trade Unions

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what recent representations he has received from the Civil Service trade unions on their wider obligations to the Crown in Parliament.

Mr. Luce: In the course of discussions about the revision of the Civil Service pay and conditions of service code to take account of the Official Secrets Act 1989, the unions expressed reservations about the implications of a passage in the revision which follows the note by the former head of the home Civil Service on the duties and responsibilities of civil servants in relation to Ministers (the Armstrong memorandum) in describing the constitutional position of civil servants in relation to Ministers. This is one of a number of issues to be discussed at a meeting which has been arranged between the Civil Service unions and the head of the home Civil Service.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

COCOM

124. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's response to the recent Western European Union report on COCOM Doc. 1207.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer my hon. Friend to the written answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 15 December to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas).

Lebanon

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 29 November 1989, to the hon. Member for St. Helens, North, *Official Report*, columns *328-29*, if he will state what he regards as *(a)* substantive and *(b)* non-substantive concessions to the hostage holders in the Lebanon, in the development of policy to seek the release of the British hostages; and what non-substantive concessions he is (i) prepared to make or (ii) has already made.

Mr. Waldegrave: Our policy of no substantive concessions precludes the payment of ransoms. It does not, of course, preclude contacts with those Governments, organisations or individuals who may be able to help secure the release of the British hostages. It would not be helpful to elaborate further.

Extradition

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will now obtain and place in the Library copies of all communications between the then high commissioner in Malaysia, Mr. D. H. Gilmore CMG, and the then governor of Hong Kong, the late Sir Edward Youde, which occurred between 30 November 1985 and 1 June 1987, on the subject of the request, from the then governor of Hong Kong, to his Department for the extradition of Lorrain Osman and Dato Hashim Shamsuddin;

(2) if he will now place in the Library all communications between the then high commissioner in Malaysia, Mr. D. H. Gilmore CMG and his Department which occurred between 30 November 1985 and 1 June 1987, on the subject of the request, from the then governor of Hong Kong, the late Sir Edward Youde, to his Department for the extradition of Lorrain Osman and Dato Hashim Shamsuddin;

(3) if he will now place in the Library all communications between the then governor of Hong Kong, the late Sir Edward Youde, and his Department which occurred between 30 November 1985 and 1 June 1987, on the subject of the request from the then governor of Hong Kong to his Department for the extradition of Lorrain Osman and Dato Hashim Shamsuddin.

Mr. Waldegrave: This matter remains sub judice. I have nothing to add to the answer given to the hon. Gentleman by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 1 December at column *456*.

Immigration

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) when a decision is going to be taken on the application made by Mr. Liaqat Hussain, who was born in 1965, Ref: IMM/98735, to the post in Islamabad to join his wife in the United Kingdom; and when Mr. Hussain was interviewed at the post;

(2) if he has arranged for the post in Islamabad to issue a passport to Mr. Abdul Waheed, whose date of birth is 5 February 1964, Ref: IMM/87378; TH/4335/89; when instructions were issued to the post to issue entry clearance to Mr. Waheed; and when Mr. Waheed is going to be issued with a visa to enter the United Kingdom.

Mr. Waldegrave: In accordance with the guidelines on the handling of representations by Members of Parliament in immigration cases, issued to Members on 14 December 1988, I have referred the questions to the correspondence unit of the migration and visa department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The hon. Member will receive replies from the unit as soon as possible.

Human Rights

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he intends to take to ensure that the issue of human rights violations by China is raised at the forthcoming United Nations human rights commission.

Mr. Waldegrave: With our European Community partners, we have already raised our concerns about human rights violations in China at the current session of the commission on human rights. On 2 February, the presidency statement at the commission called upon the Chinese authorities to guarantee full respect of the human rights of their citizens throughout China including Tibet.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the Government will ratify the second optional protocol to the international covenant on civil and political rights.

Mr. Waldegrave: Successive British Governments have taken the view that the decision whether or not to abolish or to reintroduce the death penalty should be left to individual Members of Parliament voting according to their own judgment. Accordingly, we will not take on an international obligation on the abolition of the death penalty.

Nuclear Non-proliferation

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has had any recent meeting with the director of the programme for promoting nuclear non-proliferation; and whether he plans any future meetings with this organisation.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 2 February 1990]:* No. However officials of this Department have had meetings with this organisation.

Kashmir

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking to honour the United Nations resolution of 1947 guaranteeing a plebiscite on self-determination for the people of Kashmir.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 2 February 1990]:* None. Britain voted in favour of the various UN resolutions on Kashmir. Much has happened since, including the 1972 Simla agreement on bilateral relations between India and Pakistan. We believe that the status of Kashmir can be settled only by agreement between the two sides.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what involvement he has with Commonwealth nations in trying to resolve the demands for self-determination for the people of Kashmir.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 2 February 1990]:* We have received representations both from India and from Pakistan on the issue of Kashmir. We believe the status of Kashmir can be settled only by agreement between those two Commonwealth nations.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of India regarding the growing violence in Kashmir.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 2 February 1990]:* In our recent contacts with both the Indian and Pakistan Governments we have noted that the situation in Kashmir is obviously of great concern to both, and expressed the hope that they would be able to reach a peaceful settlement of the issues involved.

THE ARTS

Art Education Institutes

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Minister for the Arts how many art education institutes he has visited in the last three years; if he will list them; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: In the last three years, I have visited the Portsmouth college of art and design and the Bournemouth and Poole college of art and design. I have been impressed by the work I have seen there and at other art education institutes which I have visited previously. Such institutes are the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Education and Science.

British Library

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Minister for the Arts, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland of 25 January, *Official Report*, column 797, what consideration he gave to the letter dated 10 July 1989 from the director of the oriental collections and the India Office library and records, in reaching his decision to support the conclusions of the British Library Board.

Mr. Luce *[holding answer 5 February 1990]:* I noted the contents of the letter from the director responsible for the British Library's oriental collections and India Office library and records. Decisions on the best use of the British Library's resources and the location of its collections are, however, for the British Library Board to make. I am confident that in making these decisions the board takes account of the advice of the library's managers.

National Heritage

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister for the Arts what has been the annual grant to the national heritage memorial fund from his office in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what is the budget figure for 1989-90 and the estimates to 1992-93.

Mr. Luce *[holding answer 5 February 1990]:* The grants which my office has provided, or plans to provide, to the national heritage memorial fund are as follows:

	£ million
1984-85	4·0
1985-86	1·5
1986-87	1·5
1987-88	1·5
1988-89	1·5
1989-90	1·5
1990-91	1·5
1991-92	1·5
1992-93	1·5

The Department of the Environment provides an equal amount of grant in aid to the fund.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Payroll Tax

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration he has given to the implementation of a payroll tax similar to that in the United States of America.

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Member would not expect me to comment on tax proposals in the run-up to the Budget.

Age Allowance

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are his estimates of the net changes in income to the Exchequer which will follow the introduction of the new rules whereby the age allowance and income limit applies to each person rather than as an allowance to a couple.

Mr. Lilley: When independent taxation is introduced in 1990-91, the cost of giving separate age-related allowances and aged income limits to individuals, rather than giving one such allowance to appropriate married couples, is estimated to be about £25 million in a full year. Aged couples will also gain about £340 million from disaggregating the wife's category B pension and wife's investment income. These estimates are based on a projection of the 1987-88 survey of personal incomes and are provisional.

Beer

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the cost advantage per 50 cl can over beer brewed in the United Kingdom of beer brewed in *(a)* France, *(b)* the Netherlands and *(c)* West Germany provided by their present excise duty and value added tax rates.

Mr. Ryder: Rates of excise duties and VAT on a 50 cl can of beer in France, the Netherlands, West Germany and the United Kingdom, according to the latest information available, are set out in the table:

Country	*Excise duty (pence per 50 cl can)*	*VAT rate*
		Percentage
France	¼ p	18·6
Netherlands	6 p	18·5
West Germany	3 p	14
United Kingdom	17 p	15

Rates of exchange as at 31 January 1990.
Source: EC Excise Duty Tables.

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether consideration is being given to the harmonisation of beer excise duties with other European Community countries before 1992.

Mr. Ryder: In January 1990, the Commission put forward revised excise duty rate proposals for alcoholic products. To date, there has been no discussion of these revised proposals. The United Kingdom view remains that centrally determined approximation of excise duty rates is neither necessary nor appropriate to achieve the single market. As changes to excise duties law require unanimous agreement, the United Kingdom's position is safeguarded.

Share Ownership

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will make a statement on the numbers of new shareholders since 1979; and whether he intends to promote measures to further encourage the growth of individual share ownership.

Mr. Lilley: The joint Treasury and stock exchange survey carried out in January and February 1989 estimated that approximately 9 million people own shares directly, 20 per cent. of the adult population—a threefold increase since 1979.

Privatisation

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he estimates privatisation revenue will be in 1989-90.

Mr. Lilley: The latest estimate of net privatisation proceeds in 1989-90 is £4¼ billion.

New Coins

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to introduce new 1p and 2p coins.

Mr. Ryder: Increases in the world price of base and non-ferrous metals have meant that the cost of producing United Kingdom 1p and 2p coins in bronze now exceeds their face value. The Master of the Mint is therefore considering proposals to replace the present bronze coins with coins made of copper-plated steel. The plated coins would have the same weight and diameter as the existing bronze coins but would be very slightly thicker. The new coins would circulate with the existing bronze coins.

The Royal Mint has begun preliminary discussions with representatives of the vending industry, who are the only people likely to be affected by the difference in specification. The Mint will now contact representatives of the blind and disabled and other interested parties, mainly to reassure them that there would be no noticeable change in the size or feel of the coins.

No final decision has been made about when the coins would be introduced. It would not be before 1991 at the earliest. If and when a date is set, it will be announced in the usual way.

Debt

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the level of *(a)* individual, *(b)* corporate and *(c)* public debt in (i) 1979 and (ii) 1989; and what he estimates is the proportion of this debt which accrued to the Treasury in the form of revenues.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 5 February 1990]:* The table gives the net financial wealth of the personal and company sectors, and net public sector debt:

£ billion

	end-1979	*end-1988*
Personal sector	170·6	578·9
Company sector	−87·7	−357·3
Public sector	−102·1	−158·5

Notes:—Positive numbers indicate net wealth, negative numbers indicate net debt.
For public sector, figures refer to end of March 1980 and end of March 1989.

It is not clear what relationship between sectoral debt and Government revenues the hon. Member has in mind in the second part of the question.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Strangeways Prison

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what purpose is served by the chimney integral to Strangeways prison, Manchester; and whether he will consider its demolition.

Mr. Mellor: The chimney at Strangeways prison, Manchester is a ventilation shaft forming an integral part of the plenum system which provides heating and ventilation to the cell blocks. It has been working satisfactorily for over 100 years and seems likely to continue to do so for some time to come. There are no plans to demolish it and I would see no point in considering such an action unless its condition should deteriorate to such a degree that it becomes a safety hazard.

Horse Race Totalisator Board

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce the transfer of the Horse Race Totalisator Board to the private sector.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Advice from Lloyds merchant bank on the feasibility of privatising the Tote remains under consideration and the Government's conclusions will be made known in due course.

Hoax Alarm Calls

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many firemen in the past 10 years have been killed; and how many have been injured whilst responding to hoax alarm telephone calls.

Mr. John Patten: Between 1980 and 1989 fire brigades in England and Wales reported that 12 firefighters had been killed in the course of duty as a result of road traffic accidents. It is not possible to determine from the information available whether or not any of the firefighters were killed while responding to hoax alarm calls. Comparable information on the number of firefighters injured is not available.

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many members of the general public in the past 10 years have been killed; and how many have been injured by vehicles of the emergency services whilst responding to hoax alarm telephone calls.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: This information is not held centrally.

Guildford Pub Bombings

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Surrey as to the measures being taken to apprehend the persons guilty of the Guildford pub bombings.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. Dicks) on 4 December 1989 at column *75*.

Drugs

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish the agenda for the international conference to be held this year in London concerning drugs.

Mr. Mellor: I am placing in the Library a paper giving details including the outline programme of the world ministerial summit to reduce the demand for drugs and to combat the cocaine threat.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who has been invited to the international conference on drugs to be held in London this year.

Mr. Mellor: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter) on 25 January 1990 at column *870*.

Shotguns

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many shotguns and semi-automatic shotguns that would become section 1 firearms from 1 February have been proofed by either the London or Birmingham proof houses, following their conversion under the terms of the Firearms Act 1988, to remain as shotguns.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the masters of the proof houses that approximately 33,000 adapted smooth[illegible] guns have been certified by the proof houses so as to enable the guns to be retained on a shotgun certificate; 21,000 of these were dealt with in Birmingham and the remainder in London.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* to show how many applications have been made to each chief constable of police for shotguns which have now under the terms of the Firearms Act 1988 become section 1 firearms to be held on firearms certificates; and how many such applications have been *(a)* granted, *(b)* refused and *(c)* withdrawn by the applicant.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to ensure that all chief officers of police have notified all shotgun certificate holders individually prior to 1 February 1990 of the changes in the law under the Firearms Act 1988 with regard to semi-automatic and pump-action shotguns that they have converted and reproofed or the owner makes an application for the shotgun to be held on a firearms certificate.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In January Home Office officials invited the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) to remind certificate holders about the end of 31 January 1990 of the seven- month transitional period in which to

comply with the new controls. I understand that ACPO has advised chief officers accordingly. But it is for certificate holders to ensure their compliance with the law.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) further to his answer of 31 January to the hon. Member for Londonderry, East, if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Gwent as to the date on which the shotgun, the property of Mr. G. W. Phillips, was taken by PC 853 Fairie; on what date it was entered by PC Fairie into police station records; and on what date it was transferred to Newport police headquarters and by whom;

(2) further to his reply to the hon. Member for Londonderry, East, on 31 January, if he will call for and place in the Library a report from the chief constable of Gwent covering the report compiled by PC 853 Fairie into the shotgun renewal application of Mr. G. W. Phillips;

(3) if, further to his answer of 31 January to the hon. Member for Londonderry, East, he will call for a report from the chief constable of Gwent as to which police officer laid evidence before the office manager, firearms administration, that the shotgun, the property of Mr. G. W. Phillips, was given into the possession of Mr. P. Stokes;

(4) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Gwent as to who was requested by Mr. G. W. Phillips to hand the shotgun belonging to Mr. Phillips to Mr. P. Stokes;

(5) if he will call for a report from the chief constable of Gwent as to which police officers, by rank, countersigned the report of PC 853 Fairie into the renewal application by Mr. G. W. Phillips for his shotgun certificate; and on which dates in each case.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. The local administration of the firearms licensing system is a matter for the chief officer of police concerned.

Mrs. Jan Begum

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish that part of the letter written by an official of his Department to the hon. Member for Bradford, West on 25 August 1988, concerning the application of Mrs. Jan Begum, Ref: H197247/4, for British citizenship, that relates to the timing of the decision on her application; and when he intends to let Mrs. Begum know whether she has been granted British citizenship.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It is not the normal practice to publish correspondence with individual applicants. However, I can confirm that the letter of 25 August 1988 recorded progress, and our expectation that it would not take long to reach a decision. The facts of the case were not entirely straightforward, and action was delayed for a time while the fee was awaited. Some further delay was caused because action on the case was overlooked, and I am sorry that that happened. But the application was approved in August 1989 and the applicant was invited to take the oath of allegiance. As soon as she has done so, the certificate can be issued.

London Underground (Smoking)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the amount of each fine levied for smoking on the Tube since smoking was banned after the King's Cross fire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 26 January 1990]:* This information is not collected centrally but statistics available from the British Transport police, L division are given in the table:

Persons[1] fined for smoking on the Underground following the King's Cross fire on 18 November 1987 by the amount of fine imposed

Fine imposed £	*1988*	*1989*
<5	—	2
10	8	2
15	2	1
20	10	7
25	7	5
30	5	3
40	2	3
45	—	1
50	5	14
75	1	—
100	1	2
<200	—	1

[1] Includes persons prosecuted for other offences at the same court appearance.

PRIME MINISTER

United States of America

Q10. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Prime Minister when she next expects to pay an official visit to the United States of America.

The Prime Minister: I plan to attend the economic summit in Houston from 9 to 11 July.

Interest Rates

Q77. **Mr. Harry Ewing:** To ask the Prime Minister what assessment she has made of the effects of the Government's policies on the level of interest rates.

The Prime Minister: The Government's policy objective is to bring inflation down. The level of interest rates is set to achieve this.

European Community (Expansion)

Q101. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Prime Minister if Her Majesty's Government have recently participated in discussions with other European Community states concerning the extension of membership of the European Community to include Scandinavian, central and east European nations; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: There have been no recent substantive discussions among member states on this matter. The Community will need to look comprehensively at the implications of further accessions in due course. We agree with the general view within the Community that —until at least 1993—the emphasis must be on consolidation, not enlargement, and completion of the single market.

Finchley

Q134. **Mr. Ashton:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will pay an official visit to Finchley.

The Prime Minister: As the Member for Finchley I hold regular constituency surgeries and deal with the many representations that are made.

Literacy

Q.224 **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Prime Minister what recent representations she has received relating to standards of literacy.

The Prime Minister: The Government regularly receive correspondence about the standards of written and spoken English. It is important continually to seek to raise the standards of literacy.

English is a core subject in the national curriculum. Attainment targets and performances of study for five and seven-year-old children were introduced in September 1989. The requirements for older children will be introduced in stages between now and September 1992. Assessment at regular intervals will mean that children with literacy problems will be identified at an early stage and can be given the necessary help.

The Government have given priority to the literacy needs of adults. They have provided grants of £3 million this year to the adult literacy and basic skills unit. In addition, local education authorities are being assisted through education support grants to provide open learning centres, and the training of tutors of adult literacy and basic skills has been designated a national priority area under the LEA training grants scheme.

Human Rights

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Prime Minister to which Commonwealth countries the United Kingdom Government have made representations of concern about the abuse of human rights since 1979.

The Prime Minister: Where Commonwealth countries' practice on human rights has given cause for concern, we have made representations as necessary. These representations are sometimes more productive if undertaken without publicity. It would not, therefore, be helpful to list the countries concerned.

Conveyancing

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list the reforms which her Government have introduced in the conveyancing of homes since 1979; and which other areas are currently under consideration for such further reforms.

The Prime Minister: The following measures designed to improve the conveyancing process have been introduced by the Government since 1979:

(1) the Administration of Justice Act 1985 which established licensed conveyancers; (2) the Building Societies Act 1986 which provided for the conveyancing of property by financial institutions.

The Courts and Legal Services Bill currently being considered in another place includes provision for authorised conveyancing practitioners. The conveyancing standing committee at the Law Commission has published guides as to improvements in conveyancing practice on the following matters:

(1) Pre-Contract Deposits; (2) Preliminary Inquiries; (3) House selling the Scottish way for England and Wales; (4) Local Authority Enquiries; (5) Conveyancing Claims; (6) Avoiding Completion Delays; (7) the operation of the Caveat Emptor rule.

The Government have asked the Director General of Fair Trading to review estate agency practices. They have also asked that draft legislation should be prepared at the Law Commission to give effect to a commonhold scheme.

Downing Street

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister how many injuries have occurred in Downing street due to *(a)* road traffic accidents, *(b)* pedestrians tripping over uneven paving slabs and *(c)* other causes for each of the past 10 years; what compensation the victims received; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: As far as I am aware there have been no road traffic accidents in Downing street. The responsibility for compensating individuals in the event of tripping over uneven paving slabs rests with Westminster city council.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister how often the front of 10 Downing street is *(a)* painted and *(b)* cleaned; whether the work is contracted out; what is the cost to public funds; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: There is no set frequency for the external painting of No. 10 Downing street. The windows were last painted in 1984 and the front door in 1988. The brickwork of the Downing street elevation is stained black and was last restained in 1962.

External decorating work is undertaken by contractors. The cost of repainting the external woodwork of Nos. 10, 11, and 12 Downing street was £16,000 in 1984.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister whether the postmen who deliver mail to 10 Downing street have to *(a)* hold a pass and *(b)* be accompanied by a police officer; and how many postal deliveries 10 Downing street receives each day; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: No. 10 receives the normal number of postal deliveries. As regards the other parts of the hon. Member's question it is not the practice to comment on security matters of this kind.

Petitions

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister what is her policy with regard to the disposal of items such as flowers, clothing and footwear handed in to her at 10 Downing street on the occasion of a right hon. or hon. Member presenting a petition on behalf of constituents.

The Prime Minister: Such goods are normally dealt with in accordance with the request, if any, which accompanies the petition.

Chancellor Kohl

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Prime Minister when she next expects to meet the Chancellor of West Germany; and what matters she will discuss.

The Prime Minister: I expect to meet Chancellor Kohl before long. As is usual, there will be a wide range of issues to discuss including developments in eastern Europe, East-West relations, and European Community matters.

Engagements

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 6 February.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 6 February.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 6 February.

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 6 February.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 6 February.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 6 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I shall attend a reception to commemorate the 150th anniversary of New Zealand's founding treaty.

WALES

Rent Arrears

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish rent arrears for each of the district councils and boroughs of Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: Rent arrears information in respect of 1988-89 for each local authority district in Wales is given in the table. The figures indicate both current and former tenants' arrears and are taken from returns supplied by local authorities to the Department.

Local Authority	*Rent Arrears 1988-89 (£)*
Aberconwy Borough Council	128,200
Alyn and Deeside District Council	106,400
Arfon Borough Council	130,000
Blaenau Gwent Borough Council	154,820
Brecknock Borough Council	69,767
Cardiff City Council	732,889
Carmarthen District Council	107,929
Ceredigion District Council	105,000
Colwyn Borough Council	134,730
Cynon Valley Borough Council	217,720
Delyn Borough Council	130,284
Dinefwr Borough Council	110,242
Dwyfor District Council	14,120
Glyndwr District Council	217,598
Islwyn Borough Council	69,980
Llanelli Borough Council	275,236
Lliw Valley Borough Council	201,312
Meirionydd District Council	45,966
Merthyr Tydfil Borough Council	137,251
Monmouth Borough Council	116,077
Montgomery District Council	102,771
Neath Borough Council	190,809
Newport Borough Council	510,187
Ogwr Borough Council	1,158,015
Port Talbot Borough Council	149,590
Preseli District Council	232,600
Radnor District Council	21,000
Rhondda Borough Council	179,640
Rhuddlan Borough Council	61,435
Rhymney Valley District Council	226,367
South Pembrokeshire District Council	79,500
Swansea City Council	679,184
Taff-Ely Borough Council	333,620
Torfaen Borough Council	403,696
Vale of Glamorgan Borough Council	131,200
Wrexham Maelor Borough Council	485,049
Ynys Mon Borough Council	144,170

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assistance he plans for the housing authorities of Wales concerning rent arrears.

Mr. Grist: Rent arrears is a housing management issue and I look to councils to resolve it. I stand ready to consider any realistic proposals that the Council of Welsh Districts (CWD) cares to put to me to promulgate good practice.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the spending levels for 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91 for *(a)* the average of all Welsh county councils and *(b)* South Glamorgan council in cash and percentage terms.

Mr. Grist: Information for 1988-89 and 1989-90 is given in the table. Figures are not yet available for 1990-91.

	1988-89 revised estimate	*1989-90 budget*	*Percentage increase*
	£000	*£000*	
Average of Welsh County Councils	180,163	193,506	7·4
South Glamorgan County Council	191,174	207,952	8·8

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the spending levels for 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91 for *(a)* the average of all Welsh district councils and *(b)* Cardiff council in cash and percentage levels.

Mr. Grist: Information for 1988-89 and 1989-90 is given in the table. Figures are not yet available for 1990-91.

	1988-89 revised estimate	*1989-90 budget*	*Percentage increase*
	£000	*£000*	
Average of Welsh District Councils	7,297	8,147	11·6
Cardiff City Council	25,473	30,501	19·7

Sheep

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many sheep farmers in each of the Welsh counties have 1,000 ewes or over; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: I refer the hon. Gentleman to table 3.11 in "Welsh Agricultural Statistics No. 11, 1989", a copy of which is in the Library.

Rural Affairs Unit

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will set up a rural affairs unit in his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: Effective arrangements already exist within the Department to ensure the co-ordination and implementation of the various policies which affect rural

areas of Wales. A close relationship is also maintained with other agencies and organisations having responsibilities and an interest in rural affairs.

Mid-Wales

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives he proposes to enhance economic activity in mid-Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Development Board for Rural Wales has the principal responsibility for the economic regeneration of mid-Wales. Its recently announced "Strategy for the 1990s" sets out its future intentions for the area. Apart from the Development Board for Rural Wales, other sources of economic and industrial assistance are available to mid-Wales through the Wales tourist board, the Welsh Development Agency and central Government.

Upland Farmers

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives he proposes to take concerning the difficulties encountered by upland farmers in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: We have just announced an 11 per cent. increase in the hill livestock compensatory allowance for hardy breed sheep in the severely disadvantaged area, bringing the rate up to £7·50. For the future, we shall seek to ensure that upland farmers in Wales are able to compete effectively and on equal terms with the rest of Europe.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will meet the farmers' unions in Wales to discuss the needs of the upland farmers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State regularly meets representatives from the Welsh farming unions to discuss a wide range of issues affecting agriculture in Wales.

Rented Property

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives he proposes concerning the need for homes to rent in rural Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: We are encouraging local authorities to make the best use of their housing stock through good housing management practice. Authorities are also encouraged to work together with housing associations to provide homes for rent in rural Wales. Furthermore the rural initiative launched by Housing for Wales last year has brought forward a number of pilot projects involving the provision of rented homes. Two research projects have been commissioned by Housing for Wales to establish the overall level of housing need in rural areas which will assist the accurate targeting of its resources. In addition, Housing for Wales has been asked to maintain significant investment in rural housing at around £25 million in the context of its overall programme.

Cardiff-Wales Airport

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what policy initiative he proposes to enhance the status of Cardiff-Wales airport.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Wherever possible, the Government encourage growth at regional airports, and they are already leading the way in liberalising European air fares and services. However, future development of Cardiff-Wales Airport Ltd. will depend on the expansion of services which is primarily a matter for the commercial judgment of the airlines.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will meet local government leaders and management of Cardiff-Wales airport to discuss future development; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already arranged to meet the airport director in early March for discussions on the prospects for new services at Cardiff-Wales airport.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will visit Cardiff-Wales airport.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend has no current plans to do so.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many official visits he has made to Cardiff-Wales airport.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: None. However my right hon. Friend is a frequent user.

Welsh Water plc

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to ensure that Welsh Water plc meets its obligations to improve the quality and dependability of supply of water.

Mr. Grist: My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Wales have recently established a drinking water inspectorate, details of which were given by the Minister for Housing and Planning in answer to a question from the hon. Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay) on 21 December 1989. The Director General of Water Services also has duties under the Water Act 1989 to ensure that the functions of a water undertaker are properly carried out.

Patients (Referrals)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how the cost of treatment for a patient referred to a treatment centre by a general practitioner will be met; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether he will make a statement as to why general practitioners will not be allowed to refer patients directly to treatment centres of the practitioner's choice.

Mr. Grist: Treatment centres are intended to help directly people who have been waiting too long for treatment for key disabling conditions. They will therefore offer those patients who have already been waiting over four months for the relevant operations the choice of earlier treatment at the centres. Treatment for all patients at the centres will be funded centrally. GPs will continue to be able to refer new patients direct to hospitals of their choice, which will continue to treat the majority of patients.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement as to which authority is to be responsible for the after care of a patient following treatment at a centre outside the patient's health authority.

Mr. Grist: The consultant team at the centre will be responsible for post-operative care and follow-up, including any complications arising from the surgical procedure. However, with the agreement of the referring consultant, consideration may be given to conducting follow-up nearer the patient's home. The place of treatment for late surgical complications after completion of in-patient treatment should be decided by the patient and GP after consultation with the operating surgeon.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to set up a special fund to help meet the travel expenses of patients referred to treatment centres outside their own health authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: The cost of travel where medically indicated to and from the orthopaedic treatment centre at the Prince of Wales hospital, Rhydlafar, will be shared between the referring authorities and the centre itself; £20,000 a year of central funds are being set aside for this purpose. The arrangements for the other centres are currently under discussion. Patients on low incomes can obtain help with their travelling expenses to and from the centres from the Department of Social Security as with any other hospital service.

Health Care

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he intends to ensure a comprehensive range of health care services within each health authority in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: The provisions of the National Health Service and Community Care Bill place a clear duty on district health authorities to secure an adequate range, quality and depth of services for their local populations. As now, some services will need to be provided to patients outside their district health authority of residence. In determining arrangements for the treatment of their residents, health authorities will wish to reconcile the need for service, quality of access to service, and value for money in the mode of provision.

Polluted Beaches

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide a list of the 10 most polluted beaches in Wales and give details of the most recent measurements of pollution on each of them.

Mr. Grist: This information is not available. However, the results of the 1989 survey of bathing water quality in England and Wales announced by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside on 25 January showed that 83 per cent. of the 48 Welsh waters listed under the terms of the EC bathing water directive complied with its bacteriological standards. Details have been placed in the Library of the House.

Polluted Rivers

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide a list of the 20 most polluted rivers in Wales and give details of the most recent measurements of pollution in each of them.

Mr. Grist: This information is not available. However, the 1985 river water quality survey showed that 93 per cent. of all river lengths surveyed in Wales were in either class 1 or 2.

Firearms Range, Cardiff

Mr William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will indicate the date on which the safety certificate for the indoor firearms range at the national sports centre, Cardiff was first granted; and for which classes and calibres of firearms and muzzle energies it presently holds such a safety certificate.

Mr. Grist: The information provided by the Sports Council for Wales is as follows:

Original certificate issued 18 July 1972 for the following:
·22 calibre rifle
210 feet per pound muzzle energy

·22 calibre pistol
100 feet per pound muzzle energy

On 14 May 1984 upgraded to:
·380 calibre pistol

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Bangladesh

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list, by cost and project, the aid which is currently given to Bangladesh in the form of *(a)* grant aid and *(b)* repayable loans.

Mrs. Chalker: Under British bilateral aid to Bangladesh all assistance is provided in grant form.

Capital aid projects funded under the programme at present are:

	Allocation (rounded)
	£ million
Dhaka Power Phase II A	11·5
Dhaka Power Phase III	58·9
Second Gas Development Project	22·9
Bridging and Institutional Development	11·8
Tea Rehabilitation	20·0
Second Deep Tubewells Project	17·9
Second Rural Development Project	6·6
Third Health and Population Project	8·0
Technical Education Project	1·4

We also support a large number of technical co-operation activities, including training in Bangladesh and in the United Kingdom, consultants, advisers, aid personnel and equipment. In 1988-89 some £14 million was spent on these activities.

In addition, Britain provides commodity aid for goods, equipment and spare parts to maintain and improve existing production capacity in Bangladesh. A grant for £15 million was signed in February 1989.

Aid (Disabled People)

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department is taking to ensure that an appropriate part of the financial aid given to countries is allocated to the needs of disabled people to ensure that they have equal opportunity in the development of their countries.

Mrs. Chalker: In many developing countries the needs of disabled people are handled by the non-governmental sector. The ODA provides grants to United Kingdom non-governmental organisations operating in developing countries for the partial funding of their projects, which are usually carried out by local organisations. Within our Government-to-Government country aid programmes we are ready to respond positively to requests from recipient Governments to provide assistance to help them meet the needs of disabled people.

Details of projects funded by the ODA, both directly and through non-governmental organisations, which focus on the needs of disabled people, were contained in the answer the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) on 6 December at columns *231-32*.

EMPLOYMENT

Tourism

Mr. Lee: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the latest available figures of the balance of payments deficit on the travel and tourism account; and what is his projection for the year.

Mr. Nicholls: During the first 10 months of the year, overseas residents spent an estimated £5,820 million in the United Kingdom while United Kingdom residents spent £8,370 million abroad. Estimates for the whole of 1989 will be published on 7 March.

Youth Training

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of YTS trainees in training broken down by ethnic background and the number of contracted places in *(a)* London and *(b)* Birmingham/Solihull for February 1989.

Mr. Nicholls: The number of YTS trainees in training by ethnic background for the two areas requested on 28 February 1989 is as follows:

Ethnic group	*London*	*Birmingham/ Solihull*
White	16,630	9,972
Black/African Caribbean descent	2,501	573
Indian sub-continent descent	1,229	830
Chinese Vietnamese/mixed race	579	119
Prefers not to say	578	63

The number of contracted places for February 1989 are:

	Number
London	31,311
Birmingham	18,041

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has on the construction ITB YTS scheme showing the ethnic background and number of trainees in each of the occupational categories concerned; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: The table shows the number in training in YTS CITB schemes as at 31 December 1989 and gives the ethnic breakdown within each occupational area:

In-Training on YTS CITB schemes, as at 31 December 1989

Occupational Group (TOC)	*White*	*Black/Afro/ Caribbean*	*Indian sub-continent*	*None of these*	*Prefer not to say*	*Total*
A. Administration and Clerical	159	—	3	1	—	163
D. Selling and Storage	9	—	—	—	—	9
K. Construction and Civil Engineering	27,960	92	68	55	164	28,339
M. Electronic and Electrical Engineering	7,732	51	28	16	17	7,844
N. Mechanical Engineering	4	—	—	—	—	4
P. Motor Vehicle Repair and Maintenance	1	—	—	—	—	1
Q. Non-Metal Processing	2	—	—	—	—	2
R. Printing	1	—	—	—	—	1
S. Clothing and Textiles	1	—	—	—	—	1
Total	35,869	143	99	72	181	36,364

Training

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to relaunch Employment training.

Mr. Nicholls: My Department has no such plans.

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list all training enterprises and schemes which have been introduced since 1979.

Mr. Nicholls: The training programmes and schemes introduced by my Department since 1979 are as follows:
Training Opportunities Scheme.
Open Tech.
National Priority Skills Scheme.
Youth Training Scheme.
Technical and Vocational Education Initiative.
Local Collaborative Projects.
Non Advanced Further Education/Work Related Further Education.
Job Training Scheme.
Training For Enterprise.
Local Grants to Employers.
Wider Opportunities Training Programme.
New Job Training Scheme.
Enterprise in Higher Education and other HE projects.
Employment Training.
Business Growth Training.
Compacts.
The Open College.

Mr. Parry: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if employment training is to become a designated scheme under the Employment Act 1988.

Mr. Nicholls: My Department has no plans for employment training to be designated under the Employment Act 1988.

Union Mergers

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has as to how many union mergers have taken place in the years since 1980, and as to what the sizes of the unions merged were.

Mr. Nicholls: There were 115 mergers involving a total of 2·7 million union members in the period 1980 to 1988; annual data are given in the table. Separate statistics on the sizes of individual unions involved in these mergers are not readily available.

Year	*Number of mergers*	*Number of members involved*
1980	13	113,235
1981	4	8,617
1982	12	1,455,207
1983	9	65,320
1984	18	142,302
1985	11	73,526
1986	32	50,530
1987	5	125,200
1988	11	673,300
Total	115	2,707,237

Labour Costs

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of hourly manufacturing labour costs, indexed with the United Kingdom as 100, in West Germany, France, the United States of America and Japan in 1979 and 1989, and what is his estimate of an index of labour costs in the same countries in the same years, using an index of manufacturing productivity calculated on the same basis.

Mr. Nicholls: International comparisons of hourly manufacturing labour costs (excluding recruitment and training costs and costs of facilities and services) are made periodically by the United States Bureau of Labour Statistics. Available data from this source are as follows:

Index UK = 100

	1980	*1988*
United Kingdom	100	100
West Germany	166	172
France	120	124
United States	132	133
Japan	76	121

Manufacturing productivity data on the same basis are not available.

Factory Inspectors

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many factory inspectors were employed for each year since 1980.

Mr. Nicholls: The number of factory inspectors employed in the Health and Safety Executive in each year since 1980 is as follows (1 April figures):

Year	*Number of factory inspectors*
1980	759·0
1981	735·0
1982	678·0
1983	654·0
1984	627·0
1985	652·0
1986	623·0
1987	621·5
1988	592·5
1989	604·0
[1]1990	624·5

[1] 1 January.

Hazardous Substances

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what resources his Department has given for the implementation of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations.

Mr. Nicholls: These regulations will be enforced by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and local authorities as part of their continuing programme of visits to premises. Responsibility for implementation of the regulations rests with industry. The HSE has been working closely with industry organisations and employers to encourage them to develop guidance for their members as well as promoting the regulations by a variety of means including national and trade advertising and the distribution of introductory leaflets.

Training Agents

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many training agents have been appointed in the Wakefield and Leeds area; which individuals or organisations are involved as training agents; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: There are four training agents in the Leeds and Wakefield area currently participating in ET. These are:

Wakefield Training Agent
Leeds City Council
Shapman Ltd.
The Leeds Chamber Training Agent.

Action for Jobs

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much of the expenditure on Action for Jobs, in addition to expenditure on television advertising and printed material in 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88 was spent through the Central Office of Information:

Mr. Eggar: In addition to Action For Jobs expenditure on television advertising and printed material, the following amounts were spent through the Central Office of Information:

1985-86 Nil
1986-87 £1·7 million
1987-88 £2·4 million.

Maternity Leave

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list all the changes in employment law since May 1979 which have affected women's rights to maternity leave.

Mr. Nicholls: The Employment Act 1980 made the following changes:

Initial notification of intention to return after confinement must now be in writing and should include the expected week of confinement or, if confinement has occurred, the actual date.

An employer has the right, not earlier than 49 days after the beginning of the expected week of confinement (or the notified date of confinement) to make a written request for confirmation in writing that the woman intends to return. If she does not comply within 14 days of receiving the request (or if that is not reasonably practicable, as soon as is reasonably practicable) she will lose the right to return.

Final notification of the intended date of return must now be made in writing at least 21 days (formerly 7 days) beforehand.

A woman who has been prevented from returning because of an interruption to work must resume work not later than 28 days (formerly 14 days) after the interruption is over.

The right to complain to an industrial tribunal if an employer does not reinstate her to her old job does not apply where it is not reasonably practicable for an employer to reinstate the woman in her original job (for reasons other than redundancy) and where an offer of employment is unreasonably refused.

Employers with fewer than 6 employees no longer have to re-employ a woman if it is not reasonably practicable either to reinstate her in her old job or to offer her suitable alternative employment.

SCOTLAND

Skye Toll Bridge

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the planning procedure which he intends to follow in relation to the proposed Skye toll bridge.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As indicated in "New Roads by New Means" (Cmnd. 698), it is proposed to introduce new legislation to provide revised procedures for the authorisation of privately financed roads. These would amend and supplement the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984. Alternatively, as with the M25 Dartford crossing, a project specific Bill may be judged the most suitable vehicle to progress Skye bridge timeously. In either case, the statutory procedures adopted will safeguard the environment and uphold the rights of individuals and local councils affected by such privately funded infrastructure developments.

School Boards

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list, in respect of each Scottish education authority area, the applications received by him to have the obligation to have a school board waived, in terms of section 20 of the School Boards (Scotland) Act 1988; and if he will indicate those cases in which he has granted such a waiver.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 21 December 1989]:* My right hon. and learned Friend has received one such application, which he has granted in respect of Graemsay primary school in Orkney.

Sand-eels

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will decide whether the ban on commercial sand-eel fishing in the Shetlands will be extended a further season.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 5 February 1990]:* A consultation paper setting out the scientific advice on sand-eel stocks and a range of possible management options for the fishery has been issued by the Department. Responses from several bodies are still awaited.

TRANSPORT

Highway Authorities

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list in the *Official Report* for each highway authority in England *(a)* their bid for annual capital guidelines and transport supplementary grant for 1990-91, *(b)* the allocation announced in each case, *(c)* the allocation as a percentage of bid in each case and *(d)* the percentage of each authority's transport supplementary grant allocation attributable to minor works.

Mr. Atkins: "Capital allocations" under the present local government finance system are not equivalent to "annual capital guidelines" (ACGs) under the new one for 1990-91 onwards. For example, capital allocations included transport supplementary grant (TSG) but ACGs do not. Furthermore, local authorities are also given "supplementary credit approvals" (SCAs) in addition to ACGs to help them finance capital expenditure not met by TSG.

Table 1 shows each local highway authority's bid for capital expenditure on roads and parking, the sum of its TSG, ACG and SCA allocations, and the percentage that the total allocations are of the bids.

Table 2 shows authorities' bids and allocations for accepted expenditure, the percentage that allocations are of bids, and the percentage of accepted expenditure that is for minor works.

Table 1
Capital expenditure on roads and parking 1990-91

Highway Authority	*Bid*	*Sum of TSG ACG and SCA*	*Column 2 as percentage of Column 1*
	£ million	*£ million*	*Per cent.*
	(1)	(2)	(3)
City of London	2·152	0·562	26·1
Barking and Dagenham	8·285	5·370	64·8
Barnet	2·551	0·732	28·7
Bexley	7·681	5·003	65·1
Brent	3·352	0·743	22·2
Bromley	10·281	8·162	79·4
Camden	3·494	1·284	36·7
Croydon	7·199	2·778	38·6
Ealing	16·092	7·731	48·0
Enfield	14·198	11·790	83·0

Highway Authority	Bid £ million	Sum of TSG ACG and SCA £ million	Column 2 as percentage of Column 1 Per cent.
Greenwich	3·792	1·168	30·8
Hackney	3·662	0·977	26·7
Hammersmith and Fulham	6·009	1·451	24·1
Haringey	8·702	6·162	70·8
Harrow	12·380	8·882	71·7
Havering	2·222	0·783	35·2
Hillingdon	17·543	9·956	56·8
Hounslow	2·309	1·098	47·6
Islington	2·294	0·717	31·3
Kensington and Chelsea	1·671	·979	58·6
Kingston upon Thames	5·275	2·447	46·4
Lambeth	0·990	0·434	43·8
Lewisham	7·777	5·068	65·2
Merton	20·813	15·532	74·6
Newham	6·774	4·660	68·8
Redbridge	2·729	0·732	26·8
Richmond upon Thames	2·741	0·805	29·4
Southwark	4·327	1·950	45·1
Sutton	8·514	3·758	44·1
Tower Hamlets	5·161	1·098	21·3
Waltham Forest	2·931	0·782	26·7
Wandsworth	13·202	4·440	33·6
Westminster	17·314	4·956	28·6
Bolton	5·444	3·287	60·4
Bury	3·145	2·164	68·8
Manchester	20·586	13·201	64·1
Oldham	10·823	3·057	28·2
Rochdale	5·208	1·225	26·0
Salford	14·364	6·430	44·8
Stockport	2·738	1·417	51·8
Tameside	6·461	1·841	28·5
Trafford	6·357	1·955	30·8
Wigan	6·939	2·937	42·3
Knowsley	3·427	2·293	6·9
Liverpool	8·250	3·256	39·5
St. Helens	6·727	6·288	93·5
Sefton	3·196	1·340	41·9
Wirral	4·391	1·969	44·8
Barnsley	6·260	3·848	61·5
Doncaster	5·221	2·604	49·9
Rotherham	4·614	3·151	68·3
Sheffield	16·932	12·007	70·9
Gateshead	6·274	2·963	44·1
Newcastle upon Tyne	9·803	2·982	30·4
North Tyneside	2·420	0·695	28·7
South Tyneside	4·260	1·942	45·6
Sunderland	8·120	3·880	47·8
Birmingham	27·312	18·450	67·6
Coventry	7·242	3·836	53·0
Dudley	8·462	2·847	33·6
Sandwell	6·326	3·424	54·1
Solihull	4·117	1·753	42·6
Walsall	9·242	5·934	64·2
Wolverhampton	10·028	6·701	66·8
Bradford	11·364	6·709	59·0
Calderdale	3·018	1·524	50·5
Kirklees	5·210	0·795	15·3
Leeds	10·125	6·596	65·1
Wakefield	9·507	2·614	27·5
Avon	18·900	14·435	76·4
Bedfordshire	9·008	6·382	70·8
Berkshire	24·775	7·844	31·7
Buckinghamshire	7·383	3·240	43·9
Cambridgeshire	15·976	6·248	39·1
Cheshire	19·586	10·328	52·7
Cleveland	15·159	11·793	77·8
Cornwall	14·531	7·467	51·4
Cumbria	8·345	5·652	67·7
Derbyshire	13·801	4·935	35·8
Devon	26·802	11·423	42·6
Dorset	14·000	7·410	52·9
Durham	7·658	5·342	69·8
East Sussex	16·048	8·813	54·9
Essex	31·913	18·592	58·3
Gloucestershire	10·835	5·148	47·5

Highway Authority	Bid	Sum of TSG ACG and SCA	Column 2 as percentage of Column 1
	£ million	£ million	Per cent.
Hampshire	22·456	17·823	79·4
Hereford and Worcester	7·883	3·923	49·8
Hertfordshire	9·910	7·725	78·0
Humberside	16·365	12·989	79·4
Isle of Wight	4·808	1·616	33·6
Kent	56·010	31·272	55·8
Lancashire	38·014	29·369	77·3
Leicestershire	14·303	7·605	53·2
Lincolnshire	7·535	4·055	53·8
Norfolk	20·279	12·990	64·1
Northamptonshire	16·050	7·964	49·6
Northumberland	6·570	3·746	57·0
North Yorkshire	15·041	8·353	55·5
Nottinghamshire	15·359	5·900	38·4
Oxfordshire	17·627	7·814	44·3
Shropshire	11·791	5·106	43·3
Somerset	14·748	7·642	51·8
Staffordshire	15·000	7·303	48·7
Suffolk	21·545	8·969	41·6
Surrey	24·643	15·435	62·6
Warwickshire	9·463	2·932	31·0
West Sussex	16·426	10·577	64·4
Wiltshire	13·214	7·699	58·3

Table 2
Transport supplementary grant for local roads 1990-91

Highway authority	Bid for accepted expenditure	Gross accepted expenditure	Gross accepted expenditure as percentage of bid	Accepted expenditure for minor works as percentage of column 2
	£ million (1)	£ million (2)	per cent. (3)	per cent. (4)
City of London	0·935	0·202	21·6	100·0
Barking and Dagenham	6·220	5·296	85·1	5·6
Barnet	0·651	0·322	49·5	100·0
Bexley	4·578	4·568	99·8	6·1
Brent	1·502	0·364	24·2	100·0
Bromley	8·652	7·668	88·6	7·5
Camden	1·070	0·378	35·3	100·0
Croydon	4·375	1·776	40·6	40·9
Ealing	8·572	7·408	86·4	7·6
Enfield	13·460	13·582	100·8	2·6
Greenwich	3·785	1·388	36·7	20·2
Hackney	2·072	0·372	18·0	100·0
Hammersmith and Fulham	1·605	0·296	18·4	100·0
Haringey	7·447	5·792	77·8	4·0
Harrow	11·315	10·728	94·8	3·1
Havering	0·327	0·430	131·5	100·0
Hillingdon	13·915	12·584	90·4	5·5
Hounslow	1·950	0·958	49·1	41·6
Islington	0·939	0·336	35·8	100·0
Kensington and Chelsea	1·558	1·220	78·3	24·4
Kingston upon Thames	3·112	2·882	92·6	10·8
Lambeth	0·369	0·308	83·5	100·0
Lewisham	5·699	5·174	90·8	6·6
Merton	20·172	14·550	72·1	2·4
Newham	5·353	5·132	95·9	7·4
Redbridge	2·091	0·268	12·8	100·0
Richmond upon Thames	0·770	0·344	44·7	100·0
Southwark	3·427	2·798	81·6	14·2
Sutton	3·134	1·880	59·6	25·7
Tower Hamlets	1·635	0·182	11·0	100·0
Waltham Forest	2·086	0·562	26·9	91·1
Wandsworth	8·832	3·122	35·3	29·5
Westminster	4·317	1·384	32·1	33·4
Bolton	3·404	2·984	87·7	6·3
Bury	2·065	1·698	82·2	15·2
Manchester	16·208	10·752	66·2	8·4
Oldham	7·618	2·378	31·2	11·7
Rochdale	1·205	0·378	31·4	100·0
Salford	11·928	5·096	42·7	7·8
Stockport	1·251	0·966	77·2	12·0
Tameside	1·814	1·106	61·0	18·4

Highway authority	Bid for accepted expenditure £ million (1)	Gross accepted expenditure £ million (2)	Gross accepted expenditure as percentage of bid per cent. (3)	Accepted expenditure for minor works as percentage of column 2 per cent. (4)
Trafford	4·051	0·778	19·2	35·7
Wigan	6·559	2·944	44·9	1·3
Knowsley	2·684	1·792	66·8	20·0
Liverpool	7·600	3·300	43·4	6·1
St. Helens	6·277	5·882	93·7	4·2
Sefton	1·823	0·738	40·5	23·6
Wirral	3·916	2·250	57·5	9·1
Barnsley	4·360	3·348	76·8	11·2
Doncaster	2·819	1·864	66·1	17·1
Rotherham	3·426	2·486	72·6	10·3
Sheffield	13·073	11·192	85·6	5·3
Gateshead	5·651	2·094	37·1	14·5
Newcastle upon Tyne	7·275	3·824	52·6	10·0
North Tyneside	2·190	0·306	14·0	100·0
South Tyneside	2·365	1·450	61·3	13·8
Sunderland	7·305	2·544	34·8	11·6
Birmingham	23·727	15·790	66·5	4·5
Coventry	4·802	2·948	61·4	12·8
Dudley	4·706	1·150	24·4	20·1
Sandwell	5·533	2·104	38·0	12·0
Solihull	1·038	0·856	82·5	10·0
Walsall	6·053	5·502	90·9	2·1
Wolverhampton	7·395	6·334	85·7	3·6
Bradford	9·319	6·884	73·9	7·0
Calderdale	0·894	0·192	21·5	100·0
Kirklees	1·079	0·270	25·0	88·9
Leeds	6·847	6·064	88·6	7·3
Wakefield	4·320	0·314	7·3	100·0
Avon	17·015	13·428	78·9	2·1
Bedfordshire	8·328	5·182	62·2	7·3
Berkshire	12·485	4·614	37·0	9·4
Buckinghamshire	2·498	2·306	92·3	5·4
Cambridgeshire	7·883	4·414	56·0	13·9
Cheshire	10·572	8·558	80·9	3·4
Cleveland	12·276	11·084	90·3	2·2
Cornwall	9·440	5·944	63·0	4·4
Cumbria	5·849	4·632	79·5	6·7
Derbyshire	4·388	1·864	42·5	16·7
Devon	18·284	6·788	37·1	4·3
Dorset	12·380	5·732	46·3	7·3
Durham	6·678	4·820	72·2	10·6
East Sussex	9·175	6·242	68·0	5·5
Essex	17·241	13·672	79·3	3·3
Gloucestershire	9·383	3·866	41·2	4·0
Hampshire	16·627	15·278	91·9	1·6
Hereford and Worcester	5·335	2·926	54·8	9·2
Hertfordshire	8·600	8·400	97·7	3·6
Humberside	12·972	10·624	81·9	4·1
Isle of Wight	3·950	0·828	21·0	100·0
Kent	46·565	30·450	65·4	1·3
Lancashire	32·236	25·896	80·3	2·5
Leicestershire	9·431	6·094	64·6	6·5
Lincolnshire	4·338	3·148	72·6	12·2
Norfolk	14·090	11·346	80·5	2·6
Northamptonshire	12·523	6·998	55·9	9·0
Northumberland	4·739	3·062	64·6	6·9
North Yorkshire	10·927	7·688	70·4	5·0
Nottinghamshire	4·859	3·828	78·8	12·9
Oxfordshire	10·243	5·124	50·0	0·9
Shropshire	6·576	3·182	48·4	4·6
Somerset	9·618	6·812	70·8	1·7
Staffordshire	10·045	5·826	58·0	6·7
Suffolk	12·908	6·374	49·4	3·6
Surrey	19·438	13·560	69·8	5·2
Warwickshire	5·187	2·284	44·0	20·4
West Sussex	10·723	9·564	89·2	2·6
Wiltshire	11·461	6·320	55·1	2·7

Notes

1. Column 2 does not take into account any adjustments arising from underspends on accepted expenditure in previous years.
2. Transport Supplementary Grant is paid at the rate of 50 per cent. of net accepted expenditure (ie after adjustment).

3. For London, accepted expenditure for Transport Supplementary Grant includes each Borough's share of expenditure on the London-wide Urban Traffic Control system managed by the City of London on behalf of the Secretary of State which is not included in boroughs' bids but is included in their gross accepted expenditure. This is why for some London authorities their accepted expenditure is greater than their bid.

London Assessment Studies

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will permit his Department's consultants to release detailed drawings to the public showing how specific properties will be affected by the proposals in stage 2B of the London assessment studies.

Mr. Atkins: Since the consultants' preliminary drawings are only illustrative it would be inappropriate and misleading to release them to the public. Much more detailed design work will be necessary on any options which may be taken forward before it will be known how specific properties will be affected.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will publish in full the results of the public consultation on stage 2B of the London assessment studies and "Traffic in London".

Mr. Atkins: We have not yet decided in what form the results should be published.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will extend the time period given for public consultation over the London road assessment studies.

Mr. Atkins: No.

M1 (Lighting)

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when motorway lighting will be installed on the M1 from Watford Gap to its junction with the M6.

Mr. Atkins: Motorway lighting is at present being installed from Watford Gap (junction 17) to Crick (junction 18) and will be completed by the end of this month. Further extension from Crick to the M6 junction (junction 19) is planned and should go ahead during the 1990-91 financial year.

Roads (Sterilised Land)

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the latest estimate of land sterilised for other uses by the construction of *(a)* new two-lane highways, *(b)* new four-lane highways and *(c)* new six-lane highways measured in terms of land sterilised per 1,000 m of new road construction.

Mr. Atkins: The amount of land taken for road scheme varies according to topography, structures and the amount of landscape treatment. In terms of standard carriageway widths, the land take is as follows:

Standard	*Width*	*Area per 1000 metres (in hectares)*
	metres	
Motorway		
Dual 4 lane	≈50	5·0
Dual 3 lane	≈43	4·3
Dual 2 lane	≈35	3·5
All-purpose		
Dual 2 lane[1]	≈38	3·8
Wide single	≈26	2·6
Single	≈23	2·3

[1] Includes allowance for footpaths.

When the expanded roads programme is complete, the trunk road network in England will cover an area of 3,836ha, 0·29 per cent. of the total land area.

Greenham Common

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will consider the use of the Greenham Common airfield for civilian aircraft following the closure by the United States Airforce of its base there.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Government are prepared to look sympathetically at applications for civil use of Ministry of Defence airfields, where such use is compatible with their operational role. I understand that RAF Greenham Common will remain available to the United States Airforce as a standby operating base for the foreseeable future.

Jubilee Line

Ms Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is the developers' financial contribution to the extension of the Jubilee line in today's prices; and over what period it is due to be paid;

(2) what is the formulation of the agreement between the developers and the Department of Transport over contributions towards the construction of the Jubilee line extension; and if it is available in written form.

Mr. Portillo: In my right hon. Friend's answer of 16 November to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) *Official Report* column *398*, he said:

"The Jubilee extension will cost about £1 billion in today's prices to which developers over time will be making a cash contribution of over £400 million".

Of that sum just over £100 million will be paid within the next three years, with the balance to be paid in the years following the opening of the line, which is as yet an indeterminate date. The full total of contributions is not yet known as negotiations with some developers remain to be concluded.

The understandings to this effect, reached in recent months between the Department and developers, remain to be executed as legal agreements between LRT and those developers, and contain commercially confidential material.

London Docklands Railway

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement concerning the resignation of the manager of the docklands light railway; and when he expects a permanent replacement to be appointed.

Mr. Portillo: This is not an appointment made by the Secretary of State. It is a matter entirely for the board of London Regional Transport.

Road Closure, Poplar

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received in connection with the proposed road closure at the junction of Lanrick road and East India Dock road in Poplar, east London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: No proposal has been made to close Lanrick road at its junction with East India Dock road. Representations have been received about the local authority's suggested closure of Lanrick road at its junction with Portree road. These were from the deputy mayor of the London borough of Tower Hamlets, the chief executive of the Poplar standing neighbourhood committee, the local Liberal Focus team, enclosing a petition signed by 230 local residents, and two members of the public. The Department is concerned at the safety implications of the proposed closure since it would create a cul-de-sac access to the busy A13 trunk road. My right hon. Friend would consider any formal proposal made by the local highway authority on its merits.

Cost-benefit Analysis

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has any plans to change the method of pricing involved in the cost-benefit analysis, COBA 9, presently used by his Department.

Mr. Atkins: All the major economic parameters used in COBA 9 are kept under continuous review and adjustments made periodically. A number of major revisions have been made in the last three years. I have no plans, at present, to make any further revisions.

Diesel Exhaust Fumes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce measures to reduce levels of hydrocarbons contained within diesel exhaust fumes.

Mr. Atkins: Regulations were made last year that will apply to new diesel-engined vehicles from 1 October 1990. They will introduce European Community limits on gaseous emissions, including hydrocarbons. The European Commission is expected to propose much tighter gaseous emission standards for lorries and buses later this year, and to propose limits on particulates. We are pressing the Commission to make its long-overdue proposals as soon as possible.

HEALTH

Private Hospitals

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many private hospitals he has visited in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have not visited any private hospitals in the last 12 months.

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, further to his reply to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby of 20 December, *Official Report*, column *333*, concerning the accountancy firms employed by his Department, if he will indicate *(a)* the names of the five firms, *(b)* a list of payments made to each in 1988 and 1989, *(c)* details of the consultancy contracts given to each firm and *(d)* who his Department consulted when drawing up the contracts.

Mr. Freeman: Information about the five consultancy firms employed by the Department is set out in the tables for both financial years.

The individual contracts were prepared to accord with the specific requirements of the work undertaken, drawing as necessary on relevant expertise within the Department and in line with the guidance issued by Treasury on employment of external consultants.

Financial Year 1988-89

Accountancy Firm and Details of Contract	*Amount paid/ contracted £*
1. Touche Ross *(a)* Statutory Audit of NHS	147,954·70
Touche Ross *(b)* Paymaster (Methods in NHS)	20,000·00
2. Ernst Young Statutory Audit of NHS	181,806·80
3. Coopers Lybrand Deloittes Statutory Audit of NHS	153,872·90
4. Price Waterhouse *(a)* Statutory Audit of NHS	148,329·43
Price Waterhouse *(b)* FMI policy and Financial Management Review of CCETSW[1]	60,000·00
5. Hodgson Impey Statutory Audit of NHS	120,555·10

[1] Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work.

Financial Year 1989-90

Accountancy Firm and Details of Contract	*Amount paid/ contracted £*
1. Touche Ross Statutory Audit of NHS	301,011·52
2. Ernst Young Statutory Audit of NHS	204,413·49
3. Coopers Lybrand Deloittes *(a)* Statutory Audit of NHS	221,694·87
Coopers Lybrand Deloittes *(b)* Hospital Cost Arrangements, Procedures and Systems	40,000·00
4. Price Waterhouse Statutory Audit of NHS	187,488·29
5. Hodgson Impey Statutory Audit of NHS	135,663·45

NHS Assets (Interest)

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health at what level the interest elements of capital charges are set for National Health Service assets; how this figure is arrived at; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: When capital charging is introduced in April 1991, the interest rate to be applied to the current value of National Health Service assets will be 6 per cent. This rate is based on the discount rate used for the non-trading part of the public sector, as published by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in 1989.

Tobacco-related Diseases

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the annual cost to the National Health Service of treating tobacco-related diseases.

Mr. Freeman: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave him on 17 January 1990 at column *277*.

Computer Security

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department has taken, and is taking to improve the security of its computer systems.

Mr. Freeman: For unclassifed but sensitive systems the Department of Health is expected to follow Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency guidance covering all aspects of IT security, and the application of this has been tightened recently. CCTA advice is kept under continuous review and is based on analysis of security risks and requirements using structured methods such as CCTA's risk analysis management methodology (CRAMM), which has also been made available commercially.

More stringent conditions apply to classified systems.

Temperature Controls (Food)

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what consideration he has given to representations by manufacturers and retailers of certain foods concerning new temperature controls and the commercial viability of their business;

(2) what consideration he has given to representations by soft cheese manufacturers suggesting that any new temperature control will prevent the proper maturing of traditional soft cheeses;

(3) what consideration he has given to stricter food labelling and improved food safety education as alternatives to statutory temperature controls in relation to food hygiene;

(4) what plans he has to introduce statutory temperature controls regulating the temperatures of certain foods following the consultation document issued by his Department regarding proposed amendments to the Food Hygiene (General) Regulations 1970;

(5) what response he has had to the consultation document issued by his Department regarding proposed amendments to the Food Hygiene (General) Regulations 1970;

(6) when he intends to lay before the House amendments to the Food Hygiene (General) Regulations 1970; and to what procedure they will be subject.

Mr. Freeman: Over 150 responses have been received to the consultation document, from all interested parties including those with a duty to enforce the regulations (environmental health officers); the retail trade, including representatives of small shopkeepers; delicatessens and market traders; catering organisations; refrigeration interests; delivery concerns; microbiological experts and trade associations, including soft cheese manufacturers, bakers and representatives of dairy and meat manufacturers.

All the representations received are being given careful consideration in order to bring forward, in the near future, a measure which will balance the protection of the public health with the practicalities of implementation. In accordance with section 120(2) of the Food Act 1984, the regulations when laid will be subject to the negative resolution procedure. Questions of labelling and food safety education and, indeed, hygiene in manufacturing processes are essential adjuncts but not alternatives to temperature controls and are being pursued in parallel.

Compulsory Removal

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department will take steps to compile annual statistical returns on the use by local authorities of powers of compulsory removal under the provisions of the National Assistance Act and the Mental Health Act.

Mr. Freeman: Certain statistical information is already collected centrally about the use of the compulsory powers provided by the Mental Health Act, including the number of cases of guardianship under sections 7 and 37. (The decision to use these compulsory powers is based on the recommendations of medical practitioners). At present we do not see any need to collect statistics on the use of the compulsory removal power in section 47 of the National Assistance Act.

Social Services

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the work of the social services inspectorate during the last available year was concerned with private sector social services provision.

Mr. Freeman: Direct concern with private sector social services provision is a matter for local authorities, which are the registering authorities for private residential care homes. The Department's social services inspectorate works with the statutory, private and voluntary sectors in promoting good standards of care. The results of this work are published from time to time. For example, the inspectorate has recently produced a handbook, "Homes Are for Living In", designed to help care home managers and local authority inspectors evaluate the quality of care in residential care homes for elderly people in both local authority and independent sector homes.

It would not therefore be practicable to apportion the inspectorate's work between sectors.

Great Ormond Street Hospital

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current state of the actions brought against any of the parties over the cardiac block at Great Ormond Street.

Mr. Freeman: All actions brought against parties involved in this case have now been settled.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether any of the capital or revenue expenditure increase for 1988-89 over 1982 for the Hospital for Sick Children given in the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State's letter of 29 January to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras represents spending on the cardiac block at Great Ormond Street.

Mr. Freeman: Health authorities' annual accounts do not separately identify expenditure on specific schemes. The hon. Member may like to consult the authority concerned for this information.

Acute Hospital Beds

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the number of acute hospital beds in the north-west area in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1989.

Mr. Freeman: The information is given in the table:

Acute hospital beds in the North Western regional health authority

	Year	
	1979	*1988-89*
Average daily available beds in the acute sector (including units for the younger disabled)	13,545	11,766

Over the same period numbers of patients treated have increased through improved efficiency in bed usage: in-patient cases treated up 43 per cent., day cases doubled and out-patient cases up 11 per cent.

Source: SH3 returns—1979.
KHO3 returns—1988-89.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Soil (Straw Incorporation)

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research is taking place into the effects of straw incorporation into heavy clay soils.

Mr. Gummer: Expenditure by my Department on straw-related research is currently running at £706,000 per annum. Of this, £200,000 is concerned with the effect of straw incorporation into heavy clay soils and involves the following projects:

Amount of funding in 1989-90

Location and project	*£000*
ADAS (Sproatley and Rochford) Straw incorporation on heavy clay and stony soils	50
ADAS (Boxworth EHF and Drayton EHF) Effects of straw disposal by soil cultivation methods	
AFRC (IER) Studies on cultivation mechanisms for cereals and other crops	150

Fishing Industry

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from, and what discussions he has had with, fishing industry representatives regarding prospects for the industry in 1990; and if he will make a statement on the outcome of any such meetings.

Mr. Curry: I and my officials are in frequent contact with the various representatives of the fishing industry. We discussed 1990 quotas and their implications in the run-up to the December Fisheries Council. I am working in close consultation with the industry to achieve improvements in our quota management and licensing arrangements and improved technical conservation measures.

Straw

Mr. Butler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reports he has received on research into alternative uses for straw.

Mr. Curry: We have received the following reports on research into alternative uses for straw:

Straw Disposal and Utilisation: A review of Knowledge: 1984; Working Party of the Straw Utilisation Group, MAFF; available in the Library of the House.

Alternatives to Straw Burning: 1984; S. England, Imperial College London.

The Effects of Field Burning Restriction, Straw Incorporation and Alternative Uses as Fuel, Fibre on Feed on the Amount of Field Burning and the Supply and Demand for Straw: Divisional Note DN 1307; E. Audsley, Institute of Engineering Research.

Register of Research and Development on Straw Disposal and Utilisation: 1985; Chief Scientists' Group, MAFF, available in the Library of the House.

Alternative Methods of Straw Disposal and Utilisation: 1987; National Society for Clean Air, England.

The Biodegradation of Thatching Straw: 1988; J. J. H. Kirby and A. D. M. Rayner, University of Bath.

The Economics of Whole Group Crop Cereal Harvesting: Divisional Note DN 1555; 1989; E. Audsley, Institute of Engineering Research.

Experiments Investigating the Mechanical and Agronomic problems of Incorporating Stripped and Chopped Straw on Clay Soil. 1987-88: Divisional Note DN 1543; 1989, R. E. Cope, Institute of Engineering Research.

Agricultural Extensification

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any plans to meet the chairman of the Countryside Commission to discuss agricultural extensification.

Mr. Curry: I have no present plans to do so, but I am always ready to meet Sir Derek to discuss matters of mutual interest and Ministers from this Department frequently meet Sir Derek at conferences and other functions.

Haddock

Mr. John Townend: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what compensation his Department intends to offer those English fishermen who have been stopped fishing for North sea haddock because of overfishing by some Scottish FPOs.

Mr. Curry: Three Scottish and one English group exceeded their North sea haddock allocations in 1989 causing an early closure of the fishery. Compensation for the groups prejudiced by the early closure will be provided by deductions from the offending groups' 1990 allocations under established rules.

Anthrax Vaccine

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the stock of anthrax vaccine currently available for use in Wales; what is its location; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: There is no commercial source of supply of anthrax vaccine in the United Kingdom at present. Supplies of vaccine are, however, held at the central veterinary laboratory, Weybridge, for emergency use in the event of an outbreak anywhere in the United Kingdom.

Farm Incomes

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a further statement on the current level of farm incomes.

Mr. Curry: Estimates of farm incomes for 1989 are contained in "Agriculture in the United Kingdom 1989", published today and available in the Library of the House.

Milk Quota

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will add the unfrozen 1 per cent. of temporarily suspended milk quota to the national quota for 1989-90, so as to avoid United Kingdom dairy farmers incurring superlevy.

Mr. Curry: The decision taken by the Council of Agriculture Ministers was to cancel 1 per cent. out of the 5·5 per cent. of suspended wholesale quota and to add an equivalent quantity of new quota to the Community reserve for distribution by member states to their producers. I am currently considering to which categories of producer this additional 1 per cent. should be allocated in the United Kingdom. While I will try to ensure that quota is distributed before the end of the current quota year I cannot guarantee that this will be achieved, since we need to obtain Commission approval for our plans. We will seek to have the new quotas in place as soon as possible.

Computer Security

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps his Department has taken and is taking to improve the security of its computer systems.

Mr. Curry: For unclassified but sensitive systems Departments are expected to follow the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA) guidance covering all aspects of IT security and the application of this has been tightened recently. CCTA advice is kept under continuous review and is based on analysis of security risks and requirements using structured methods such as CCTA's risk analysis and management methodology (CRAMM) which has also been made commercially available.

More stringent conditions apply to classified systems.

Command Papers

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons he ceased to publish the Command Paper entitled "Annual Review of Agriculture"; what information provided there is not included in the replacement volume entitled "Agriculture in the United Kingdom", published annually; and what matter in that publication could be, or was unsuited to, publication in the former Command Paper.

Mr. Curry: The then Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced on 5 December 1988 that the results of the annual review of agriculture would no longer be published as a White Paper. Before our accession to the European Community, the annual review led to the determination of commodity price guarantees for the coming year, which were published as part of the White Paper. Since our accession the emphasis has shifted towards the annual negotiation of agricultural prices in the European Community. The annual review White Paper has effectively become a compendium of agricultural statistics and it was considered that it was no longer appropriate to publish these in a White Paper.

All the statistical information previously contained in the annual review White Papers is now published annually in "Agriculture in the United Kingdom", together with some additional material, and all the information in the current publication could have been published in the previous format.

Slaughterhouses

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he intends to exempt any United Kingdom slaughterhouses from the requirements of EEC export standards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The EC Commission envisages that in the single market the rules which at present must be observed by slaughterhouses which engage in intra-Community trade should be extended to all plants throughout the Community, with the possibility of some minor exceptions only. The precise arrangements will depend, however, upon decisions still to be taken by the Council of Ministers.

I fully support the application of common standards to all plants and firmly believe that if any exceptions are to be permitted, for example for very small businesses trading locally, from some of the detailed structural requirements, they should be kept to a minimum and must not compromise hygiene standards.

Breeding Ewes

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his present estimate of the breeding flock of ewes in England and Wales and the number of ewes on which hill livestock compensatory allowance was *(a)* claimed and *(b)* paid in 1989 and 1988.

Mr. Curry: We estimate that the total breeding flock is currently 9·3 million ewes in England and 5·1 million ewes in Wales. The number of ewes on which hill livestock compensatory allowances were paid in the last two years is as follows:

	England million	*Wales million*
1988	3·2	3·9
[1]1989	3·4	4·0

[1] Provisional.

Figures on the number of ewes on which HLCAs have been claimed are not readily available, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the new projects that he is now funding on bovine spongiform encephalopathy; how much is to be spent on each; where they are to be located; and how many scientists he expects to work on each.

Mr. Gummer: My Department is funding work on BSE to the value of £6·1 million over the years 1990-91 to 1992-93. The projects being funded are:

(a) epidemiology; £0·6 million; at the Central Veterinary Laboratory (CVL);
(b) clinicopathology; £0·6 million; at the CVL;
(c) transmission studies; £2·1 million; at the CVL, the Neuropathogenesis Unit (NPU) and the Royal Veterinary College;

(d) molecular biology; £0·5 million; at the CVL and NPU;
(e) molecular genetics; £0·5 million; at the CVL and NPU; and
(f) dam-offspring transmissions; £1·8 million; by the CVL at ADAS experimental husbandry farms.

Further details of these research projects are contained in the interim Tyrrell report, a copy of which is in the Library of the House. It is not possible to give a meaningful breakdown of the scientific staff to be engaged on each project.

Salmon Dealers

Mr. Butler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what decisions the Government have reached on schemes for the licensing of dealers in salmon; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Our proposals for schemes of salmon dealer licensing in Scotland and in England and Wales, set out in the consultation papers issued last July, attracted responses from a wide range of interests. The Government have considered most thoroughly these responses as well as the benefits—in relation to the costs and other burdens involved—which these schemes might bring to continuing efforts to combat poaching.

As was explained in the consultation paper, the Government's principal objective was to reduce trade in unlawfully taken salmon with as little disruption and control of the lawful trade as practicable. The proposed schemes took account of the previous round of consultations and sought to achieve the best practicable balance between the possible benefits and the regulatory effort and costs which would be required. In particular, it was proposed that the schemes should apply to all salmon and sea trout, including farmed and imported fish, but would exempt final sales of fish by hoteliers, restaurateurs or retailers which they had obtained from licensed dealers.

Many who favoured salmon dealer licensing in principle argued that the schemes would not be effective with the range of exemptions that we had proposed. Some interests felt that salmon dealer licensing would work effectively only if compulsory carcase tagging (for which there is no legislative provision) was also introduced. On the other hand, fish farmers and many fish traders took the view that the schemes, even with the proposed exemptions, imposed an excessive and inappropriate regulatory burden on trade in legally obtained, and particularly farmed or imported, fish.

The Government recognise that the proposed exemptions could undermine the potential effectiveness of the scheme. The scheme would have had to apply to dealers importing salmon and, because wild salmon and farmed salmon are virtually indistinguishable except under forensic conditions, to farmed salmon, too. It became clear that the proposed scheme would impose a heavy burden on many businesses even with the proposals for exemptions and with record-keeping requirements kept to a minimum. For many traders and markets the record-keeping requirements, in particular, would pose virtually insurmountable difficulties. Accordingly, it has now been decided not to proceed further with these schemes for licensing of dealers.

The Government, however, view most seriously the problem of salmon poaching, as do district salmon fishery boards in Scotland, the National Rivers Authority in England and Wales and police authorities. Considerable use has been made of the additional powers introduced in the Salmon Act 1986 to make it illegal to possess or handle fish which had been obtained in suspicious circumstances. Substantial resources will continue to be committed by district boards and the DAFS fishery protection service in Scotland and the National Rivers Authority in England and Wales to enforcement at the point of capture or attempted capture. Further consideration is being given to a proposed scheme of salmon tagging which the River Tweed commissioners have been drawing up as a measure of local river bank management.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Waste Paper

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his estimate of the United Kingdom's manufacturing industry's current capacity for recycling waste paper.

Mr. Forth: Although my Department has not attempted a capacity estimate, my hon. Friend will be interested to know that in 1988 United Kingdom paper and board manufacturers consumed a total of 2,416,900 tonnes of waste paper. I understand that last year's total will be even higher.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much waste paper was imported into the United Kingdom in the year 1988-89 and the most recent 12 months for which figures are available, expressed in tonnes and sterling value.

Mr. Forth: The figures are as follows:

United Kingdom imports of waste paper and paperboard[1]

Year ended	*Tonnes*	*£ thousands*
November 1988	59,957	8,970
November 1989	76,349	12,287

Source: Overseas Trade Statistics.
[1]Subgroup 251.1 of the Standard International Trade Classification.

Package Travel

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on how the proposed European Community draft directive on package travel will affect current Association of British Travel Agents' codes of conduct.

Mr. Forth: An EC directive has yet to be formally adopted, although EC Ministers reached a common position on an amended proposal at the 21-22 December 1989 Council. It is therefore too early to say, in advance of its finally agreed form, how a directive might affect the operation of the ABTA codes of conduct. However, the Department of Trade and Industry will consult widely when considering how to implement any directive which is agreed in this area.

European Single Market

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has received the report on the prospects for south-west Yorkshire, Strathclyde, Greater Manchester and Merseyside in the European

Community single market proposed by the Catholic university of Louvain for the regional policy Commission; if he will seek to have the report made available to hon. Members, indicating what policy changes he is considering in his policy in response; and if he will make a statement on the studies he has commissioned on the problem.

Mr. Redwood: A draft report has been received from the Commission. Only selected regions within the Community were examined; these included Strathclyde and south Yorkshire. The Commission has not yet published the report, though a copy of the draft was placed in the Library of the House on 1 February. The report is being studied.

Accountancy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he proposes to make to Sir Leon Brittan, and what evidence he intends to provide, for his consideration of new rules to ensure the quality of audit by accountancy firms throughout Europe; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: None.

Textiles

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the British Government have put any proposals to the European Community in discussions on the general agreement on tariffs and trade and textiles concerning safeguards, anti-dumping, access to new markets and preventing counterfeiting.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 5 February 1990]:* The Government recognise the need for the return of trade in textiles and clothing to GATT rules to be accompanied by a strengthening of those rules. We have played—and will continue to play—an active part in the development of Community positions: we are keen to see progress in the current GATT negotiations on safeguards, anti-dumping, market access and intellectual property, all matters of great concern to the textile industry. The EC negotiators will have to judge all these matters in the light of progress in the GATT round as a whole.

Beds

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects the British Standards Institute to publish the revised version of BS6807, so enabling bed manufacturers to conform to the requirements of BS7177, with particular regard to the labelling of divan bases.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 5 February 1990]:* BS6807 —methods of test for the ignitability of mattresses—was published in 1986. I understand that the revised version which also covers testing of divans and bed bases, is due to be published about the end of March. The proposal to approve BS7177 for the purpose of the general safety duty of the Consumer Protection Act, was and remains limited to domestic mattresses.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Severe Disablement Allowance

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many severe disablement allowance claimants are in receipt of *(a)* income support, *(b)* housing benefit, *(c)* another means-tested benefit; and if he will state for each group what his Department's estimate is of the reduction in dependence on income-related benefits resulting from the introduction of the three age-related additions to severe disablement allowance.

Mr. Scott: It is estimated that about 140,000 severe disablement allowance claimants receive income support and that of these, about 50,000 also receive housing benefit. About a further 5,000 severe disablement allowance claimants receive housing benefit but not income support. The number receiving other income-related benefits is negligible. The introduction of an age-related addition for severe disablement allowance will result in a gross increase in expenditure of £110 million in the first full year after implementation (1991-92). The consequential reduction in expenditure on income-related benefits is expected to be £60 million leaving a net expenditure increase of £50 million. Almost all the reduction in income-related benefit expenditure stems from reduced dependence on income support.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his Department's estimate of the amount of reduction in dependence on income-related benefits by the introduction of the three age-related additions to severe disablement allowance.

Mr. Scott: The introduction of an age-related addition for severe disablement allowance will increase gross expenditure by £110 million in the first year after implementation (1991-92). The consequential reduction in income-related benefit expenditure is expected to amount to £60 million, leaving a net increase in expenditure of £50 million as a consequence of this measure.

Maternity Payments

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all the changes in social security law since May 1979 which have affected the entitlement of women to maternity payments, giving his estimate of the numbers affected by each measure and the savings, net of tax and benefits as appropriate, or cost of each measure.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The initial changes to extend eligibility for help with the costs of maternity were as follows:

November 1980—introduction of single payments for maternity needs through the supplementary benefit scheme

12 months ending	*Amount paid £ million*	*Number of payments made*
December 1981	2·6	61,000
December 1982	5·4	101,000
December 1983	8·5	142,000
December 1984	12·8	188,000
February 1986	16·9	188,000
May 1987	18·3	176,000

Source: Annual Statistical Inquiries.
Notes:

The data relate to all payments made during the 12 months prior to the inquiry. However, they exclude payments made to claimants who ceased to receive supplementary benefit prior to the date of the inquiry. Therefore the figures quoted may be an undercount of the actual payments made.

July 1982—abolition of contribution conditions for £25 maternity grant.
Additional beneficiaries: 60,000.
Additional cost: £1·5 million per year.
The £25 maternity grant had not been increased since 1969. Most families could accommodate the cost of having a baby within their own resources, but for those who did need help £25 was clearly inadequate. The measures introduced in 1987 increased the grant by more than three times to £85 for people on low income.

April 1987—abolition of single payments for maternity needs and maternity grant. Replacement by social fund maternity payment of £85.
Women not entitled to maternity grant: 700,000.
Savings: £17·7 million.

Awards of social fund maternity payments

Year	*Amount paid (£ million)*	*Number of awards*
1987-88	15·5	193,000
1988-89	13·9	162,000
April 1989-December 1989	10·9	126,700

There was no doubt that the maternity allowance no longer met its objective. The purpose of the allowance has always been to help pregnant working women to give up work in good time before the baby is due in the interest of their own and their baby's health. But the old contribution test meant that many women who had given up work before they became pregnant could still receive the allowance, whereas other women who had worked continuously over the previous 12 months failed to qualify. The new arrangements better targeted payments more directly on women with a recent employment record.

April 1987—introduction of statutory maternity pay (SMP).
Beneficiaries: 250,000 per year.
Amounts of SMP paid:
1987-88—£193 million.
1988-89—£250 million.

April 1987—introduction of revised contribution conditions for maternity allowance (MA).
Beneficiaries: 45,000 per year.
Amounts of MA paid:
1987-88—£51 million.
1988-89—£27 million.

It is estimated that the combined effect of the SMP and MA changes was a PSBR saving of £13 million in 1987-88. About 94,000 women with no recent attachment to the employment field no longer qualified for MA; some 20,000 women qualified for MA or SMP for the first time.

The rates of maternity benefits are subject to review each year. It is proposed for example that from April 1990 maternity allowance will increase from £33·20 to £35·70 per week and that the lower rate of SMP will be uprated in excess of the increase required to keep pace with the movement in prices from £36·25 to £39·25 per week. The social fund maternity payment will also be increased from £85 to £100.

Maintenance

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his statement of 30 January, *Official Report*, column 197, when the survey of courts and local Department of Social Security offices commissioned by his Department in conjunction with the Lord Chancellor's Department, the Home Office, the Scottish Office and the Lord Advocate's Department, will be completed, and if it will include data on lone parents not in receipt of state benefits.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The maintenance survey of courts and Department of Social Security local offices will be completed in the summer and I can confirm that it will include data on lone parents not in receipt of state benefits. Further information about the survey is given in my answer yesterday to my hon. Friends the Members for Medway (Dame P. Fenner), for Rochford (Dr. Clark), for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg), for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) and for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook).

ENVIRONMENT

Storm Damage Assistance

Dame Janet Fookes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if the city of Plymouth will be eligible for assistance under the Bellwin scheme following severe storm damage on 25 January;

(2) what practical steps he is taking to advise local authorities of help available in the wake of severe storm damage.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department wrote on 26 January to all local authorities in England to notify them that the Bellwin scheme for special financial assistance to authorities in emergencies had been activated. We have written again today with full details of the operation of the scheme and application forms. A copy of our letter has been placed in the Library of the House.

The scheme covers the cost of emergency work resulting from the storms of 16 and 17 December and 25 January, and also the floods in the Severn valley, which began on 29 January. If the city of Plymouth has incurred eligible expenditure above a threshold equivalent to a 0·15p rate, it will qualify for assistance under the scheme.

Peak and Northern Footpath Society

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Peak and Northern Footpath Society was informed of the inquiry under the Town and Country Planning Act 1971, section 210, into the Metropolitan Borough of Bury (Definitive Right of Way No. 3 St. John's Radcliffe) (Public Path Stopping-up) Order 1989; and whether as an objector the society was given sufficient notice.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Notification of the inquiry under the Town and Country Planning Act 1971, section 210, into the Metropolitan Borough of Bury (Definitive Right of Way No. 3 St. John's Radcliffe) (Public Path Stopping-up) Order 1989, was sent by the Department on 26 January, four days before the inquiry. It is accepted that as a statutory objector, the Peak and Northern Footpath Society was given insufficient notice, and the inquiry has been adjourned until 21 March.

Common Land

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to come forward with legislation arising out of the report on common land produced by the working party established by the Countryside Commission.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 27 November 1989 by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside, the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Mr. Trippier), to my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr), (*Official Report*, Vol. 162, c. *89*).

Rate Support Grant

Sir Peter Hordern: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the cost of rate support grant in each of the last five years, and the proportion that rate support grant bears to total local government expenditure in each of those years.

Mr. David Hunt: The information for English authorities is as follows:

	Rate support grant (£ million)	*Total expenditure (£ million)*	*Rate support grant as a percentage of total expenditure*
1985-86	9,153	21,662	42·3
1986-87	9,051	23,729	38·1
1987-88	9,467	25,677	36·9
1988-89	9,687	27,835	34·8
1989-90[1]	9,577	29,564	32·4

[1] Polytechnics were transferred from the local authority sector in April 1989.

Computer Security

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department has taken and is taking to improve the security of its computer systems.

Mr. Chris Patten: For unclassified but sensitive systems, Departments are expected to follow CCTA guidance covering all aspects of IT security, and the application of this has been tightened recently. CCTA advice is kept under continuous review and is based on analysis of security risks and requirements using structured methods such as CCTA's risk analysis and management methodology (CRAMM), which has also been made commercially available.

EC Water Directive

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action his Department is taking to deal with levels of aluminium, nitrate and trihalomethanes above the European Commission's maximum admissible concentrations in Wakefield; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend has accepted programmes of works drawn up by Yorkshire Water services to achieve compliance with the standards in the EC drinking water directive on aluminium and trihalomethanes. The drinking water inspectorate established last month will monitor progress, and advise my right hon. Friend if any further action is necessary. I am not aware of any evidence that nitrate levels in Wakefield exceed the limit in the directive.

Unleaded Petrol

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what level of naturally occurring lead is present within unleaded petrol; and what volume of lead is released into the atmosphere per annum by this means.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In 1988, the latest year for which figures are available, the concentration of lead in unleaded petrol averaged 0.002 grammes per litre, much of which was residual lead being flushed out of the distribution system. Combustion of the unleaded petrol sold in that year resulted in the emission of 0·5 tonnes of lead.

However, use of this fuel rather than leaded petrol avoided the emission of 35 tonnes. In 1989, we expect that the remarkable increase in the use of unleaded petrol will avoid emissions of around 600 tonnes of lead.

Yorkshire's Water Environment

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the distribution of the NRA report entitled "Guarding Yorkshire's Water Environment"; what was the cost incurred in the production and distribution of this document; and how it was paid for.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am informed by the NRA that its brochure, "Guarding Yorkshire's Water Environment", has been distributed to the media, local Members of Parliament, local authorities, NRA Yorkshire region staff and advisory committees, internal drainage boards and other relevant organisations. It is also made available to members of the public and others seeking information about the role of the NRA.

A total of 4,000 copies of the brochure were printed at a cost of £11,410, paid for out of the NRA Yorkshire region public relations budget. So far, around 2,000 have been distributed, mainly by post.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the percentage of rate fund revenue account income represented by rate support grant for each charging authority for *(a)* 1978-79 and *(b)* 1989-90; and if he will give the equivalent figure for revenue support grant in 1990-91.

Mr. David Hunt *[holding answer 30 January 1990]:* The available information has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will update the answer to the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East, of 28 July 1989, *Official Report*, columns *1200-2*, listing all recent sources of legislation and official guidance on the operation of the community charge, and any further orders and regulations *(a)* laid before and agreed to by the House, *(b)* laid before, but not yet agreed to by the House and *(c)* yet to be laid before the House, giving in each case an outline of the area of implementation affected.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 5 February 1990]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) on 17 January 1990, *Official Report*, column *254*, which gave details of statutory instruments laid before Parliament up to that date. The other information requested is as follows:

Statutory Instruments laid before Parliament since 17 January 1990
The Relevant Population (England) Regulations 1990—23 January 1990.
The Charging Authorities (Notification of Population to Precepting Authorities) (England) Regulations 1990—23 January 1990.
The Standard Community Charge (Multipliers) Order—5 February 1990.
Community Charge (Co-owners) Regulations 1990—5 February 1990.

Statutory Instruments to be laid before Parliament
Form of the Community Charge and Rate Bill and accompanying information.
Exemption for the severely mentally impaired.
Exemption for 18 and 19 year olds in full-time non-higher education.
Other funds.
Levying bodies.
Payment to and from authorities.

Practice Notes issued to local authorities
Collection Fund—August 1989.
Students and the Community Charge—August 1989.
Transitional Relief Scheme for England—December 1989.

Environmental Protection Bill

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the organisations that have been sent a copy of the schedules of prescribed processes and substances under clause 2 of the Environmental Protection Bill.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 5 February 1990]:* The current schedules of processes and substances are working drafts which have been made available to Standing Committee H to inform discussion of part I of the Environmental Protection Bill. They are not the subject of a public consultation exercise, because they do not yet incorporate our proposals for processes to be prescribed on account of special waste arisings, or for waste substances. The drafts will be finalised as soon as possible, and incorporated in a draft of the regulations provided for under clause 2 of the Bill. This will be published for comment as soon as it has been prepared.

Protected Species

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he intends to include the brown hare on the wildlife and countryside list of protected species.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 5 February 1990]:* We have no current plans to include the brown hare on the list of species protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Its position will be considered further during the Nature Conservancy Council's second quinquennial review of species protection under the 1981 Act, due in late 1991.

Newsprint

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will set out for the most recent year available a table showing for the United Kingdom *(a)* the total usage of waste newspapers, *(b)* the volume of imports of newsprint and *(c)* the volume of imports of newsprint from the United States of America.

Mr. Forth: I have been asked to reply.
The information requested is as follows:

	1988 (tonnes)
(a) Usage of newsprint-grade waste paper by United Kingdom paper and board manufacturers (see note below)	367,742
(b) Total imports of newsprint	1,458,953
(c) Imports of newsprint from the United States of America (included in *(b)*)	601

Note: The above information has been provided by the British Paper & Board Industry Federation. The figure at *(a)* includes certain periodicals, magazines and telephone directories, as well as newspapers (for which no separate information is available).

Canals

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next intends to meet the chairman of the British Waterways Board to discuss future policy for canals.

Mr. Chris Patten *[pursuant to his reply, 24 January 1990, c. 742]:* The Government have today published their response to the Environment Committee's report on the British Waterways Board. The Committee's report appeared at a significant stage in the management of the board's affairs and addressed some key issues which were under consideration by the Government. In our response, which reflects consultation with BWB where findings were directed at the board rather than the Government, we reply to the Committee's detailed recommendations and outline policy developments since the report was published.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Water Supplies (Disconnections)

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the latest figures for the number of people who were disconnected from their water supplies in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 2 February 1990]:* In Northern Ireland, 292 metered water supplies were disconnected during 1989.

None of these supplies was for use by domestic households only.

Residents' Parking Permits

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has for introducing residents' parking permits in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 2 February 1990]:* Legislation to permit the introduction of residents' parking schemes does not currently exist in Northern Ireland. Consideration is being given to taking enabling powers.

Stalker Inquiry

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the dates of formal requests from the Royal Ulster Constabulary to his Department for an investigation into alleged leaks emanating from the

Stalker inquiry, specifying whether the requests were made verbally or in writing and his reasons for acceding to or refusing such requests.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 5 February 1990]:* Requests were received both verbally and in writing on 20 June 1986. Further requests were made in writing on 18 July and 20 August 1986 and 1 March 1987 and verbally on 6 April 1987.

It was decided that in all the circumstances it would not be productive to mount a separate inquiry in an attempt to identify the individual or individuals alleged by Sir John Hermon to be leaking information from the inquiry by the Greater Manchester police into the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

ENERGY

National Grid Interconnector

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the present capacity of the national grid interconnector between Scotland and England; whether it has been operated at full capacity; and what works would be required to increase the capacity by specified percentages.

Mr. Baldry: This link is a matter for the electricity industry, and I will ask the chairman-designate of the National Grid to write to the hon. Member. However, I understand that the firm capacity available for transfers between Scotland and England in normal circumstances is about 850MW, but this depends on system conditions.

Electricity Supply Industry

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if, pursuant to his answer of 14 December 1989, *Official Report*, column *779*, he will now publish in the *Official Report* the dates on which the reports of the constituent bodies of the electricity supply industry in England and Wales have been published in each year since nationalisation, either for existing or predecessor corporations.

Mr. Baldry: In recent years these reports have been published in the period late July to early August. In 1989 the Electricity Council and the Central Electricity Generating Board published theirs in December.

Connah's Quay Power Station

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will meet a deputation of Alyn and Deeside council concerning the future of the site of Connah's Quay power station.

Mr. Baldry: Decisions on the future of power station sites are presently a matter for the day-to-day management of the CEGB.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Drugs

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if, pursuant to his reply of 23 January, *Official Report*, columns *594-96*, to the hon. Member for Warrington, South, he will describe the arrangements for monitoring actual expenditure and claims by local education authorities for initiatives aimed at combating the misuse of drugs; and if he will publish relevant details of actual expenditure for this purpose in recent years.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Expenditure on which local education authorities have claimed grant is as follows:

Financial year	*Education support grant £ million*	*LEA training grants scheme £ million*
1986-87	1·50	—
1987-88	2·22	1·28
1988-89	[1]2·40	1·60

[1] Figures for 6 local education authorities still to be submitted.

Grant is paid on the basis of claims from local education authorities, which must submit an auditor's certificate confirming that the claims have been made in accordance with the requirements of the programme in question.

Teachers

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many teachers have left the profession in each year since 1979.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave on Monday 8 January, (*Official Report*, columns *186-87*) to the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey).

Special Education

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list by education authority *(a)* the total number of children in receipt of full-time compulsory education, *(b)* the total number of such children statemented as being in need of special educational provision and *(c)* the percentage of each authority's total thus statemented.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The total number of pupils in maintained primary, middle, secondary and special schools and the number and percentage with statements of special educational needs in each local education authority in England in January 1989 are given in the table. The number of pupils with statements includes all pupils in maintained special schools.

Number of pupils in maintained schools and proportion with statements
January 1989

	All pupils in maintained schools	*Statemented pupils and special school pupils*	*Statemented and special school pupils as a percentage of all pupils*
Barking	23,307	272	1·17
Barnet	40,178	525	1·31
Bexley	31,627	564	1·78
Brent	32,499	458	1·41
Bromley	34,948	844	2·42
Croydon	40,916	862	2·11
Ealing	37,755	634	1·68
Enfield	37,894	480	1·27
Haringey	25,350	376	1·48
Harrow	26,077	420	1·61
Havering	35,714	486	1·36
Hillingdon	32,469	453	1·40
Hounslow	31,016	780	2·51
Kingston upon Thames	17,002	334	1·96
Merton	21,069	341	1·62
Newham	35,209	672	1·91
Redbridge	30,363	459	1·51
Richmond upon Thames	16,813	284	1·69
Sutton	22,193	405	1·82
Waltham Forest	30,386	864	2·84
Birmingham	169,359	3,670	2·17
Coventry	47,266	1,078	2·28
Dudley	45,575	794	1·74
Sandwell	49,191	994	2·02
Solihull	33,089	480	1·45
Walsall	46,394	752	1·62
Wolverhampton	40,597	761	1·87
Knowsley	27,609	738	2·67
Liverpool	78,809	1,842	2·34
St. Helens	30,819	573	1·86
Sefton	45,377	699	1·54
Wirral	51,772	1,236	2·39
Bolton	43,936	588	1·34
Bury	26,132	605	2·32
Manchester	69,686	1,931	2·77
Oldham	38,634	813	2·10
Rochdale	34,668	724	2·09
Salford	35,729	811	2·27
Stockport	42,131	828	1·97
Tameside	35,900	662	1·84
Trafford	28,710	672	2·34
Wigan	51,611	895	1·73
Barnsley	34,822	381	1·09
Doncaster	49,095	854	1·74
Rotherham	42,505	783	1·84
Sheffield	70,577	1,430	2·03
Bradford	82,745	1,278	1·54
Calderdale	31,933	392	1·23
Kirklees	61,908	1,183	1·91
Leeds	106,874	2,525	2·36
Wakefield	49,054	805	1·64
Gateshead	30,276	524	1·73
Newcastle upon Tyne	38,844	938	2·41
North Tyneside	30,841	595	1·93
South Tyneside	23,942	461	1·93
Sunderland	49,151	835	1·70
Isles of Scilly	265	0	0·00
Inner London	278,279	8,568	3·08
Avon	129,965	4,108	3·16
Bedfordshire	83,075	1,518	1·83
Berkshire	105,319	1,963	1·86
Buckinghamshire	94,119	2,499	2·66
Cambridgeshire	96,970	1,826	1·88
Cheshire	152,211	3,509	2·31
Cleveland	101,668	2,334	2·30
Cornwall	68,549	1,552	2·26
Cumbria	73,107	1,410	1·93
Derbyshire	141,040	3,407	2·42
Devon	132,008	3,378	2·56
Dorset	82,434	1,729	2·10
Durham	92,117	1,479	1·61
East Sussex	81,859	1,472	1·80
Essex	222,742	4,214	1·89

	All pupils in maintained schools	Statemented pupils and special school pupils	Statemented and special school pupils as a percentage of all pupils
Gloucestershire	74,550	1,394	1·87
Hampshire	211,733	5,042	2·38
Hereford and Worcester	95,318	1,455	1·53
Hertfordshire	147,794	3,299	2·23
Humberside	138,596	2,062	1·49
Isle of Wight	17,113	375	2·19
Kent	217,501	4,417	2·03
Lancashire	210,702	4,458	2·12
Leicestershire	138,339	1,998	1·44
Lincolnshire	83,052	1,907	2·30
Norfolk	101,465	2,035	2·01
North Yorkshire	99,190	1,851	1·87
Northamptonshire	93,894	1,679	1·79
Northumberland	48,480	836	1·72
Nottinghamshire	152,683	2,449	1·60
Oxfordshire	72,212	940	1·30
Shropshire	61,826	1,516	2·45
Somerset	62,022	1,617	2·61
Staffordshire	157,364	2,572	1·63
Suffolk	89,296	2,088	2·34
Surrey	120,101	2,980	2·48
Warwickshire	71,496	1,674	2·34
West Sussex	89,457	1,468	1·64
Wiltshire	77,683	2,201	2·84
England	6,945,860	142,922	2·06

City Technology Colleges

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what were the number and the percentage of pupils suspended *(a)* in each of the city technology colleges in their first year of operation and *(b)* in the education authority surrounding each of the city technology colleges.

Mr. Alan Howarth: No pupils have been excluded from Kingshurst (Solihull) or Macmillan (Teesside) city technology colleges, and four pupils (some 2 per cent.) have been temporarily excluded from Djanogly college (Nottingham) in their first year of operation. No pupils have been permanently excluded.

Over the same period in each case, 126 pupils (some 1 per cent.) in Solihull and 108 (0·3 per cent.) in Cleveland education authorities have been excluded from maintained secondary schools; and 67 (0·1 per cent.) have been permanently excluded in Nottinghamshire education authority. The authority does not keep records of temporary exclusions, since it regards these as simply a form of internal discipline.

Teachers' Pay

Sir Peter Hordern: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a table showing the cost of teachers' salaries in each of the last five years, and the percentage increase in each year.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Spending by local education authorities in England on school teaching staff, including national insurance and superannuation, is recorded in the annual expenditure returns to the Department of the Environment. Spending in the last five years for which such data are available was as follows:

Year	£ million (Cash)	Year on year increase per cent.
1983-84	4,752	—
1984-85	4,946	4·1
1985-86	5,233	5·8
1986-87	5,765	10·2
1987-88	6,325	9·7

The changes in spending reflect changes in the number of teaching staff, as well as in teachers' salaries.

Capital Allocations

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what were the education capital allocations to each of the Tyne and Wear metropolitan boroughs in 1989-90 and 1990-91, in both cash and current prices; and what was the capital grant to city technology colleges in the Tyne and Wear area, in cash and current prices for the same years.

Mr. Alan Howarth: For 1989-90, local education authorities received capital allocations for education. With the introduction of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, the Department has issued an annual capital guideline to each local education authority for 1990-91, which is one element in the calculation of each local authority's basic credit approval for 1990-91 announced by the Department of the Environment. Table A shows the figures for the Tyne and Wear area. Table B shows the estimated total capital expenditure for the new build for Tyneside's CTC, which will be divided on a ratio of 80:20, split between the Department and sponsors.

LEA	Allocations 1989-90 Cash	Allocations 1989-90 Current prices (1989-90)	Annual Capital Guidelines 1990-91 Cash	Annual Capital Guidelines 1990-91 Current prices (1989-90)
Table A				
Gateshead	1,032	1,032	1,082	1,031
Newcastle upon Tyne	1,566	1,566	1,564	1,490
North Tyneside	1,577	1,577	1,283	1,205
South Tyneside	3,372	3,372	1,894	1,804
Sunderland	3,859	3,859	1,883	1,793
Table B				
Tyneside CTC	3,490	3,490	2,800	2,667

Notes
1. All figures are in thousands.
2. Current prices are calculated at 1989-90 prices using the GDP deflator.

DEFENCE

United States Forces

4. **Mr. Terry Fields:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what new facilities are being prepared in the United Kingdom for use by United States defence personnel.

54. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what new facilities are being prepared in the United Kingdom for use by United States defence personnel.

113. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what new facilities are being prepared in the United Kingdom for use by United States defence personnel.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The United States maintains a continual programme of construction and works projects at its facilities in the United Kingdom. I understand that some 39 projects of various sizes are currently under construction for United States forces in this country. Around 120 further projects are currently at some stage in the design process. These totals include both United States and NATO-funded projects.

84. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contribution United States military forces make to the defence of the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

112. **Mr. Fishburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the contribution United States military forces make to the defence of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The United States makes the largest single contribution to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, membership of which is fundamental to the defence of the United Kingdom.

European Co-operative Long-Term Initiative for Defence

14. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money his Department has committed to the European co-operative long-term initiative for defence.

Mr. Alan Clark: No money has yet been committed by any nation to this initiative. We expect that the first detailed collaborative programmes will be agreed in the course of this year. The precise extent of United Kingdom funding will then become clearer and will come from moneys voted for defence research.

Greenham Common

15. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his latest plans for the future use of RAF Greenham common.

116. **Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his latest plans for the future use of RAF Greenham common.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The remaining ground-launched cruise missiles are due to be withdrawn from RAF Greenham common by May 1991. After that date the station will remain available to the United States Air Force and revert to its former role as a standby operating base.

In addition the station will continue to provide support to RAF Welford and under the terms of the INF treaty it will remain subject to short-notice inspection by the Soviet Union until the year 2001. It will also remain the designated point of entry to the United Kingdom for Soviet inspection teams wishing to visit either Greenham common or Molesworth.

Conventional Forces in Europe

16. **Mr. John P. Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications of an elimination of the imbalance of conventional forces in Europe for the procurement of theatre nuclear weapons.

93. **Ms. Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications of an elimination of the imbalance of conventional forces in Europe for the procurement of theatre nuclear weapons.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications of an elimination of the imbalance of conventional forces in Europe for the procurement of theatre nuclear weapons.

Mr. Tom King: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen).

European Fighter Aircraft

17. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current position regarding Ferranti's interest in the contract for radar to be fitted to the European fighter aircraft.

32. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the reasons for his Department's choice of the Ferranti radar system for the EFA project.

Mr. Alan Clark: At this stage I have nothing to add to the information I gave the House during the Adjournment debate on 23 January 1990, *Hansard*, col. 869-72.

26. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the European fighter aircraft.

Mr. Alan Clark: I have nothing to add to what I told the hon. Member on 23 January, col. 869-72.

81. **Mr. Alexander:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what evaluation he has made of the need for the European fighter aircraft following the reduction of tension in Europe in the past year.

Mr. Alan Clark: While we welcome moves towards a reduction in tension in Europe, there will be a continuing need to ensure the future air defence of the United Kingdom and of British forces wherever they may be located. We expect EFA to play a key role in this.

Property Services Agency

18. **Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the implications for the security of military installations of privatisation of the Property Services Agency.

52. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the implications for the security of military installations of privatisation of the Property Services Agency.

89. **Mr. Buckley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the implications for the security of military installations of privatisation of the Property Services Agency.

101. **Mr. O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he has give to the future of defence security following the privatisation of the Property Services Agency; and if he will make a statement.

119. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the implications for the security of military installations of privatisation of the Property Services Agency.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the implications for the security of military installations of privatisation of the Property Services Agency.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The arrangements for the security of military installations will not be adversely affected by the privatisation of the Property Services Agency.

Ambulance Services

19. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost of the armed services covering civilian ambulance services.

95. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost of the armed services covering civilian ambulance services.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Up to 31 December 1989 extra costs in the region of £1·9 million have been reported for recovery by the Ministry of Defence from the Department of Health, the Scottish Home and Health Department and the Welsh Office.

Flying Accidents

20. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civilians have died as the result of Royal Air Force flying accidents in the United Kingdom in the last 10 years.

Mr. Neubert: One civilian has died as a result of Royal Air Force flying accidents in the United Kingdom in the last 10 years. The fatality occurred during a search and rescue mission.

Trident

21. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next expects to meet his American counterpart to discuss the development of the Trident missile system.

Mr. Tom King: As I mentioned earlier in my answer to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), I met the United States Defence Secretary in the course of my visit to the United States last week. I expect to meet him again during this year at NATO ministerial meetings.

79. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* defective and *(b)* successful test firings there have been of the Trident D5 missile; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: In 1989 the United States navy completed a series of 19 land-based Trident II D5 development test firings, of which 16 were successful (one partial), one was destroyed in error by the test range authorities, and two were unsuccessful. The United States navy is currently undertaking a series of submarine-launched test firings of the Trident II D5 missile of which there have been six successful and two unsuccessful flights. The causes of all unsuccessful flights have been diagnosed and corrected.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make a further statement on progress on the Trident programme.

56. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the progress being made on the Trident programme.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer my hon. Friend and the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 31 January at columns 207-08, and to the detailed report on Trident which was placed in the Library of the House on the same day.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of the cost of the Trident programme.

41. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of the cost of the Trident programme.

65. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of the cost of the Trident programme.

110. **Mr. Heffer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his latest estimate of the cost of the Trident programme.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. Members to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 31 January at columns 207-08.

Defence Manufacturing

22. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what level of employment in defence manufacturing industry he estimates there will be in the year 2000.

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what level of employment in defence manufacturing industry he estimates there will be in the year 2000.

37. **Mr. Fatchett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes he estimates there will be in the number of jobs in the defence manufacturing industries over the next five years; and if he will make a statement.

76. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what level of employment in defence manufacturing industry he estimates there will be in the year 2000.

92. **Mr. Leyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what level of employment in defence manufacturing industry he estimates there will be in the year 2000.

Mr. Alan Clark: It is not for my Department to make general estimates of the future level of employment in private companies.

Nuclear Test Veterans

23. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his Australian counterpart about compensation for nuclear test veterans.

38. **Mr. Michael J. Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his Australian counterpart about compensation for nuclear test veterans.

58. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his Australian counterpart about compensation for nuclear test veterans.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces met a member of the Australian Federal Government last October to discuss a number of issues, including the question of compensation being sought for nuclear test veterans.

64. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his United States counterpart about compensation for nuclear test veterans.

Mr. Warning: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his United States counterpart about compensation for nuclear test veterans.

122. **Mr. Clay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his United States counterpart about compensation for nuclear test veterans.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Government have had no discussions with the United States authorities on this issue.

Air Defence

24. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department is making of Britain's future air defence needs.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The future air defence needs of the United Kingdom are kept under constant review.

Nuclear Weapons

25. **Mr. Boateng:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he proposes to reduce the number of scientists employed in nuclear weapons development and construction.

78. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he proposes to reduce the number of scientists employed in nuclear weapons development and construction.

85. **Ms. Walley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he proposes to reduce the number of scientists employed in nuclear weapons development and construction.

Mr. Neubert: No.

62. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of total accumulated defence expenditure, actual and anticipated, on nuclear weapons, including associated research in the years 1988 to 1991.

70. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of total accumulated defence expenditure, actual and anticipated, on nuclear weapons, including associated research in the years 1988 to 1991.

87. **Mr. Sillars:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of total accumulated defence expenditure, actual and anticipated, on nuclear weapons, including associated research in the years 1988 to 1991.

Mr. Alan Clark: Estimated expenditure for 1987-88, 1988-89 and 1989-90 on the strategic nuclear force is shown in table 2.3 of volume 2 of the 1989 Statement on the Defence Estimates. Estimated expenditure for 1990-91 will be published in the 1990 Statement on the Defence Estimates.

Expenditure Reductions

27. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has identified any possible savings in defence expenditure over the next five years.

34. **Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has identified any possible savings in defence expenditure over the next five years.

45. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has identified any possible savings in defence expenditure over the next five years.

102. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has identified any possible savings in defence expenditure over the next five years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In the 1980s major improvements have been achieved in procurement practices, in the cost-effective use of manpower and in reducing other operating costs through measures to increase efficiency. Savings from these and further such measures will continue to increase the value we get from the defence budget. I refer the hon. Members to the essay on the new management strategy on pages 43-44 of the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1989, vol. 1 (Cm. 675-1).

50. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for United Kingdom defence spending of the recently announced United States defence budget.

71. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for United Kingdom defence spending of the recently announced United States defence budget.

75. **Ms. Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for United Kingdom defence spending of the recently announced United States defence budget.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The plans for United Kingdom defence expenditure in the years to 1992-93 reflect our assessment of the sums necessary to maintain our security and sustain our responsibilities within the NATO Alliance. The United States defence budget proposals now before Congress do not alter that assessment.

United States Secretary for Defence

28. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next intends to meet the United States Secretary for Defence; and what subjects he proposes to raise.

118. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next intends to meet the United States Secretary for Defence; and what matters he intends to discuss.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend had discussions with Secretary Cheney in Washington on 30 January on a range of matters of mutual interest. He expects to meet him again later this year at NATO ministerial meetings.

Racial Discrimination

29. **Mr. Bernie Grant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action has been taken in response to the Commission for Racial Equality report on racial discrimination in the Army.

97. **Mr. Cabora:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action has been taken in response to the Commission for Racial Equality report on racial discrimination in the Army.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I am not aware of a report by the Commission for Racial Equality on racial discrimination in the Army. The hon. Members may have in mind the report commissioned by my Department into ethnic minority recruitment into the armed services—a report which we have recently made widely available. I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) on 23 January which set out in detail the action we shall be taking on the recommendations in the report.

Defence Establishments (Security)

30. **Sir Michael McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will initiate an inquiry into security measures at defence establishments.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Security measures at our defence establishments are regularly reviewed.

Volunteer Reserves

31. **Mr. Wood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contribution the volunteer reserves make to the United Kingdom defence capability.

115. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contribution the volunteer reserves make to the United Kingdom defence capability.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer my hon. Friends to the essay at page 28 of the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1989, vol. 1, Cmnd. 675-1.

Disablement Pensions

33. **Mr. Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will bring forward proposals to increase the levels of pension for the war disabled.

67. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will bring forward proposals to increase the levels of pension for the war disabled.

108. **Dr. Moonie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will bring forward proposals to increase the levels of pension for the war disabled.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. The levels of pensions for the war disabled are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security.

United Nations Forces

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what part British service personnel play in United Nations international peacekeeping and monitoring activities.

99. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what part British service personnel play in United Nations international peacekeeping and monitoring activities.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw).

European Security

36. **Mr. Burt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contribution the United Kingdom is making to confidence and security-building measures in Europe.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The United Kingdom is playing a full part, together with its allies, in the CSBM talks now under way in Vienna.

Military Doctrines Seminar

39. **Ms. Short:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the defence implications of the recent seminar on military doctrines involving NATO and Warsaw pact senior officers.

57. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the defence implications of the recent seminar on military doctrines, involving NATO and Warsaw pact senior officers.

104. **Mr. Buchan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the defence implications of the recent seminar on military doctrines, involving NATO and Warsaw pact senior officers.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the defence implications of the recent seminar on military doctrines involving NATO and Warsaw pact senior officers.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The military doctrine seminar which concluded in Vienna on 5 February, and which involved representatives of all the 35 states of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) process, was an important and useful opportunity to exchange views, put forward our own thinking, and explore that of other nations.

Light Attack Helicopter

40. **Mr. Duffy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has completed his inquiry into evaluation of light attack helicopter alternatives.

Mr. Alan Clark: Not yet.

Land Holdings (Wales)

42. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many acres of land are owned at the present time by his Department in Wales.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: At 1 April 1989, the latest date for which figures are available, MOD land holdings in Wales, including freehold and leasehold land and foreshore, stood at 52,038 acres.

Nuclear Weapons (Anglo-French Co-operation)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on current Anglo-French co-operation on nuclear weapon development.

Dr. Reid: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on current Anglo-French co-operation on nuclear weapon development.

44. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on current Anglo-French co-operation on nuclear weapon development.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo).

Type 23 Frigates

46. **Mr. Barry Porter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next expects to place an order for a type 23 frigate for the Royal Navy.

60. **Mr. Franks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to place a further order for a type 23 frigate for the Royal Navy.

Mr. Neubert: The Government remain committed to maintaining a force of about 50 destroyers and frigates, and we will place sufficient orders to meet that commitment. We announced an order for three type 23 frigates on 19 December 1989, col. *197*. We hope to invite tenders for a further batch of type 23s later this year. A decision on the size and timing of an order will be made once tenders are submitted by shipyards.

Toxic Chemicals

47. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on the disposal of toxic chemicals after use by the armed forces.

Mr. Alan Clark: Toxic chemicals are disposed of through contracts laid by the Ministry of Defence with licensed disposal companies.

Ethnic Minorities

48. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action has been taken in response to the report by Peat Marwick McLintock on recruitment of ethnic minorities into the armed services.

61. **Mr. John Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action has been taken in response to the report by Peat Marwick McLintock on recuitment of ethnic minorities into the armed services.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) on 23 January 1990 at col. *588-89*.

91. **Mr. Ashton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many recruits to the armed forces in 1989 year were of Afro-Caribbean or Asian origin; and how many service personnel of similar background left.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The provisional results of the survey of ethnic origins of applicants to the armed forces during the financial year 1988-89, the latest period for which figures are available, indicate that 121 recruits classified themselves as Caribbean, 26 as African and 64 as Asian. Figures for those who left the armed forces are not available.

Eastern Europe

49. **Mr Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to reduce defence expenditure in the light of the new situation in Europe.

98. **Mr. Cartwright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to review the planned level of defence spending in the light of the changing situation in the USSR and eastern Europe.

83. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the impact on future defence policy of recent events in eastern Europe.

Mr. Trednnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes in defence policy have taken place since the recent changes in Governments in eastern Europe.

Mr. Tom King: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh).

96. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reassessment of the threat to the United Kingdom he is making following the recent changes in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We keep all potential threats to the United Kingdom under constant review.

NATO Defence Ministers

51. **Mr. Douglas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next expects to attend a meeting of NATO Defence Ministers; what topics he expects to raise; and if he will make a statement.

55. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will next meet his NATO counterparts to discuss the military implications of the reforms currently taking place in eastern Europe.

Mr. Tom King: I will attend a meeting of the independent European programme group later this month. A range of issues of mutual interest will be discussed.

86. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next intends to meet the Secretary-General of NATO; and what subjects he proposes to raise.

114. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next intends to meet the Secretary-General of NATO to discuss future NATO strategy in the light of the Vienna talks on conventional forces in Europe.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend regularly meets the Secretary-General of NATO. The next scheduled meeting is at the NATO nuclear planning group in early May, when a wide range of issues of mutual interest will be discussed.

Disaster Relief

53. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what role his Department plays in disaster relief.

111. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what role his Department plays in disaster relief.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence is always willing to respond positively to requests for military assistance in disaster relief at home and abroad. For an account of the part played by the armed forces in disaster relief operations during 1989, I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens) on 24 October 1989 at column *430*.

With the recent spate of bad weather, all three services have been engaged in a range of military assistance to the civil community tasks. Much effort has been directed at helping electricity boards to clear roads blocked by trees toppled during the gales, mobile generators have been supplied for a variety of purposes and service accommodation has been made available to house the homeless. Should it be needed, military units are standing ready to provide assistance to communities at risk from flooding.

Defence Exports

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the overall value of defence exports for the past six months.

59. **Mr. Kirkhope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the overall value of defence exports for the last six months.

Mr. Alan Clark: Figures for the overall value of defence exports are calculated on an annual basis. New contracts signed in 1988 are expected to be worth some £3,500 million. The figure for 1989 is not yet available.

Defence Act 1854 (Repeal)

63. **Ms. Gordon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will bring forward proposals to repeal the Defence Act 1854.

69. **Mr. Benn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will bring forward proposals to repeal the Defence Act 1854.

82. **Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will bring forward proposals to repeal the Defence Act 1854.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will bring forward proposals to repeal the Defence Act 1854.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Service Personnel (Benefits)

66. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what advice is given to armed service personnel and their families about their eligibility for social security and housing benefits and poll tax rebate.

94. **Mr. Frank Cook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what advice is given to armed service personnel and their families about their eligibility for social security and housing benefits and poll tax rebate.

Mr. Neubert: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell).

Strategic Nuclear Weapons

68. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning the implications for British defence policy of progress in the talks for the reduction of strategic nuclear weapons.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We support the efforts of the United States and Soviet Governments to achieve deep cuts in strategic offensive nuclear weapons. The Government's policy remains as set out in paragraph 215 of the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1989 Cm. 675-1.

Tank Movements, Wiltshire

72. **Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has any plans to visit Durrington and Amesbury in Wiltshire to discuss tank movements.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has no current plans to do so.

Defence Review

73. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to institute a defence review.

106. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to institute a defence review.

Mr. Tom King: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh).

Low Flying

74. **Mr. Harry Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many mid-air collisions have happened between low-flying aircraft that were not part of the same formation for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Neubert: The table gives the numbers of mid-air collisions between low-flying British military aircraft which were not part of the same formation for each of the last 10 years:

	Numbers
1980	0
1981	0
1982	1
1983	0
1984	1
1985	2
1986	0
1987	1
1988	1
1989	1
1990	1

109. **Mr. Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will introduce an annual moratorium on low flying during the lambing season.

Mr. Neubert: No.

117. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many aircraft have been written off as a result of accidents in low flying training since 1979; and what has been the total cost of these aircraft at 1989 prices.

Mr. Neubert: Since 1 January 1979 104 British military aircraft have been written off as a result of accidents while undertaking low flying training. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Sainsbury) announced on 14 December 1987 (col. *411*), it is no longer our practice to publish unit production costs. This precludes us from giving the total cost of military aircraft destroyed in accidents over any specified period since, by varying the period, commercial in confidence information could be deduced.

Research

77. **Dr. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his Department's research contracts are currently placed with United Kingdom universities and other institutions of higher education.

Mr. Neubert: The Ministry of Defence has currently 745 research agreements and 106 research contracts placed with a wide range of United Kingdom universities and other institutions of higher education.

US Construction Budget

80. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has regarding the United States fiscal year 1991 military construction budget for bases and facilities in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I understand from information provided by the United States authorities that funding approval is being sought from their fiscal year 1991 budget for the following military construction projects in the United Kingdom:

High Wycombe Air Station
- Dormitory

RAF Alconbury
- Add to and alter dormitories
- Add to and alter physical fitness centre

RAF Bentwaters
- Post Office
- Conventional munitions shop
- Field training facility

RAF Chicksands
- Satellite communications facility

RAF Lakenheath
- Add to and alter dormitory
- Alter munitions storage

RAF Mildenhall
- Add to physical fitness centre

RAF Molesworth
- Joint Analysis Centre

Systems Controllerates

88. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the possible centralisation of the sea systems controllerate and other procurement executive staff within the travel-to-work area of Keynsham and Bath.

Mr. Neubert: Studies have been carried out into the relocation of the procurement executive's land and air systems controllerates and associated staff away from central London, and into the collocation of the sea systems controllerate. We are now consulting the MOD trade union side on the results of these studies, as is usual in such matters. A final decision will be taken only in the light of the outcome of these consultations and a full statement will be made at the appropriate time.

F-15E Aircraft

90. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has received any proposals to station F-15E aircraft of the United States Air Force in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: NATO is considering a number of options for adjusting its remaining nuclear forces following the signature of the INF treaty. These options include the possible deployment to Europe, including the United Kingdom, of longer-range dual capable aircraft from the United States. However, no decisions have yet been taken.

West German Defence Minister

100. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next intends to meet the West German Secretary of State for Defence; and what matters he intends to raise.

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next expects to meet his West German counterpart; and what matters he will discuss.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend will be meeting Dr. Stoltenberg in Scotland later this month. I expect that a wide range of issues of mutual interest will be discussed.

Royal Army Veterinary Corps

103. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress is being made with his review of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps, Melton Mowbray.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Further work is continuing in the light of the Ministry of Defence's consideration of the study by Peat Marwick McLintock into future arrangements for canine and equine-related training in the services.

Tactical Nuclear Weapons

Sir Anthony Meyer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had in the current year with his NATO colleagues about the modernisation of tactical nuclear weapons.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has met a number of his principal NATO colleagues over recent weeks. NATO's agreed position of maintaining an appropriate mix of adequate, effective and up-to-date nuclear forces was among a number of items discussed.

Colombia

107. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on British military assistance to the Government of Colombia in their fight against the drug trade.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: At the request of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and as part of Her Majesty's Government's package of assistance to the Colombian Government, training is being provided to the Colombian law enforcement authorities in a number of areas including bomb disposal, close protection of VIPs and riverine patrolling. Royal Navy vessels in the area are also periodically deployed to provide maritime surveillance assistance to Colombia.

Infantry Battalions

120. **Mr. Ted Garrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is *(a)* the full complement and *(b)* the average strength of infantry battalions.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The complement of an infantry battalion varies between about 590 and 680 officers and men according to its specific task at the time. As at 30 November 1989, the average strength across all infantry battalions was just over 580. These figures do not include Gurkha battalions, which have four rifle companies rather than the usual three, or infantry personnel employed in areas outside line battalions.

British Army of the Rhine

121. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next expects to visit units of the British Army of the Rhine.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence hopes to take an early opportunity to visit the British Army of the Rhine. I visited the Commander-in-Chief BAOR on 24-25 January.

East Germany

123. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his NATO counterparts on the possible military status of East Germany in the event of German reunification.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has had regular discussions with his NATO counterparts on a wide range of matters of mutual interest.

German Reunification

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the implications for defence policy of the initiatives being taken by the West German Government on German reunification.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We continue to believe that NATO will remain the foundation of western security and welcome the West German Government's continuing commitment to the Alliance.

Training Deaths

Dr. Michael Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service men died in training during the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In 1988, the last year for which figures are available, the deaths of 14 service personnel were recorded as being attributable to injuries sustained during exercises or training. This figure excludes the Gurkhas and members of the Ulster Defence Regiment and the reserve forces.

National Sports Centre, Cardiff

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Londonderry, East of 30 January, on what date the report into the conditions of the national sports centre, Cardiff indoor firearms range was made.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The range was inspected on 8 August 1989 and a copy of the subsequent report was sent to the Sports Council for Wales on 15 August 1989.

Mr. Hugh Mooney

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the role of Mr. Hugh Mooney in HQ Northern Ireland.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Mr. Mooney was an information adviser to the General Officer Commanding.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Student Loans

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many studies were undertaken by his Department, or on behalf of his Department, to consider alternatives to the currently proposed student top-up loan scheme.

Mr. Jackson: A wide range of options has been considered in advice from officials to Ministers.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his estimate of the number of loans that will have been made to students under the Education (Student Loans) Bill by *(a)* October 1990, *(b)* November 1990 and *(c)* December 1990.

Mr. Jackson: On the basis of a take-up rate of 80 per cent., some 455,000 students are likely to receive top-up loans in the 1990-91 academic year. Students will be able to apply at any time in the year; many will no doubt do so in the first few months.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has yet written to higher education institutions inviting them to discuss arrangements over certification for student loans.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend has written to the chairmen of representative bodies of higher education institutions inviting them to meet him to discuss their role in the top-up loans scheme.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will place in the Library copies of all studies undertaken by his Department which considered *(a)* the currently proposed top-up loan scheme and *(b)* alternatives to the proposed scheme.

Mr. Jackson: No. Advice from departmental officials to Ministers is confidential.

Information Technology

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the amount of funds received by each local authority in each of the last five years for information technology purposes.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Several activities for which my right hon. Friend has allocated funds under the education support grant programme and the local education authority training grants scheme (and its predecessor the in-service teacher training grants scheme) support spending on information technology (IT). The relevant allocations of expenditure supported for the past five years are shown in the following tables. The grants paid under these programmes are additional to the general rate support grant which local authorities receive, and which they may use for IT purposes within education. Local authorities may also receive funds relating to the use of IT within education from other Government Departments and through contributions from private sources.

Education support grants programme—1986-87 actual expenditure for IT related activities

LEA	*Micros for sen* (£ 000)	*IT in NAFE* (£ 000)	*CMIS* (£ 000)	*Special needs in FE* (£ 000)
Barking	0·0	23·6	0·0	0·0
Barnet	0·0	76·1	15·7	0·0
Bexley	0·0	7·8	1·6	0·0
Brent	0·0	37·7	6·0	0·0
Bromley	0·0	74·8	17·6	0·0
Croydon	0·0	40·0	0·0	6·7
Ealing	0·0	89·8	27·2	0·0
Enfield	0·0	16·4	2·6	0·0
Haringey	0·0	11·0	0·0	2·3
Harrow	0·0	20·0	0·0	8·2
Havering	0·0	2·3	0·0	0·0
Hillingdon	0·0	46·5	0·0	0·0
Houslow	0·0	44·7	0·0	0·0
Kingston upon Thames	0·0	3·1	0·7	0·0
Merton	0·0	11·4	0·0	0·0
Newham	0·0	12·4	6·3	0·0
Redbridge	0·0	4·9	6·2	0·0
Richmond upon Thames	0·0	4·2	0·0	0·0
Sutton	1·6	12·7	5·0	0·0
Waltham Forest	0·0	0·0	20·8	0·0
ILEA	0·0	545·2	20·9	0·0
Birmingham	0·0	296·5	31·4	0·0
Coventry	0·0	50·4	15·2	20·9
Dudley	0·0	78·2	17·6	0·0
Sandwell	0·0	5·3	9·4	15·7
Solihull	0·0	1·3	0·0	0·0
Walsall	0·0	2·4	4·4	0·0
Wolverhampton	0·0	23·5	1·5	0·0
Knowsley	0·0	5·7	0·0	10·8
Liverpool	0·0	5·5	1·7	0·0
St. Helens	0·5	26·2	10·5	0·0
Sefton	0·0	84·5	0·0	0·0
Wirral	0·4	3·1	0·0	0·0
Bolton	0·0	32·0	3·7	0·0
Bury	0·0	14·0	0·2	10·2
Manchester	0·0	62·2	12·0	19·0
Oldham	0·0	1·1	7·8	0·0
Rochdale	0·0	18·5	0·0	12·7
Salford	0·0	0·0	3·1	0·0
Stockport	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Tameside	0·0	6·1	0·0	0·0
Trafford	0·0	6·8	8·3	0·0
Wigan	0·0	33·1	0·0	0·0
Barnsley	0·0	14·9	0·0	0·0

LEA	Micros for sen (£ 000)	IT in NAFE (£ 000)	CMIS (£ 000)	Special needs in FE (£ 000)
Doncaster	0·0	5·8	0·0	0·0
Rotherham	0·0	89·8	7·9	26·1
Sheffield	0·0	80·0	0·0	8·9
Bradford	0·0	18·2	0·0	0·0
Calderdale	0·0	12·3	0·0	8·7
Kirklees	0·0	146·4	13·4	0·0
Leeds	0·0	146·0	14·3	0·0
Wakefield	0·0	38·4	0·0	0·0
Gateshead	0·0	42·9	1·0	0·0
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	0·0	95·4	15·7	0·0
North Tyneside	0·0	2·5	2·6	7·9
South Tyneside	0·0	22·3	0·0	0·0
Sunderland	0·0	64·6	8·7	0·0
Isles of Scilly	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0
Avon	0·0	123·5	0·0	0·0
Bedfordshire	0·0	112·0	18·6	0·0
Berkshire	0·0	208·3	31·4	14·8
Buckinghamshire	0·0	90·1	25·0	0·0
Cambridgeshire	1·1	156·8	31·4	0·0
Cheshire	0·0	174·3	0·0	10·0
Cleveland	0·0	174·7	0·0	10·5
Cornwall	0·0	50·8	11·5	0·0
Cumbria	0·0	160·9	2·5	10·3
Derbyshire	0·0	167·6	26·1	0·0
Devon	4·0	285·2	0·0	16·9
Dorset	0·0	179·2	7·8	0·0
Durham	0·0	135·3	0·0	7·8
East Sussex	0·0	109·8	21·9	0·0
Essex	0·0	270·5	16·2	0·0
Gloucestershire	0·0	154·0	3·1	0·0
Hampshire	0·0	261·5	4·9	8·6
Hereford and Worcester	0·0	161·3	7·0	0·0
Hertfordshire	0·0	223·5	19·9	33·9
Humberside	0·0	162·3	16·1	14·8
Isle of Wight	0·0	2·0	2·1	9·2
Kent	0·0	182·2	20·9	0·0
Lancashire	0·0	191·2	25·9	0·0
Leicestershire	0·0	99·4	25·1	15·0
Lincolnshire	0·0	80·7	20·0	17·7
Norfolk	0·0	161·6	7·3	0·0
North Yorkshire	0·0	68·5	28·4	0·0
Northamptonshire	0·0	190·8	0·0	0·0
Northumberland	0·0	37·1	0·0	0·0
Nottinghamshire	0·0	150·1	9·0	8·6
Oxfordshire	0·0	47·3	0·0	18·3
Salop	0·0	42·4	37·2	0·0
Somerset	0·0	5·2	175·4	24·9
Staffordshire	0·0	243·5	24·9	28·0
Suffolk	0·0	46·9	10·5	0·0
Surrey	0·0	165·7	7·3	0·0
Warwickshire	0·0	149·1	18·1	5·5
West Sussex	0·0	212·8	31·4	0·0
Wiltshire	0·0	187·1	31·4	10·5
Total	7·6	8,245·8	1,039·5	423·3

Education support grants programme—1987-88
Actual expenditure for IT related activities

£ thousand

Local education authority	IT in NAFE	CMIS	Special needs in FE
Barking	20·8	35·0	0·0
Barnet	82·6	12·8	0·0
Bexley	9·3	0·0	0·0
Brent	26·5	0·0	0·0
Bromley	20·5	0·0	0·0
Croydon	23·1	34·0	0·0
Ealing	21·7	23·3	9·6
Enfield	71·4	0·0	0·0
Haringey	10·2	0·0	0·0
Harrow	110·1	0·0	0·0
Havering	1·0	5·0	0·0
Hillingdon	37·9	9·4	0·0
Hounslow	0·0	0·0	0·0
Kingston upon Thames	0·0	7·5	0·0
Merton	5·6	23·0	0·0
Newham	21·5	0·0	12·1
Redbridge	0·7	0·0	0·0
Richmond upon Thames	18·5	0·0	0·0
Sutton	1·2	0·0	0·0
Waltham Forest	22·8	40·7	0·0
ILEA	432·1	18·1	16·0
Birmingham	106·9	30·0	11·5
Coventry	73·2	32·8	14·5
Dudley	61·5	0·0	0·0
Sandwell	2·1	0·0	15·6
Solihull	0·1	0·0	0·0
Walsall	1·0	0·0	0·0
Wolverhampton	23·9	0·0	0·0
Knowsley	2·1	0·0	0·0

Local education authority	IT in NAFE	CMIS	Special needs in FE
Liverpool	4·2	30·8	0·0
St. Helens	37·6	38·9	0·0
Sefton	0·0	0·0	0·0
Wirral	44·6	0·0	10·4
Bolton	63·4	36·6	10·4
Bury	11·1	7·3	0·0
Manchester	83·6	45·0	0·0
Oldham	3·2	0·0	29·5
Rochdale	5·1	0·0	4·4
Salford	0·8	0·0	0·0
Stockport	28·2	0·0	0·0
Tameside	5·0	0·0	9·3
Trafford	45·0	17·5	0·0
Wigan	34·4	0·0	0·0
Barnsley	46·1	0·0	0·0
Doncaster	44·1	0·0	31·1
Rotherham	48·1	0·0	17·7
Sheffield	82·5	49·0	15·6
Bradford	20·4	30·2	17·9
Calderdale	1·0	0·0	0·0
Kirklees	164·8	11·4	15·6
Leeds	198·8	7·3	0·0
Wakefield	25·0	0·0	6·0
Gateshead	19·4	0·0	9·6
Newcastle upon Tyne	130·8	0·0	0·0
North Tyneside	8·1	21·5	0·0
South Tyneside	9·4	0·0	0·0
Sunderland	58·4	19·9	12·0
Isles of Scilly	0·0	0·0	0·0
Avon	125·4	0·0	0·0
Bedfordshire	93·4	0·0	10·0
Berkshire	131·6	50·0	0·0
Buckinghamshire	183·8	39·0	0·0
Cambrideshire	70·6	27·0	0·0
Cheshire	134·3	0·0	0·0
Cleveland	64·3	0·0	0·0
Cornwall	88·7	38·0	31·1
Cumbria	183·2	0·0	13·0
Derbyshire	192·7	50·0	16·0
Devon	158·5	52·1	6·3
Dorset	121·5	0·0	0·0
Durham	71·0	0·0	12·5
East Sussex	111·1	25·6	0·0
Essex	223·2	40·0	0·0
Gloucestershire	177·3	40·0	16·1
Hampshire	133·7	85·0	0·0
Hereford and Worcester	13·5	0·0	14·9
Hertfordshire	195·4	20·0	0·0
Humberside	53·7	11·0	0·0
Isle of Wight	0·0	0·0	0·0
Kent	90·6	24·5	0·0
Lancashire	208·4	33·5	13·6
Leicestershire	162·8	20·0	0·0
Lincolnshire	63·2	0·0	0·0
Norfolk	84·3	26·0	0·0
North Yorkshire	41·4	20·0	9·9
Northamptonshire	141·8	0·0	0·0
Northumberland	31·1	8·2	0·0
Nottinghamshire	116·2	0·0	0·0
Oxfordshire	67·9	0·0	0·0
Salop	88·2	40·0	0·0
Somerset	163·7	0·0	0·0
Staffordshire	104·7	0·0	0·0
Suffolk	127·8	0·0	9·9
Surrey	31·7	38·3	9·7
Warwickshire	70·1	29·3	0·0
West Sussex	141·6	0·0	10·4
Wiltshire	76·3	18·0	0·0
Total	6,769·9	1,322·4	442·3

Education support grants programme—1988-89
Approved expenditure for IT related activities

LEA	IT in NAFE (£ 000)	CMIS (£ 000	IT in schools (£ 000)
Barking	0·0	0·0	55·3
Barnet	97·0	31·3	106·7
Bexley	0·0	57·2	67·2
Brent	0·0	0·0	75·2
Bromley	6·5	0·0	84·3
Croydon	0·0	0·0	102·1
Ealing	129·1	0·0	85·9
Enfield	33·5	40·2	77·9
Haringey	29·0	0·0	60·9
Harrow	29·5	0·0	73·2
Havering	2·1	0·0	106·7
Hillingdon	41·3	0·0	71·6
Hounslow	4·3	51·9	47·4
Kingston-upon-Thames	0·0	0·0	38·5
Merton	4·0	0·0	35·8
Newham	4·3	83·6	91·8
Redbridge	4·3	0·0	73·4
Richmond-upon-Thames	3·2	0·0	39·5
Sutton	3·2	0·0	55·0
Waltham Forest	1·5	0·0	74·5
ILEA	394·8	0·0	796·4
Birmingham	122·9	62·7	554·2
Coventry	23·5	80·9	119·9
Dudley	24·7	27·8	121·6
Sandwell	4·3	66·5	126·9
Solihull	2·1	0·0	88·5
Walsall	2·1	0·0	128·6
Wolverhampton	6·5	0·0	126·1
Knowsley	4·3	0·0	99·2
Liverpool	8·8	0·0	276·1
St. Helens	29·6	0·0	89·6
Sefton	0·0	0·0	147·5
Wirral	6·5	0·0	146·0
Bolton	28·6	0·0	91·1
Bury	17·7	0·0	89·6
Manchester	80·2	0·0	174·4

LEA	IT in NAFE (£ 000)	CMIS (£ 000	IT in schools (£ 000)
Oldham	8·8	0·0	115·3
Rochdale	11·1	0·0	80·2
Salford	4·3	0·0	90·0
Stockport	5·0	0·0	150·4
Tameside	11·6	0·0	120·3
Trafford	11·1	35·0	100·4
Wigan	11·1	0·0	160·0
Barnsley	8·8	0·0	116·0
Doncaster	6·5	0·0	132·6
Rotherham	47·0	17·6	122·7
Sheffield	30·6	30·1	235·3
Bradford	6·5	65·4	265·1
Calderdale	2·1	30·3	112·9
Kirklees	126·7	0·0	189·2
Leeds	48·9	0·0	359·7
Wakefield	8·8	31·1	165·8
Gateshead	8·2	33·0	86·6
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	117·6	0·0	109·1
North Tyneside	0·0	0·0	74·8
South Tyneside	53·4	0·0	57·7
Sunderland	78·4	0·0	135·5
Isles of Scilly	0·0	0·0	1·3
Avon	136·8	47·0	329·1
Bedfordshire	67·9	32·9	258·0
Berkshire	54·9	100·5	359·3
Buckinghamshire	146·0	48·7	322·3
Cambridgeshire	21·7	83·0	308·4
Cheshire	38·0	59·9	407·1
Cleveland	53·0	135·9	285·6
Cornwall	51·2	0·0	217·8
Cumbria	119·9	0·0	271·2
Derbyshire	157·8	0·0	484·2
Devon	167·3	146·5	401·7
Dorset	53·1	100·5	253·0
Durham	36·3	0·0	315·5
East Sussex	92·6	0·0	178·3
Essex	195·7	0·0	811·8
Gloucestershire	128·0	0·0	221·2
Hampshire	119·3	201·4	593·2
Hereford and Worcester	14·2	0·0	283·3
Hertfordshire	118·3	0·0	488·8
Humberside	69·3	0·0	410·9
Isle of Wight	0·0	0·0	55·6
Kent	24·3	0·0	528·3
Lancashire	113·3	123·9	653·9
Leicestershire	33·4	46·0	389·7
Lincolnshire	16·7	0·0	285·5
Norfolk	40·6	0·0	349·9
North Yorkshire	0·0	0·0	342·2
Northamptonshire	154·4	0·0	304·3
Northumberland	10·3	0·0	158·0
Nottinghamshire	71·8	0·0	397·3
Oxfordshire	21·8	0·0	274·0
Salop	11·1	0·0	200·8
Somerset	122·2	23·9	193·8
Staffordshire	124·6	0·0	516·9
Suffolk	56·9	0·0	240·7
Surrey	15·5	0·0	399·9
Warwickshire	27·8	0·0	251·3
West Sussex	111·1	45·6	235·6
Wiltshire	48·4	69·5	231·4
Total	4,601·4	2,009·8	20,789·3

Education support grants programme—1989-90
Approved expenditure for IT related activities

LEA	IT in NAFE (£000)	CMIS (£000)	IT in Schools (£000)	LMS (£000)
Barking	0·0	0·0	49·5	106·8
Barnet	102·6	16·1	87·3	161·6
Bexley	0·0	35·9	70·7	126·7
Brent	0·0	56·3	68·6	146·7
Bromley	6·9	0·0	88·4	133·7
Croydon	0·0	0·0	85·8	181·6
Ealing	136·6	72·8	92·1	161·6

LEA	IT in NAFE (£000)	CMIS (£000)	IT in Schools (£000)	LMS (£000)
Enfield	35·3	53·1	67·8	160·7
Haringey	30·6	51·0	62·8	96·8
Harrow	31·2	66·6	55·0	130·7
Havering	2·2	0·0	116·5	154·7
Hillingdon	43·7	0·0	67·0	147·7
Hounslow	4·6	53·3	50·5	137·7
Kingston-upon-Thames	27·6	49·9	40·9	78·8
Merton	4·3	0·0	38·1	91·8
Newham	4·6	70·0	117·0	145·7
Redbridge	4·6	28·8	70·1	127·7
Richmond-upon-Thames	3·4	0·0	35·3	66·9
Sutton	3·4	0·0	53·2	88·8
Waltham Forest	1·5	0·0	71·9	148·7
ILEA	417·6	746·2	726·4	54·0
Birmingham	130·0	131·0	610·2	705·0
Coventry	53·7	60·6	115·9	186·6
Dudley	26·1	43·5	114·9	201·6
Sandwell	4·6	70·3	120·7	197·6
Solihull	2·2	29·6	84·2	129·7
Walsall	2·2	40·0	139·5	186·6
Wolverhampton	6·9	0·0	106·0	165·6
Knowsley	4·6	71·0	106·8	108·8
Liverpool	9·3	42·0	305·2	281·4
St. Helens	94·9	28·4	131·8	114·7
Sefton	0·0	0·0	149·3	176·6
Wirral	6·9	0·0	126·8	197·6
Bolton	30·3	55·1	142·3	169·6
Bury	18·7	0·0	71·4	105·8
Manchester	84·8	117·0	186·3	274·4
Oldham	9·3	0·0	112·7	146·7
Rochdale	11·7	49·8	91·4	146·7
Salford	4·6	0·0	76·0	141·7
Stockport	5·3	0·0	152·8	157·7
Tameside	12·3	0·0	87·0	137·7
Trafford	11·7	29·0	82·9	117·7
Wigan	11·7	0·0	177·2	194·6
Barnsley	9·3	0·0	123·0	121·7
Doncaster	6·9	0·0	149·7	201·6
Rotherham	50·0	4·7	110·4	153·7
Sheffield	32·4	113·5	221·1	270·4
Bradford	6·9	112·3	236·6	346·2
Calderdale	2·2	42·2	116·2	104·8
Kirklees	144·9	58·4	230·7	231·5
Leeds	51·7	189·1	359·4	422·1
Wakefield	9·3	53·5	200·8	187·6
Gateshead	8·6	114·7	82·2	102·8
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	124·3	0·0	92·1	158·7
North Tyneside	0·0	0·0	71·0	138·7
South Tyneside	2·2	0·0	66·7	85·8
Sunderland	82·9	0·0	122·4	207·6
Isles of Scilly	0·0	0·0	1·3	2·0
Avon	144·7	65·5	474·9	462·0
Bedfordshire	71·8	82·1	246·3	321·3
Berkshire	58·0	211·8	305·3	375·2
Buckinghamshire	154·4	50·9	259·2	387·2
Cambridgeshire	23·0	147·4	329·3	347·2
Cheshire	40·2	210·4	389·8	483·0
Cleveland	56·0	147·4	311·5	424·1
Cornwall	54·1	95·1	209·1	203·6
Cumbria	126·8	61·1	242·9	207·6
Derbyshire	166·7	0·0	444·1	510·9
Devon	174·5	320·0	434·4	445·0
Dorset	56·1	141·5	236·6	301·3
Durham	38·3	0·0	324·5	304·3
East Sussex	11·7	0·0	173·2	274·4
Essex	207·0	233·7	932·4	798·3
Gloucestershire	125·5	0·0	249·0	263·4
Hampshire	153·7	484·5	588·6	805·3
Hereford and Worcester	15·0	87·9	280·9	343·3
Hertfordshire	125·2	311·0	414·2	527·9
Humberside	73·3	0·0	455·7	541·8
Isle of Wight	0·0	0·0	50·4	56·9
Kent	88·5	228·4	640·5	797·3
Lancashire	82·9	217·0	545·1	770·3
Leicestershire	35·4	48·1	401·0	544·8
Lincolnshire	17·6	0·0	254·2	289·4
Norfolk	42·9	188·7	290·9	342·3

LEA	IT in NAFE (£000)	CMIS (£000)	IT in Schools (£000)	LMS (£000)
North Yorkshire	14·2	0·0	334·0	322·3
Northamptonshire	163·2	145·4	408·9	326·3
Northumberland	10·8	0·0	150·4	194·6
Nottinghamshire	74·7	0·0	355·9	551·8
Oxfordshire	23·1	0·0	196·4	232·5
Shropshire	11·7	0·0	183·1	204·6
Somerset	129·3	84·3	188·3	213·5
Staffordshire	78·6	0·0	496·0	563·8
Suffolk	24·9	94·9	203·7	331·3
Surrey	16·5	128·4	384·2	458·0
Warwickshire	29·4	173·4	244·9	278·4
West Sussex	117·6	36·2	218·1	324·3
Wiltshire	84·7	109·2	236·0	241·5
Total	4,856·1	6,860·0	20,673·7	25,090·6

Education Support Grants Programme—1990-91
Approved expenditure for IT related activities

£000

	CMIS	IT in schools	LMS XXIII
City	0·0	0·5	0·0
Camden	32·4	36·0	108·0
Greenwich	23·0	62·0	0·0
Hackney	67·3	46·3	137·0
Hammersmith	50·6	30·5	100·0
Islington	57·2	40·7	120·0
Kensington	0·0	19·2	76·0
Lambeth	72·0	50·4	153·0
Lewisham	58·7	58·0	0·0
Southwark	36·1	55·9	164·7
Tower Hamlets	24·0	52·6	154·0
Wandsworth	84·9	53·5	150·0
Westminster	38·1	30·5	94·0
Barking	64·9	36·3	150·0
Barnet	71·3	64·6	211·0
Bexley	16·5	47·0	167·0
Brent	66·6	46·9	175·0
Bromley	104·0	57·7	188·0
Croydon	58·0	63·5	220·0
Ealing	69·5	66·1	176·0
Enfield	77·3	55·7	176·0
Haringey	71·4	42·5	175·0
Harrow	116·6	39·9	121·0
Havering	62·0	71·1	181·0
Hillingdon	59·0	49·3	168·0
Hounslow	22·7	36·2	166·0
Kingston-upon-Thames	59·9	30·3	121·0
Merton	39·6	31·2	143·0
Newham	62·5	90·3	193·0
Redbridge	32·6	48·6	154·0
Richmond-upon-Thames	116·0	26·5	125·0
Sutton	126·0	39·6	133·0
Waltham Forest	75·0	49·0	168·0
Birmingham	182·2	444·8	635·0
Coventry	111·7	74·2	235·0
Dudley	79·6	74·5	289·0
Sandwell	22·0	80·8	252·0
Solihull	49·6	55·2	176·0
Walsall	44·7	93·6	239·0
Wolverhampton	97·9	29·9	229·0
Knowsley	91·8	70·9	164·0
Liverpool	38·7	225·6	412·0
St. Helens	36·4	91·2	174·0
Sefton	128·0	105·4	223·0
Wirral	190·0	92·7	224·0
Bolton	107·6	110·0	226·0
Bury	64·7	41·4	170·0
Manchester	180·6	134·2	351·0
Oldham	53·1	94·3	207·0
Rochdale	36·0	55·1	195·0
Salford	72·8	36·4	220·0
Stockport	28·7	106·3	234·0
Tameside	89·0	57·4	195·0
Trafford	80·0	38·0	190·0
Wigan	52·0	103·6	262·0
Barnsley	96·7	75·9	217·0
Doncaster	65·0	99·8	264·0
Rotherham	106·6	79·7	230·0
Sheffield	196·2	134·3	337·0
Bradford	49·8	177·7	441·0
Calderdale	34·5	79·9	201·0
Kirklees	110·3	153·9	315·0
Leeds	187·4	253·5	509·0
Wakefield	77·6	137·9	277·0
Gateshead	163·0	55·9	188·0
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	52·0	69·5	208·0
North Tyneside	92·0	56·2	185·0
South Tyneside	43·0	45·4	155·0
Sunderland	87·0	82·7	229·0
Isles of Scilly	0·0	1·1	6·0
Avon	177·6	327·4	611·0
Bedfordshire	99·9	146·9	440·0
Berkshire	263·9	197·0	490·0
Buckinghamshire	84·9	156·6	437·0
Cambridgeshire	154·0	238·6	469·0
Cheshire	157·0	268·3	754·0
Cleveland	153·3	232·2	455·0
Cornwall	189·4	148·0	413·0
Cumbria	116·3	169·6	494·0
Derbyshire	100·0	258·6	733·0
Devon	334·8	277·2	701·0
Dorset	179·9	147·9	386·0
Durham	150·0	229·3	485·0
East Sussex	135·0	125·4	389·0
Essex	145·3	612·4	1,034·0
Gloucestershire	137·0	156·3	477·0
Hampshire	503·9	399·8	891·0
Hereford and Worcester	160·9	186·2	521·0
Hertfordshire	492·2	285·2	750·0
Humberside	173·0	289·5	690·0
Isle of Wight	45·6	33·8	137·0
Kent	129·1	358·9	1,074·0
Lancashire	261·3	366·3	1,004·0
Leicestershire	24·4	267·0	630·0
Lincolnshire	100·5	173·1	308·0
Norfolk	139·3	211·3	554·0
North Yorkshire	109·0	226·0	636·0
Northamptonshire	136·0	226·9	487·0
Northumberland	43·3	99·4	314·0
Nottinghamshire	275·2	218·8	762·2
Oxfordshire	155·0	137·7	421·0
Salop	100·0	123·8	383·0
Somerset	173·6	119·2	389·0
Staffordshire	150·0	286·2	730·0
Suffolk	116·4	157·2	496·0
Surrey	119·3	212·0	541·0
Warwickshire	140·9	144·6	367·0
West Sussex	38·0	145·9	390·0
Wiltshire	113·6	158·6	468·0
England Totals	11,134·5	13,806·2	35,662·7

In-service training grants scheme 1986-87
Allocations for IT-related activities

	Micro-electronics £
Barking	2,960
Barnet	4,640
Bexley	4,250
Brent	3,950
Bromley	4,840
Croydon	5,470
Ealing	4,550
Enfield	4,720
Haringey	3,110
Harrow	3,210
Havering	4,810
Hillingdon	4,060
Hounslow	3,630
Kingston upon Thames	2,130
Merton	2,640
Newham	4,260
Redbridge	3,800
Richmond upon Thames	2,060
Sutton	2,850
Waltham Forest	3,890
Inner London	33,640
Birmingham	20,910
Coventry	6,190
Dudley	6,160
Sandwell	6,350
Solihull	4,380
Walsall	5,950
Wolverhampton	5,410
Knowsley	3,680
Liverpool	9,730
St. Helens	4,160
Sefton	5,820
Wirral	6,630
Bolton	5,590
Bury	3,360
Manchester	8,300
Oldham	4,750
Rochdale	4,490
Salford	4,670
Stockport	5,670
Tameside	4,460
Trafford	3,950
Wigan	6,880
Barnsley	4,740
Doncaster	6,130
Rotherham	5,680
Sheffield	9,910
Bradford	10,060
Calderdale	4,070
Kirklees	8,100
Leeds	13,800
Wakefield	6,470
Gateshead	3,950
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	4,720
North Tyneside	3,700
South Tyneside	3,060
Sunderland	6,440
Isles of Scilly	40
Avon	14,890
Bedfordshire	10,680
Berkshire	13,820
Buckinghamshire	12,280
Cambridgeshire	12,030
Cheshire	19,460
Cleveland	12,590
Cornwall	8,510
Cumbria	9,630
Derbyshire	18,500
Devon	17,340
Dorset	10,510
Durham	12,140
East Sussex	10,160
Essex	30,200
Gloucestershire	9,680
Hampshire	28,310
Hereford and Worcester	12,840
Hertfordshire	19,140
Humberside	18,250
Isle of Wight	2,150
Kent	29,580
Lancashire	27,570
Leicestershire	17,740
Lincolnshire	11,100
Norfolk	13,600
North Yorkshire	12,630
Northamptonshire	11,700
Northumberland	6,070
Nottinghamshire	20,040
Oxfordshire	9,810
Shropshire	8,130
Somerset	8,220
Staffordshire	21,090
Suffolk	11,830
Surrey	16,000
Warwickshire	9,480
West Sussex	11,920
Wiltshire	10,630

Local education authority training grants scheme 1987-88
Indicative allocations for IT-related activities

	Micro-electronics (schools) £'000	Micro-electronics (FE) £'000
Barking	13	21
Barnet	22	7
Bexley	19	3
Brent	19	6
Bromley	22	4
Croydon	25	4
Ealing	20	5
Enfield	22	5
Haringey	15	4
Harrow	15	6
Havering	21	3
Hillingdon	18	2
Hounslow	17	3
Kingston-upon-Thames	10	4
Merton	12	3
Newham	19	7
Redbridge	17	2
Richmond-upon-Thames	8	6
Sutton	12	4
Waltham Forest	17	5
ILEA	154	76
Birmingham	96	19
Coventry	28	7
Dudley	27	8
Sandwell	29	8
Solihull	20	5
Walsall	27	4
Wolverhampton	24	6
Knowsley	16	3
Liverpool	44	14
St. Helens	19	7
Sefton	26	9
Wirral	30	9

	Micro-electronics (schools) £'000	Micro-electronics (FE) £'000
Bolton	25	7
Bury	15	2
Manchester	39	15
Oldham	22	3
Rochdale	20	3
Salford	22	4
Stockport	28	6
Tameside	20	5
Trafford	17	5
Wigan	31	8
Barnsley	21	3
Doncaster	28	8
Rotherham	23	5
Sheffield	44	12
Bradford	45	9
Calderdale	19	3
Kirklees	36	7
Leeds	62	14
Wakefield	28	6
Gateshead	18	3
Newcastle	22	6
North Tyneside	17	4
South Tyneside	14	5
Sunderland	29	4
Isles of Scilly	—	—
Avon	77	17
Bedfordshire	46	12
Berkshire	60	17
Buckinghamshire	34	9
Cambridgeshire	54	15
Cheshire	86	20
Cleveland	53	10
Cornwall	37	8
Cumbria	43	8
Derbyshire	81	15
Devon	75	24
Dorset	45	9
Durham	54	11
East Sussex	45	11
Essex	132	22
Gloucestershire	44	10
Hampshire	124	37
Hereford and Worcester	56	14
Hertfordshire	85	25
Humberside	80	14
Isle of Wight	10	2
Kent	129	27
Lancashire	122	36
Leicestershire	78	15
Lincolnshire	48	10
Norfolk	59	12
North Yorkshire	56	16
Northamptonshire	53	10
Northumberland	27	3
Nottinghamshire	87	23
Oxfordshire	43	12
Shropshire	36	9
Somerset	36	11
Staffordshire	94	19
Suffolk	52	10
Surrey	72	17
Warwickshire	42	12
West Sussex	52	11
Wiltshire	46	14

Local education authority training grants scheme 1989-90 allocations for Information Technology-related activities
Indicative allocations for national priority areas 10 (Information Technology in further education) and 12 (New Technologies across the curriculum)

	10 Information technology £000	12 New technology across the curriculum £000
Barking and District	3	16
Barnet	7	27
Bexley	4	22
Brent	7	23
Bromley	5	26
Croydon	5	30
Ealing	5	24
Enfield	6	26
Haringey	5	17
Harrow	6	18
Havering	3	25
Hillingdon	2	21
Hounslow	4	20
Kingston upon Thames	4	12
Merton	3	14
Newham	8	23
Redbridge	2	21
Richmond upon Thames	6	10
Sutton	5	15
Waltham Forest	5	21
ILEA	80	183
Birmingham	22	115
Coventry	8	33
Dudley	10	32
Sandwell	8	34
Solihull	5	23
Walsall	4	32
Wolverhampton	7	29
Knowsley	3	19
Liverpool	16	53
St. Helens	7	22
Sefton	7	32
Wirral	10	36
Bolton	7	30
Bury	3	19
Manchester	19	47
Oldham	4	26
Rochdale	3	24
Salford	5	26
Stockport	7	31
Tameside	6	24
Trafford	5	20
Wigan	9	34
Barnsley	4	24
Doncaster	8	33
Rotherham	7	30
Sheffield	15	51
Bradford	11	53
Calderdale	3	22
Kirklees	8	43
Leeds	14	74
Wakefield	6	33
Gateshead	3	21
Newcastle	7	26
North Tyneside	4	20
South Tyneside	7	16
Sunderland	5	35
Avon	20	92
Bedfordshire	14	56
Berkshire	20	73
Buckinghamshire	10	63

	10 Information technology £000	12 New technology across the curriculum £000
Cambridgeshire	15	45
Cheshire	23	103
Cleveland	12	66
Cornwall	9	46
Cumbria	10	52
Derbyshire	19	97
Devon	28	90
Dorset	10	55
Durham	12	65
East Sussex	13	55
Essex	23	159
Gloucestershire	12	52
Hampshire	40	149
Hereford and Worcester	16	67
Hertfordshire	27	102
Humberside	10	96
Isle of Wight	2	12
Kent	30	155
Lancashire	41	147
Leicestershire	17	95
Lincolnshire	12	58
Norfolk	14	71
North Yorkshire	18	68
Northamptonshire	10	64
Northumberland	3	33
Nottinghamshire	25	103
Oxfordshire	14	51
Shropshire	11	43
Somerset	12	44
Staffordshire	21	112
Suffolk	11	63
Surrey	19	86
Warwickshire	13	51
West Sussex	12	63
Wiltshire	14	55

Local Education Authority training grants scheme 1989-90 allocations for IT-related activities.
Indicative allocations for national priority areas 12 (information technology/subject competence in further education) and 10 (new technologies across the curriculum)

	12 IT/Subject Competence £,000	10 New Technologies across the Curriculum £,000
Barking and Dagenham	10	17
Barnet	21	28
Bexley	11	23
Brent	21	24
Bromley	14	26
Croydon	20	31
Ealing	13	26
Enfield	19	27
Haringey	14	18
Harrow	17	19
Havering	10	26
Hillingdon	8	22
Hounslow	13	21
Kingston upon Thames	14	12
Merton	9	15
Newham	25	24
Redbridge	7	22
Richmond upon Thames	14	11
Sutton	14	16
Waltham Forest	13	21
ILEA	171	193
Birmingham	74	120
Coventry	28	35

	12 IT/Subject Competence £,000	10 New Technologies across the Curriculum £,000
Dudley	33	33
Sandwell	28	35
Solihull	18	24
Walsall	15	33
Wolverhampton	23	29
Knowsley	11	19
Liverpool	37	54
St. Helens	22	22
Sefton	20	33
Wirral	29	37
Bolton	22	32
Bury	7	19
Manchester	62	49
Oldham	13	27
Rochdale	11	25
Salford	4	27
Stockport	20	32
Tameside	20	25
Trafford	18	21
Wigan	28	38
Barnsley	12	25
Doncaster	25	34
Rotherham	22	31
Sheffield	44	52
Bradford	41	57
Calderdale	11	23
Kirklees	28	44
Leeds	42	76
Wakefield	22	34
Gateshead	9	22
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	21	27
North Tyneside	14	21
South Tyneside	19	17
Sunderland	16	36
Isles of Scilly	—	—
Avon	62	96
Bedfordshire	41	59
Berkshire	59	76
Buckinghamshire	24	68
Cambridgeshire	35	69
Cheshire	77	110
Cleveland	42	69
Cornwall	26	48
Cumbria	30	54
Derbyshire	57	100
Devon	75	95
Dorset	33	58
Durham	42	67
East Sussex	42	58
Essex	76	166
Gloucestershire	43	55
Hampshire	109	155
Hereford and Worcestershire	52	70
Hertfordshire	85	106
Humberside	46	100
Isle of Wight	11	12
Kent	82	161
Lancashire	127	153
Leicestershire	47	99
Lincolnshire	35	61
Norfolk	45	75
North Yorkshire	49	72
Northamptonshire	28	67
Northumberland	10	35
Nottinghamshire	84	106
Oxfordshire	37	53
Shropshire	30	45

	12 IT/Subject Competence £,000	10 New Technologies across the Curriculum £,000
Somerset	39	46
Staffordshire	67	116
Suffolk	39	65
Surrey	54	89
Warwickshire	43	52
West Sussex	37	66
Wiltshire	55	58

Local education authority training grants scheme 1990-91 allocations for IT-related activities

Indicative allocations for national priority areas 14 (IT in further education) and 9 (new technologies across the curriculum)

	IT £,000	New Technologies £,000
Barking and Dagenham	5	20
Barnet	6	34
Bexley	5	28
Brent	6	28
Bromley	5	31
Croydon	6	37
Ealing	5	31
Enfield	5	33
Haringey	5	22
Harrow	9	22
Havering	5	31
Hillingdon	5	26
Hounslow	5	26
Kingston upon Thames	5	14
Merton	5	17
Newham	7	29
Redbridge	5	26
Richmond upon Thames	5	14
Sutton	5	19
Waltham Forest	5	26
Camden	5	17
Corporation of London	0	*
Greenwich	5	28
Hackney	5	19
Hammersmith and Fulham	5	13
Islington	5	17
Kensington and Chelsea	0	9
Lambeth	6	21
Lewisham	5	25
Southwark	5	24
Tower Hamlets	5	23
Wandsworth	7	23
Westminster	6	14
Birmingham	19	146
Coventry	8	41
Dudley	10	39
Sandwell	8	41
Solihull	5	29
Walsall	5	39
Wolverhampton	6	34
Knowsley	5	23
Liverpool	11	65
St. Helens	7	26
Sefton	6	39
Wirral	8	45
Bolton	6	38
Bury	5	23
Manchester	16	59
Oldham	5	33
Rochdale	5	30
Salford	5	31
Stockport	7	38
Tameside	5	30
Trafford	6	25
Wigan	9	45
Barnsley	5	29
Doncaster	7	41
Rotherham	6	36
Sheffield	11	61
Bradford	12	69
Calderdale	5	28
Kirklees	9	53
Leeds	12	90
Wakefield	6	41
Gateshead	5	26
Newcastle upon Tyne	6	33
North Tyneside	5	25
South Tyneside	6	20
Sunderland	5	43
Isles of Scilly	—	—
Avon	18	115
Bedfordshire	12	71
Berkshire	18	92
Buckinghamshire	7	82
Cambridgeshire	10	84
Cheshire	20	132
Cleveland	11	82
Cornwall	7	59
Cumbria	9	64
Derbyshire	15	120
Devon	21	115
Dorset	10	70
Durham	12	80
East Sussex	13	70
Essex	21	199
Gloucestershire	12	66
Hampshire	31	186
Hereford and Worcester	14	85
Hertfordshire	24	127
Humberside	13	119
Isle of Wight	5	15
Kent	22	193
Lancashire	37	184
Leicestershire	14	120
Lincolnshire	10	73
Norfolk	13	90
North Yorkshire	14	86
Northamptonshire	8	82
Northumberland	5	42
Nottinghamshire	23	126
Oxfordshire	13	64
Shropshire	9	54
Somerset	12	56
Staffordshire	19	139
Suffolk	11	79
Surrey	15	106
Warwickshire	12	63
West Sussex	10	80
Wiltshire	15	69

Notes to tables:

1. The main Education Support Grant programmes which have supported spending on Information Technology, and which are listed in the tables, are:

i. Micros for SEN (the provision of microelectronic equipment designed or adapted for use by children with special educational needs (SEN)).

ii. IT in NAFE (the development of the use of information technology at non-advanced further education (NAFE) establishments).

iii. CMIS (computerised management information systems —the provision of data processing equipment, accessories and software for use in the management of further education establishments).

iv. Special needs in FE (the provision of computerised learning aids at further education establishments for use by students with special educational needs).
v. IT in Schools (the promotion of information technology as an aid to learning in schools).
vi. LMS (the provision of management information systems for use in connection with schemes for local management of schools).

2. Projects supported under certain other ESG activities may also have had some IT element.

3. The allocations shown for the LMS activity in 1989-90 and 1990-91 are the total allocations for that activity. IT for management information systems is only one of the categories of expenditure covered by the activity, which also covers staff training and the provision of central LEA support. The IT element within the total sum for the activity was £12 million in the 1989-90 programme and £23 million in the 1990-91 programme. This element cannot be separately identified within the allocations to individual LEAs.

4. The Local Education Authority Training Grants Scheme (LEATGS) replaced the former In-Service Teacher Training Grants Scheme in April 1987. The allocations given for the LEATGS show the expenditure supported under the relevant National Priority Areas. Local Education Authorities are free to add to those sums from the allocations made under the LEATGS in support of local priorities, or from their other sources of income.

5. In the 1989-90 LEATGS programme, the National Priority Area shown in the Table as "IT/Subject Competence" covered training to develop competence in the teaching of technical, commercial or professional subjects in the light of recent developments in industry, commerce or the professions, including the teaching of IT and its integration across the curriculum. The element for IT cannot be separately identified within the allocations to individual LEAs.

6. The rate at which grant is paid in support of the allocations shown in the tables has varied.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about the percentage of the education support grant which has been allocated to information technology in each of the last five years.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Various aspects of information technology (IT) have been supported through a range of activities within education support grant (ESG) programmes over the last five years. These activities include those relating to IT as an aid to learning in schools, IT for pupils with special educational needs in schools, local management of schools, computerised management information systems for colleges, IT as an aid to learning in further education, and IT for students with special educational needs in further education. The proportion of the total ESG programme accounted for by the allocations for these activities is:

	per cent.
1986-87	11
1987-88	9
1988-89	24
1989-90	35
1990-91	34

In addition, projects supported under certain other ESG activities may have had some IT element.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his policy on the level of spending on information technology over the next two years.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. Friend considers that, within the resources available to the education service, the level of spending on information technology (IT) should take account of the requirements of the Education Reform Act as well as reflecting the wider benefits which pupils, students, teachers and others can derive from the use of IT. In relation to schools and colleges, it is for each local education authority, and under local management, the institutions concerned, to determine the level of spending consistent with this approach, in the light of local circumstances. My right hon. Friend is continuing to support such spending through the LEA training grants scheme (LEATGS) and education support grants (ESGs). The LEATGS allocations for 1990-91 were announced on 18 December and the ESG allocations on 18 January. Together they will support at least £55 million of spending on IT. My right hon. Friend will be announcing his proposals for the ESG and LEATGS programmes for 1991-92 in due course.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 7 February 1990

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Civil Legal Aid

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Attorney-General (1) how many applications for civil legal aid certificates were *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused; and what percentage this was of the whole in 1987, 1988 and 1989;

(2) how many applications were received for civil legal aid certificates in 1987, 1988 and 1989.

The Attorney-General: All information about civil legal aid is contained in the legal aid annual reports which are laid before Parliament each year and are available in the Library. The most recent report provides information to 31 March 1989.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Attorney-General how many prosecutions have taken place in each of the last five years for fraudulent completion of legal aid certificate applications.

The Attorney-General: The legal aid board took over responsibility from the Law Society on 1 April 1989. Since that date there has been one prosecution for fraudulent completion of a legal aid certificate application, mounted by the legal aid board. There were no prosecutions in the preceding four years. The legal aid authorities do not maintain records of police prosecutions.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Attorney-General (1) how many complaints his Department has received regarding erroneous or fraudulent applications for assessments of grant for legal aid;

(2) how many revocations of civil legal aid certificates there were during *(a)* 1987, *(b)* 1988 and *(c)* 1989 as a result of reassessment following information or complaints received.

The Attorney-General: Complaints regarding erroneous or fraudulent applications for assessment of grant for legal aid are dealt with either by the legal aid board or by the legal aid assessment office, Department of Social Security, Preston. Any allegation will lead to a re-examination of the application. Statistics about complaints and any consequent revocations of civil legal aid certificates are not at present maintained, but the legal aid board is introducing new management information and computer systems.

Judges

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Attorney-General how many judges have been removed from office for each year since 1980 for *(a)* incapacity, *(b)* misconduct and *(c)* any other reason.

The Attorney-General: One circuit judge was removed from office in 1983 for misconduct under the powers given to the Lord Chancellor in section 17(4) of the Courts Act 1971.

Criminal Cases

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Attorney-General if, pursuant to his answer of 29 January, he will give the nature of the charge before the court in relation to each of the criminal cases in the Crown court, to the legal aid costs of which he refers.

The Attorney-General: The highest payments, referred to in the answer of 29 January, to a solicitor and counsel were in respect of offences of fraud.

PRIME MINISTER

Germany (Unification)

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Prime Minister what steps are required to be taken by the Governments of the United States of America, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, France and the United Kingdom in drawing up a peace treaty with Germany in the event of reunification; and if she will list the treaty or other provisions governing the changes which may take place in the status of the Federal and Democratic Republics of Germany in advance of a peace treaty.

The Prime Minister: A number of agreements and treaties would need to be amended or abolished in the event of unification of the two German states. The precise details would need to be discussed with our partners and allies.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Audit Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any proposals for investigating the validity of audit opinions, in the light of the Ferranti, Barlow Clowes, Johnson Matthey and de Lorean affairs.

Mr. Redwood: No.

Inward Investment

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will identify the amount of inward investment announced to all areas of the United Kingdom by economic region in each of the last three years for which he has figures available.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) on 1 February at column *290*, which contains the information sought.

Manufactured Exports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will show by volume and value British manufactured exports in the last available quarter going to *(a)* the European Economic Community, *(b)* West Germany, *(c)* the United States of America, *(d)* the European Free Trade Association, *(e)* France and *(f)* the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance.

Mr. Redwood: Information on exports of manufactures from the United Kingdom is published in table V of

Business Monitor MM20 "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom" held in the House of Commons Library.

Manufacturing Imports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the share of British manufacturing imports in the last available quarter of 1989 coming from *(a)* the European Economic Community, *(b)* West Germany, *(c)* the United States of America, *(d)* the European Free Trade Association, *(e)* France and *(f)* the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance.

Mr. Redwood: Information on imports of manufactures by the United Kingdom is published in table II of Business Monitor MM20 "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom" held in the House of Commons Library.

Regional Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when his review of regional policy will be completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Regional policy is kept under continuing review. As already announced a consultant's study is currently looking at various aspects of English Estates' activities. The House will be kept informed.

Computer Security

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps his Department has taken, and is taking, to improve the security of its computer systems.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My Department follows CCTA advice on analysis of security risks and requirements using structured methods such as CCTA's risk analysis and management and methodology (CRAMM) which has also been made commercially available. A departmental IT security steering group was established in 1988 to assess requirements and determine policy. For unclassified but sensitive systems a review was carried out recently and the results are now being implemented. More stringent conditions apply to classified systems.

Textiles

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the current balance of trade in the textile industry.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Latest available figures show that imports of textiles (SITC division 65) exceeded exports by £1,576 million in the 12 months to November 1989.

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to meet other European Community Ministers to discuss the textile industry.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 5 February 1990]:* The textile industry is often covered in the frequent meetings my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have with our Community colleagues. It was last discussed at the Industry Council meeting on 14 November, which I attended. I anticipate that the subject will be discussed again at the next meeting scheduled for 13 March.

Preventable Loss

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will list the number of professionally qualified loss-prevention staff employed by his Department and the qualifications held by such staff, excluding qualifications obtained during police or military service.

Mr. Forth: All departmental staff have a duty to prevent loss. There are 14 professionally qualified staff in the Department's internal audit branch.

Small Companies (Audit)

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to remove the audit requirement from small companies.

Mr. Redwood: No.

Renaval Programme

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a further statement on the operation of the European Economic Community's Renaval programme in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 5 February 1990]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to my hon. Friends the Members for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) and for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) on 2 February in regard to applications for Tyne and Wear and Middlesbrough and Langbaurgh districts. The Government are considering what other applications might be made.

DTI Structure

Mr. Ron Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has for the future structure of his Department.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has for the future structure of his Department.

Mr. Ridley: I am reviewing various aspects of the work of my Department, but have no changes to announce at present.

ENVIRONMENT

Toxic Waste

87. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make further representations to the United States of America concerning the export of toxic or hazardous waste to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Trippier: I have discussed the problem of the waste at Wath with the United States deputy chief of mission in London and made clear my concern over the continued presence of this waste in the United Kingdom. I understand that he will be raising the matter with the appropriate authorities in the United States. Future discussions on the resolution of this issue will cover the wider implications for arrangements for the movement of waste between our two countries.

Inner Urban Aid

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the allocation of inner urban aid for Lambeth council of *(a)* 1988-89, *(b)* 1989-90 and *(c)* 1990-91.

Mr. Moynihan: The provisional urban programme allocations for Lambeth council for the years 1988-89 to 1990-91 are as follows:

	1988-89 (£m)	*1989-90 (£m)*	*1990-91 (£m)*
Lambeth	11·75 [1](8·2)	9·932	9·280

[1] Final outturn.

Hertfordshire County Council

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out a table showing *(a)* the number of full-time employees and *(b)* the number of part-time employees of Hertfordshire county council in (i) June 1981, (ii) June 1985 and (iii) June 1989.

Mr. Chope: The information is as follows:

Hertfordshire County Council: All Services (at June)

	1981	*1985*	*1989*
Full-time	21,724	20,374	[1]
Part-time	18,569	15,365	[1]
Total	40,293	35,739	[1]

[1] Data not available.

Special Education

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the formula used for calculating the financial needs of each education authority for the provision of special education and list by authority the sum included in the total standard spending assessment for 1990-91 for the provision of special education and for giving special help to children statemented as being in special need.

Mr. Chope: The formula for calculating the standard spending assessment for education is set out in the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England) which is in the Library. The assessment takes account of special needs by means of an index of additional educational needs which reflects additional needs of various kinds and is used to distribute 24 per cent. of the total SSA element for education. This covers both additional costs arising from special education and special support in ordinary schools. It is not possible to identify within this a separate element for statemented children.

Local Government Expenditure

Sir Peter Hordern: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the increase in local government expenditure in each of the last five years; and if he will express the cost of teachers' salaries as a proportion of the whole in each of these years.

Mr. David Hunt: The available information is as follows:

	Percentage increase in total expenditure over previous year	*Cost of teachers' salaries as percentage of total expenditure*
1985-86[1]	1·8	24·2
1986-87	9·5	24·3
1987-88	8·2	24·6
1988-89	8·4	n/a
1989-90[2]	6·2	n/a

[1] London Regional Transport was transferred from local authority sector in 1985-86.

[2] Polytechnics were transferred from the local authority sector in April 1989.

n/a = not available.

Total local authority spending covers rate fund revenue account net current expenditure on services plus net loan charges, contributions to other funds and accounts (eg. special funds and HRA) and net non-relevant expenditure (eg. net spending on housing benefit), less specific and supplementary grants.

The cost of teachers' salaries covers spending on school teaching staff, including national insurance and superannuation.

Rents and Rates

Sir Peter Hordern: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the total and annual increase in local authority rents and domestic rates in each of the last five years.

Mr. David Hunt: Information for England is as follows:

Local authority rents

	Average unrebated rent £ per week	*Increase over previous year per cent.*	*Cumulative increase since 1984-85 per cent.*
1985-86	15·63	6	6
1986-87	16·48	5	11
1987-88	17·40	6	18
1988-89	19·01	9	29
1989-90	[1]20·83	10	41

[1] Provisional figure.

Domestic rates

Average domestic rate poundage[1] pence	*Increase over previous year per cent.*	*Cumulative increase since 1984-85 per cent.*
173	8	8
197	14	23
210	7	31
229	9	43
250	9	56

[1] Domestic rate poundage is the average rate (in pence) per £ of rateable value levied on domestic properties.

Community Charge

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance he has given community charge registration officers on the status as students for the purposes of poll tax of members of Her Majesty's forces undergoing courses of training.

Mr. Chope: There has been no specific guidance from this Department on this issue. General guidance on determining eligibility for the student relief is contained in

"The Community Charge": Students and the Community Charge" (Community Charge Practice Note No. 23) which has been sent to all community charge registration officers. A copy is in the Library.

Opencast Mines

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many appeals against refusal of planning permission for opencast mines in county Durham are outstanding.

Mr. Moynihan: Three.

Bellwin Scheme

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether, in his review of the Bellwin scheme, he will consider giving direct funding from central Government in the form of severe weather payments to local authorities.

Mr. Chope: The purpose of the review will be to consider how to adapt the Bellwin scheme given the new local government finance system.

The principles underlying the scheme have been that the primary responsibility for dealing with emergencies lies with local authorities, but central Government assistance may be given exceptionally where otherwise an excessive burden would fall on ratepayers or chargepayers. These principles will remain.

Bathing Waters

Mr. John Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which United Kingdom bathing waters failed to meet European Community standards for salmonella bacteria in the 1989 bathing waters survey.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Environment announced on 25 January, (*Official Report*, 25 January 1990, column *785*) the results of the 1989 survey of bathing waters for England and Wales, and stated that a detailed summary of the results would be placed in the Library. Detailed results for individual waters, including numbers of samples taken for particular parameters and the number of these which failed to meet the directive's mandatory standards, are given in this report, copies of which have now been placed in the Library.

Local Government Finance

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will show for each district and borough council in Kent *(a)* by what percentage in descending order of magnitude, its 1989-90 reported budgeted total expenditure is greater or less than its grant-related expenditure assessment, *(b)* its 1989-90 reported budgeted total expenditure and *(c)* its 1989-90 reported budgeted total expenditure per head of population.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested is set out in the table. For the purpose of this reply, the population figures used are estimates produced by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys of the population of each authority at mid-1988.

Council	*GRE* £ million *1*	*Reported total expenditure* £ million *2*	*Percent difference (column 1-2 percentage* *3*	*Reported total expenditure per head* £ *4*
Shepway	6·029	8·119	34·7	93
Dartford	4·935	6·218	26·0	79
Tunbridge Wells	5·548	6·954	25·3	70
Tonbridge and Malling	5·059	6·295	24·4	62
Ashford	5·266	6·270	19·1	66
Gravesham	5·701	6·640	16·5	74
Canterbury	8·219	9·284	13·0	70
Swale	6·394	7·114	11·3	62
Thanet	9·862	10·878	10·3	84
Sevenoaks	5·400	5·719	5·9	53
Dover	6·387	6·743	5·6	63
Maidstone	7·382	7·654	3·7	56
Gillingham	6·311	5·914	−6·3	62
Rochester upon Medway	10·021	7·769	−22·5	53

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the 1990-91 revenue support grant entitlement per head of population, before safety net adjustments and after reduction of the amount of revenue support grant, attributable to Kent county council for each borough and district council in Kent in descending order of magnitude.

Mr. David Hunt: It is not possible to calculate the figures requested. Although revenue support grant is paid to district councils in support of services provided by both the district and county councils, there is no amount separately identified as being attributable to the county council.

Shell UK (Planning Appeal)

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to complete his urgent consideration of the application for costs in the planning appeal by Shell UK Oil Limited at South Brent as communicated to solicitors acting for the South Brent and Lower Glaze group on Dartmoor on 13 October 1989.

Mr. Moynihan: Unless unforeseen difficulties arise, my right hon. Friend's substantive reply will be given before the end of this month.

Environmental Protection Bill

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what individuals and organisations have been consulted in relation to environmental assessment regulations under the Environmental Protection Bill;

(2) when he will publish draft environmental assessment regulations under the Environmental Protection Bill.

Mr. Trippier: Regulations made under schedule 1 to the Environmental Protection Bill will prescribe details of the application procedure for an authorisation under part I of the Bill. I propose that those regulations should require applications to include information about the environmental effects of the proposed process. I will consult on the draft regulations in the next few months.

Residential Housing, London

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement giving his estimate of the proportion of residential housing in the outer London boroughs, i.e. not in the old London county council area, which is in conservation areas.

Mr. Chope: By 1 January 1990 there were 285 designated conservation areas in outer London, of which 253 include residential properties. It is not possible to estimate the proportion of residential property included in these areas from the information held centrally by English Heritage.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what studies he has made of practice in other countries regarding the use of economic instruments as a means to deliver policies to protect the environment; and what plans he has to make use of such measures in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have had placed in the Library of the House the report of a recent study by Environmental Resources Ltd. which examines the uses which 10 selected countries make of charges and subsidies as means of pollution control. Seven EC countries (United Kingdom, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands and Spain), two Scandinavian countries outside the European Community (Norway and Sweden) and Japan were chosen for study. The report considers both the effectiveness of such schemes in improving environmental conditions and the trends emerging over the past five years. The study shows that there has been a notable shift away from subsidies as a means of pollution control—in line with increasing emphasis on the "polluter pays" principle. At the same time, much greater attention is being paid to possibilities for using charges.

In the United Kingdom, little use has until now been made of charges as a means of pollution control. However, charges covering the costs of operating a number of pollution regulation systems, including integrated pollution control, are proposed in the Environmental Protection Bill. Moreover, the Government recognise that in appropriate circumstances it is possible that environmental policies could be delivered more efficiently by market-based instruments.

Planning

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the outcome of his review of the procedures in the Town and Country Planning General Regulations 1976.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Secretary of State for Wales have today issued a consultation paper seeking views on proposals to amend the Town and Country Planning General Regulations 1976. The proposals would also entail amending the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 and Local Government Act 1972.

The proposed changes are: councils should in future be required to apply for planning permission like any other applicant for any development where they are not the responsible development control authority; where local authorities determine their own planning applications, the decision should be taken in public; all self-applications should be determined either by the planning committee or by the council and not by a committee, sub-committee or officer responsible for the management or disposal of land or buildings owned by the authority; to direct that all self-applications should be advertised and to issue guidance on public consultation; all self-applications should be brought to the Secretary of State's attention so that where they conflict with the development plan or give rise to unresolved or substantial objections, the Secretary of State can consider whether to determine the application himself.

These proposed changes are intended to ensure fuller and more open debate about local authorities' own development proposals and to increase confidence in the accountability of local planning authorities.

Derelict Land

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what resources are being made available under the derelict land programme in 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The resources available in 1990-91 for derelict land reclamation under the derelict land programme will be £71·512 million.

Derelict land reclamation is one of the most effective ways in which the environment can be improved. Since 1979 the derelict land programme has funded the reclamation of more than 13,000 hectares of derelict land. I expect that, in the course of 1990-91, about 400 schemes producing an additional 1,200 hectares of reclaimed land will be completed. The resources available for 1990-91 should be sufficient to enable about 1,500 hectares of land to be reclaimed. The programme is thus continuing to make a real contribution to the reclamation process.

As in previous years, more than 90 per cent. of derelict land grant resources will be allocated to the north and midlands. I have given priority to the north-west and Yorkshire and Humberside where some of the most extensive and persistent dereliction is found; and to the west midlands where there is a need to fund continued investigative and remedial work on old limestone workings in the black country.

Overall my allocations include more than £12 million for treating dereliction arising from coal mining, thus maintaining the level of support given in last year's allocation.

I am approving new rolling programmes of reclamation for the joint local authority initiatives in east Manchester and Tameside, and north Staffordshire. I am also approving programmes for Oldham, Wakefield and Kerrier.

Following the first round of triennial rolling programme reviews carried out last year, I have decided to discontinue rolling programme status for north-east Lancashire but to transfer Hyndburn, where much remains to be done, to the existing Leeds and Liverpool canal corridor rolling programme. The other programmes or major projects reviewed; Wigan, Normanby Park, the black country, Wirral and Corby will continue. The rolling programmes at Barrow (Project Furness) and Liverpool will be reviewed in the course of 1990.

The total provision made for the 16 rolling programmes approved for 1990-91 will be nearly £23 million.

At present the priorities for derelict land reclamation are set out in circular 28/85 "Reclamation and Reuse of Derelict Land". These stress the importance of schemes designed to reclaim urban, especially inner city, land for housing and industrial and commercial uses.

However, when choosing new schemes to support in 1990-91, the Department will take into account the changes to the existing priorities proposed by the Government following the review of derelict land policy published in September 1989. We want to ensure that, through these changes, the derelict land programme can play an even more effective part in reclaiming sites to improve the environment.

We are considering the responses to our proposals for change, and guidance setting out new objectives and priorities will be issued later this year.

Property Services Agency

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what savings the Government expect to make from the privatisation of the Property Services Agency and Crown Suppliers.

Mr. Chope: A reduction in annual Government expenditure as a result of increased efficiency within the Property Services Agency and the Crown Suppliers.

Oil Pollution

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the total number of reported cases of oil pollution in United Kingdom coastal and estuarial waters in *(a)* 1988, *(b)* 1989 and *(c)* 1990.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 5 February 1990]:* The Department of Transport's marine pollution control unit funds a complete annual survey of oil pollution around the coasts of the United Kingdom. This is carried out by the advisory committee on pollution of the sea which draws its information from a number of sources including the Department of Transport and local authorities.

A total of 559 incidents were reported during 1988. Survey results for 1989 are expected to be published in June.

The Department of Transport's own provisional figure for incidents at sea in 1989 is 246 with a further 14 incidents reported so far this year.

Government Buildings (Clearing)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much is spent annually in cleaning Government buildings; and what is the major cause of environmental damage to them.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 6 February 1990]:* It is not possible to say how much is spent annually in cleaning Government buildings.

There is no single identifiable major cause of environmental damage to Government buildings. This can be incurred as a result of accident or by airborne or waterborne chemicals and pollutants or through weather conditions, particularly those involving extremes of heat, cold, wind, rain or tide. Records of such damage are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Water Charges

Mr. Knapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he can now announce the charges limits for statutory water companies for the next 10 years.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has now determined the charges limits for six English companies and has made firm proposals to a further 20. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has determined the charges limits for the two companies based in Wales. I have placed in the Library of the House copies of a table showing the figures for each company. Proposals will be put to Mid Sussex shortly. Our proposals will allow charges to rise by 6·5 per cent. a year on average in real terms over the next five years and by less than 2 per cent. a year on average in the following five years. Over the 10 years as a whole this represents average increases each year of only 23p (in current prices) on the monthly bill. Where determinations have not yet been made, companies have 28 days within which to make further representations. Once determined charges limits may only be adjusted or reviewed by the Director General of Water Services.

In determining these limits we have considered with each company its future programmes, operating costs and financing needs to the end of this century. We have had particular regard to the improvements in drinking water quality required to secure or facilitate compliance with the requirements of the Drinking Water Quality Regulations (which incorporates the standards of the EC drinking water directive), and to the investment required to renew aging infrastructure assets and to augment water resources so as to overcome the kind of shortages experienced during recent droughts. The proposed limits provide for total investment by the 29 companies of £1·7 billion (in current prices) over the decade to the year 2000.

My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Wales have also determined the infrastructure charges limits for 27 of the statutory water companies and made revised proposals for one other. Copies of a table showing these have also been placed in the Library. The average charge will be £593, at 1990-91 prices.

ENERGY

Computer Security

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what steps his Department has and is taking to improve the security of its computer systems.

Mr. Wakeham: My Department has clear security policies and procedures for safeguarding its unclassified but sensitive computer systems but is currently tightening its procedures in consultation with the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency. Classified systems are already protected by more stringent controls.

Petroleum Licences

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to the answer of 17 January to the hon. Member for Sheffield Central, *Official Report*, column *275*, which two South African owned companies hold small interests in the United Kingdom offshore petroleum production licences.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The companies are Baytrust Oil Explorations Limited and Unilon Oil Explorations Limited.

Cross-Channel Electricity Interconnectors

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if a new pricing contract for the exchange of electricity via the cross-Channel interconnectors will be completed before the end of the current financial year.

Mr. Baldry: Electricité de France has been invited to be a party to the pooling and settlement agreement. This will permit EdF to buy and sell electricity on a day-to-day basis. Negotiations are also taking place on longer-term contracts.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any plans to facilitate the construction of additional cross-Channel electricity interconnectors.

Mr. Baldry: The construction of additional cross-Channel electricity interconnectors will be a wholly commercial matter for the parties concerned, subject to their obtaining the necessary planning permission.

THE ARTS

English National Ballet

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts what discussions he had with the chairman of English National Ballet prior to the termination of the contracts of Mr. Peter Shanfriss and Mr. Steven Scott.

Mr. Luce: I have had no such discussions. This is entirely a matter for the board of governors of the English National Ballet.

UPSTART Theatre Company

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts (1) what information he has on *(a)* the number of productions of, *(b)* the number of performances of, *(c)* the number of seats sold by, *(d)* the box office income of and *(e)* the size of the investment of the Arts Council in the UPSTART theatre company;

(2) what information he has on who the auditors approved to audit the accounts of the UPSTART theatre company are; and whether any such accounts have been lodged with Companies House.

Mr. Luce: The UPSTART theatre company was established in 1988 with the support of the Arts Council and others to generate new touring productions. I have asked the chairman of the Arts Council to write to the hon. Member with the information he requires.

Mummified Heads

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts (1) what discussions he has had with the Governments of Australia and New Zealand about the future of mummified aboriginal and Maori heads in British museums;

(2) what information he has on the *(a)* number and *(b)* location of mummified aboriginal and Maori heads and other human relics in British museums.

Mr. Luce *[holding answer 5 February 1990]:* I have received no representations from the Governments of Australia and New Zealand about the future of mummified aboriginal and Maori heads in British museums. I understand that of the national museums and galleries for which I am responsible, the British Museum's museum of mankind has seven Maori heads in its Oceanic collection, and the natural history museum has one mummified Maori head and one mummified aboriginal head in its keeping.

NATIONAL FINANCE

European Monetary Scheme

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the percentage of deviation quarter by quarter of the pound sterling from the central trend of the exchange rate mechanism of the EMS from 1985 to date.

Mr. Ryder: The sterling/ecu exchange rate is published in the Central Statistical Office's "Financial Statistics", table 13.1. Sterling's notional central rates against the European currency unit (ECU) up to and including 12 January 1987 are given in the Commission's booklet "The EMS: Ten Years of Progress in European Monetary Co-operation". Both publications are available in the Library of the House. Sterling's notional central rate following the reweighting of the ecu on 21 September 1989 was set at 0·728627. It was subsequently set at 0·728615 after the realignment of 8 January 1990.

Income Tax

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people pay income tax; and how many fill in income tax returns.

Mr. Lilley: It is estimated that about 21·4 million single people and married couples (25 million individuals) will be liable to income tax in 1989-90. These estimates are based on a projection of the 1987-88 survey of personal incomes and are provisional. Approximately 8 million income tax returns were sent out for the most recent year.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much total revenue the poll tax is expected to raise in 1990-91; and what increase in income tax would raise an equivalent sum.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Total revenue from community charges in 1990-91 will depend on the level of charges set by individual charging authorities.

Money Supply

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was *(a)* the forecast and *(b)* the outturn for (i) M0 and (ii) M4 for 1988 and 1989; what was the cause of the differences between forecasts and outturns; and what assessment he has made of the effects on inflation of both.

Mr. Ryder: Official forecasts for M0 and M4 are not published, but target ranges for M0 growth are set out each year in the medium-term financial strategy published in the Financial Statement and Budget Report. The target range for both 1988-89 and 1989-90 was 1 to 5 per cent. M0 growth has fallen gradually since September 1988 as a result of the progressive tightening of monetary policy. M0 is a reliable indicator of monetary conditions; movements in broad money require careful interpretation but are also taken into account in assessing monetary conditions.

Interest Rates

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to announce a reduction in interest rates.

Mr. Ryder: There will be no early relaxation of monetary policy. Interest rates will remain high for some time to come.

Stamp Duty

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the yield and cost of collection of the stamp duty on *(a)* the sale of domestic housing and *(b)* any other categories where the information is available for the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Lilley: The latest available forecast of receipts from stamp duties in 1989-90, split between the major transactions from which it is derived, was given in the reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) on 30 November 1989, *Official Report*, columns *431-32*. About £950 million of the stamp duty on land and property is attributable to residential property.

The cost of collection is expected to be around 0·3 per cent. of total stamp duties; a separate figure for the cost of collecting duty on residential property is not available.

Mortgage Interest Rates

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the total savings for domestic mortgage payers from a 1 per cent. drop in mortgage interest rates.

Mr. Lilley: A reduction of one percentage point in the current level of mortgage interest rates would reduce total mortgage interest payments net of tax relief by about £170 million per month for the estimated 9·3 million domestic mortgage payers. This represents an average monthly saving of about £18 per mortgagor.

Ambulance Workers (Notice Staff)

Mr. Booker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the cost of production and distribution of the notice to the Treasury staff entitled, "Industrial Action in Support of Ambulance Workers" dated 23 January, Ref.: BO6L. AM/Allen/Ambulance issued by B.Fox (BOG).

Mr. Ryder: The estimated production and distribution costs were £13.

Building Societies Association

Mr. Parry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next expects to meet representatives from the Building Societies Association; and what matters he proposes to discuss.

Mr. Waring: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next expects to meet representatives from the Building Societies Association; and what matters he proposes to discuss.

Mr. Ryder: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor does not expect to meet representatives from the Building Societies Association in the near future.

Skiball

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received concerning the revenue implications of the introduction of a spot-the-ball game to be called Skiball; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: None.

Japan (Trade)

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* the extent in cash terms of export trade from the United Kingdom to the empire of Japan and the extent in cash terms of import trade from the empire of Japan to the United Kingdom; and if he will publish figures for both for each year since 1979.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The information may be found in the "Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics" and its mid-year supplement, available from the Library of the House, or on the Central Statistical Office databank which may be accessed through the Library.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Animal Maltreatment

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation which will strengthen bans on ownership against persons who have maltreated dogs; and if he will extend such bans to protect other animals.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The power already exists. As a result of section 1 of the Protection of Animals (Amendment) Act 1988, where a person has been convicted under the Protection of Animals Act 1911 of an offence of cruelty to any animal, the court by which he is convicted may order him to be disqualified from having custody of any animal.

Skilball

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from the Gaming Board and others concerning the introduction of a gambling activity to be called Skilball; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We understand that the promoters of "Skilball" intend it to be a prize competition in which success will depend to a substantial degree on the exercise of skill, so that it will not fall to be regulated or prohibited under the laws of gambling. Only a court could determine this question authoritatively.

The Gaming Board for Great Britain has expressed to us its concern that, in the event that "Skilball" is promoted or perceived as a form of gambling, it could have serious implications for policy on lotteries and for the general principle that demand for gambling should not be stimulated. We have also received letters from two hon. Members about "Skilball", one in his capacity as a consultant to its promoters, the other asking about its relationship to the law on lotteries.

We are at present considering the implications of the proposed competition. We have no current plan to amend the law on prize competitions such as "Skilball" is claimed to be. The position is being kept under review, and no assurance can be given that legislation may not at some stage be proposed which might affect the legality or viability of such competitions.

Hong Kong

Mr. Ashdown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria for settlement in Britain will be required for the Asian spouses of British expatriates living in Hong Kong; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Paragraph 50 of the Immigration Rules (HC. 388) sets out the criteria for admission for settlement as the spouse of a British citizen or other person who is present and settled in the United Kingdom or who is at the same time being admitted for settlement.

Summer Time (Green Paper)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many requests have been received for a copy of the Government's Green Paper on summer time, consultative document Cm 722, since June 1989; and how many responses he has received as a result.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Her Majesty's Stationery Office has sold 1,082 copies. A total of 30,867 responses have been received.

Young Offenders

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, in respect of each young offender institution and remand centre, the numbers of *(a)* convicted and *(b)* unconvicted prisoners under the age of 16 years who are receiving fewer than 15 hours of education each week.

Mr. Meller: During the most recent week for which figures are available, all inmates under 16 years of age in young offender institutions received at least 15 hours education. The number of inmates under 16 years in remand centres who did not receive 15 hours education was as follows:

Inmates under 16 years

Remand centre	*Convicted*	*Unconvicted*
Brockhill	2	4
Cardiff	1	
Feltham	18	7
Glen Parva	1	
Manchester	1	

Sentenced Prisoners

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many of those persons sentenced to a gaol by a Crown court in England and Wales during 1988 had committed an offence involving *(a)* violence, *(b)* sex, *(c)* robbery and *(d)* supply of drugs; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what proportion of *(a)* 17 to 20-year-olds and *(b)* adults were sentenced to immediate custody for (i) violence against the person, (ii) burglary, (iii) theft and handling, (iv) fraud and forgery, (v) criminal damage and (vi) drug offences in each of the Crown court centres in England and Wales during 1988; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what was the average sentence length in England and Wales for *(a)* Crown courts, *(b)* magistrates courts and *(c)* all courts during 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 25 January 1990]:* Information on the average sentence lengths by the Crown court and magistrates courts in England and Wales is given in "Criminal Statistics England and Wales 1988" (Tables 7.16 to 7.20), a copy of which is in the Library.

Information that relates to the number of persons sentenced to immediate custody by the Crown court for certain offences; and the proportion of persons aged 17 to 20 and 21 and over who were sentenced to immediate custody by certain offences in each Crown court centre in England and Wales in 1988 is given in the tables:

Table 1 Persons sentenced to immediate custody by the Crown Court 1988
England and Wales

Offence	*Total immediate custody*
Violence against the person	7,697
Sexual offences	2,362
Robbery	3,092
Supplying drugs (Trafficking)	2,594

Table 2: Proportion of persons aged 17 and under 21 and 21 and over sentenced to immediate custody for certain offences by each Crown Court centre

England and Wales 1988 — *Percentages*

Crown Court centres	Violence against the person		Burglary		Theft and handling		Fraud and forgery		Criminal damage		Drug offences	
	17-20	21+	17-20	21+	17-20	21+	17-20	21+	17-20	21+	17-20	21+
Midland and Oxford Circuit												
Birmingham	54	53	50	58	43	41	[15]	37	54	44	[2]	31
Coventry	61	54	72	70	52	56	[ ]	57	[55]	[50]	[ ]	[73]
Derby	47	44	59	74	45	45	[42]	33	[63]	42	[ ]	20
Dudley	69	52	54	67	46	44	[17]	48	[75]	[18]	[67]	33
Great Grimsby	[40]	60	38	47	21	28	[20]	[23]	[60]	—	—	[36]
Hereford	[70]	53	46	66	[30]	39	[33]	[50]	[100]	[57]	—	[43]
Leicester	48	45	59	66	45	43	[30]	46	[42]	38	[ ]	35
Lincoln	44	39	51	62	38	44	[60]	44	[57]	[35]	[ ]	[65]
Northampton	58	57	69	67	31	41	[14]	46	[38]	33	—	0
Nottingham	51	42	70	70	41	39	[22]	32	[68]	41	[50]	31
Oxford	66	71	59	62	38	48	[25]	56	[50]	[47]	[33]	[67]
Peterborough	[45]	62	65	65	[41]	46	[ ]	38	[100]	[60]	[100]	[60]
Shrewsbury	47	42	71	59	32	46	[100]	36	[22]	[36]	[67]	[43]
Stafford	53	55	64	66	43	32	[29]	43	[55]	33	[60]	[55]
Stoke-on-Trent	39	39	42	54	36	38	[27]	[43]	[33]	[35]	[ ]	[47]
Walsall	—	[ ]	—	—	—	—	[ ]	—	—	—	—	—
Warwick	57	52	74	70	54	41	[ ]	43	[60]	[30]	[50]	[25]
Worcester	65	51	64	75	47	43	[ ]	39	[67]	[50]	[25]	[40]
Wolverhampton	57	56	62	58	45	42	[50]	51	[38]	[33]	[ ]	[67]
North Eastern Circuit												
Beverley	42	38	63	60	34	33	[ ]	43	[100]	[20]	[100]	20
Doncaster	63	40	56	48	33	31	[33]	44	[38]	[33]	[ ]	[38]
Durham	32	42	57	52	29	28	[ ]	42	[25]	[20]	[ ]	[42]
Huddersfield	53	45	60	55	17	36	[ ]	[32]	[ ]	[75]	[ ]	[50]
Kingston-upon-Hull	—	—	—	—	[ ]	[100]	—	—	—	—	—	—
Leeds	40	43	54	55	33	31	[36]	35	32	31	[43]	33
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	45	30	33	38	25	33	[20]	25	[33]	32	[25]	32
Sheffield	41	41	48	54	31	30	[17]	35	[40]	26	[33]	[41]
Teesside	48	39	64	61	34	30	[33]	41	[61]	44	[67]	34
Wakefield	26	34	39	32	34	27	[ ]	32	[100]	[43]	—	[75]
York	31	40	46	39	28	33	[17]	44	[ ]	45	—	[40]
Northern Circuit												
Barrow-in-Furness	[75]	[23]	[67]	[74]	[40]	[36]	—	[100]	[100]	—		[50]
Bolton	37	48	63	51	32	40	[10]	36	[33]	[36]	[ ]	[ ]
Burnley	[47]	52	72	52	[38]	25	[ ]	32	[20]	[67]	[100]	[33]
Carlisle	60	63	63	68	[22]	30	[33]	[50]	[100]	[60]	[ ]	[65]
Kendal	—	[ ]	[50]	[100]	[33]	[20]	[ ]	[ ]	—	—	—	—
Lancaster	[40]	38	60	72	[50]	36	[ ]	[67]	[100]	[40]	[100]	[ ]
Liverpool	60	46	63	71	34	42	[38]	46	36	41	63	[ ]
Manchester	59	50	62	62	44	42	[24]	33	31	33	42	33
Preston	48	41	66	65	30	36	[20]	38	[67]	42	[33]	42
South Eastern Circuit												
Acton	44	41	55	58	21	29	[11]	37	[40]	33	[33]	[ ]
Aylesbury	60	61	[52]	67	30	45	[20]	49	[33]	[43]	[ ]	[ ]
Bury St. Edmunds	[53]	36	60	[11]	[42]	30	[ ]	[45]	[50]	[60]	[ ]	[60]
Cambridge	65	61	60	59	47	51	[100]	[65]	[50]	[22]	[100]	[64]
Chelmsford	57	47	74	52	46	49	[33]	48	[33]	32	[50]	[ ]
Chichester	[33]	38	35	46	31	33	[25]	29	[33]	[33]	—	[ ]
Croydon	21	40	68	67	22	30	[15]	36	[22]	28	[43]	[81]
Guildford	35	33	47	66	34	37	[25]	41	[36]	23	[38]	[50]
Ipswich	[58]	59	55	68	36	46	[25]	32	[100]	[17]	[33]	[60]
Isleworth	46	50	66	61	33	40	[33]	35	[22]	[19]	38	[75]
Kings Lynn	[50]	[100]	[80]	[68]	[71]	41	[ ]	[80]	[50]	—	[ ]	[ ]
Kingston Upon Thames	40	41	56	62	25	33	[ ]	33	[13]	13	[50]	[ ]
Knightsbridge	54	44	51	62	24	38	[11]	51	[9]	23	[50]	[ ]
Lewes	46	56	51	60	36	40	[50]	42	[67]	[40]	[ ]	[ ]
Maidstone	55	45	58	65	32	35	[40]	41	[67]	[25]	[ ]	[ ]
Middlesex Guildhall	[ ]	[50]	[100]	[50]	[25]	32	[ ]	[40]	[ ]	[50]	[ ]	[ ]
Newington Causeway	60	42	59	62	38	41	[26]	31	[26]	13	[ ]	[ ]
Norwich	72	60	67	62	45	48	[33]	31	[50]	[38]	[ ]	[ ]
Old Bailey	55	67	63	84	39	52	[50]	63	[33]	[38]	[ ]	[ ]
Reading	58	47	60	66	34	31	[33]	26	[25]	[46]	[50]	[ ]
St. Albans	46	46	72	68	38	34	[25]	45	[33]	26	[33]	[ ]
Snaresbrook	36	38	55	56	34	38	[25]	42	[29]	25	[50]	[ ]
Southend	64	50	77	88	51	35	[50]	[55]	[100]	[33]	—	[75]
Southwark	45	52	49	58	32	48	[13]	39	[33]	43	31	[ ]
Wood Green	46	38	47	53	32	33	[30]	17	[33]	[17]	[27]	42
Wales and Chester Circuit												

Crown Court centres	Violence against the person		Burglary		Theft and handling		Fraud and forgery		Criminal damage		Drug offences	
	17-20	21+	17-20	21+	17-20	21+	17-20	21+	17-20	21+	17-20	21+
Caernarfon	[1]33	36	65	83	[1]33	53	[1]100	[1]50	[1]100	[1]25	[1]—	[1]67
Cardiff	46	46	60	73	44	40	[1]46	42	[1]73	48	[1]75	49
Carmarthen	[1]33	25	[1]100	[1]57	[1]0	42	—	[1]46	[1]—	[1]—	—	[1]29
Chester	81	59	64	81	40	54	[1]30	46	[1]45	[1]39	[1]—	[1]65
Dolgellau	[1]100	[1]50	[1]50	[1]100	[1]0	[1]60	—	—	[1]100	[1]—	—	—
Haverfordwest	[1]—	[1]17	[1]100	[1]25	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]25	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—
Knutsford	38	55	83	90	27	38	[1]—	[1]71	[1]100	[1]88	[1]100	[1]75
Merthyr Tydfil	[1]52	35	57	56	[1]28	48	—	[1]60	[1]—	[1]—	—	[1]63
Mold	34	71	77	79	60	56	[1]67	39	[1]78	[1]50	[1]50	[1]70
Newport	37	38	60	61	30	32	[1]33	43	[1]67	[1]35	[1]100	62
Swansea	44	36	56	52	34	35	[1]57	30	[1]67	[1]63	[1]—	[1]62
Warrington	[1]40	48	70	68	30	42	—	[1]73	—	[1]50	[1]—	[1]57
Welshpool	—	[1]—	[1]—	[1]100	[1]0	[1]14	[1]—	[1]—	—	—	—	[1]100
Western Circuit												
Barnstaple	[1]14	[1]38	[1]66	[1]53	[1]70	26	[1]50	[1]43	[1]100	[1]50	—	[1]—
Bodmin	[1]57	22	68	74	34	26	[1]25	31	[1]50	[1]100	[1]—	[1]38
Bournemouth	54	34	53	63	42	35	[1]50	43	[1]20	[1]33	[1]—	[1]47
Bristol	39	44	71	58	29	34	[1]—	35	[1]—	18	[1]45	50
Dorchester	[1]57	[1]54	[1]43	[1]64	[1]67	[1]25	—	[1]50	[1]100	[1]—	—	[1]45
Exeter	44	50	66	58	26	40	[1]100	53	[1]33	[1]47	[1]100	40
Gloucester	[1]48	34	63	46	29	36	[1]40	40	[1]9	[1]25	[1]—	[1]55
Newport (Isle of Wight)	[1]33	[1]26	[1]67	[1]44	[1]—	[1]4	—	[1]38	—	[1]33	[1]33	8
Plymouth	[1]69	54	56	53	24	31	[1]—	49	[1]—	[1]50	[1]100	69
Portsmouth	47	46	38	47	21	17	[1]—	25	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	69
Salisbury	[1]13	[1]17	[1]67	[1]78	[1]40	[1]30	—	[1]75	—	—	—	—
Southampton	38	39	27	48	29	25	[1]25	22	[1]50	[1]20	[1]50	[1]75
Swindon	59	60	71	64	32	22	[1]—	[1]43	[1]100	[1]30	—	[1]40
Taunton	61	42	63	56	29	28	[1]50	[1]37	[1]—	[1]33	[1]—	[1]22
Winchester	[1]82	60	55	73	30	36	[1]—	39	[1]25	32	[1]50	[1]44
England and Wales	50	46	60	62	35	37	27	42	44	35	44	60

[1] denotes fewer than 25 persons sentenced in each age group.

Mr. Mesuum Ali Khan

Mr. Maddox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he asked the post in Islamabad to issue entry clearance to Mesuum Ali Khan (References: TH/28527/87; K223746; IMM/31449); when Mr. Khan will be issued with entry clearance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* After the appeal of Mesuum Ali Khan against refusal of entry clearance was allowed by an adjudicator on 11 October 1989, an application for leave to appeal to the immigration appeal tribunal was made on behalf of the entry clearance officer. That application has now been withdrawn and the entry clearance officer was notified on 1 February that entry clearance should be issued.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Live Births

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the latest information he has on live births and survival at low gestational age, and on live births with estimated gestation less than 28 weeks, in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 1 February 1990]:* In 1986 there were 106 live births with an estimated gestational age of less than 28 weeks. The remaining information is not available.

Child Benefit

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on behalf of how many children are parents receiving child benefit and what is the cost of paying it.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 1 February 1990]:* The number of children for whom child benefit is currently being paid in Northern Ireland is 456,000. The total amount of benefit paid for the year ended 31 March 1989 was £172,969,000. The administrative cost of paying the benefit in that year was £3,456,000.

TRANSPORT

London Assessment Studies

Mr. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy, after selecting the preferred option in stage 2B of the London assessment studies, to provide the resources necessary to implement all components of the proposals, including the public transport and traffic calming and management elements.

Mr. Atkins: I cannot anticipate decisions on what schemes will be taken forward or what priority they will have.

Mr. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if his Department will undertake a programme of publicity and public meetings on the proposals contained in stage 2B of the London assessment studies and its document, "Traffic in London"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: A full public consultation programme is already under way. Some 2,900 copies of the London

assessment studies reports, and 180,000 copies of summaries of the consultants work, with leaflets giving the Department's initial views, have been printed; 4,500 copies of the "Traffic in London" discussion document have been issued.

Displays of the assessment studies options have been mounted in public libraries and at other locations throughout the study areas. Arrangements have been made for Department of Transport officials to attend over 20 public meetings arranged by boroughs to explain the study options and the Department's initial views. The officials will answer questions about the "Traffic in London" initiatives.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps his Department took to ensure consistency in the level and detail of information its consultants have released on the proposals contained in stage 2B of the London assessment studies.

Mr. Atkins: The Department has sought to ensure consistency by arranging for discussions between the consultants.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will make it his policy that, before reaching a final decision on stage 2B of the London assessment studies and the introduction of the priority route network proposals, their combined impact on traffic and movement in the capital will be assessed using the LTS model and that the results will be published.

Mr. Atkins: We are proposing a pilot scheme which will assess the effectiveness of priority routes. We are also consulting local authorities and others on the composition of the network. It will not be possible to estimate the overall effects of the network until this work is completed. Any schemes adopted following the assessment studies will be subject to further detailed appraisal.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether he will undertake and publish a detailed analysis of the environmental impact of the proposals contained in stage 2B of the London assessment studies and his Department's document "Traffic in London";

(2) whether, before reaching a final decision on stage 2B of the London assessment studies, and the introduction of the priority route network proposals outlined in "Traffic in London", they will be assessed in the context of the Pearce report on sustainable development.

Mr. Atkins: A full and detailed analysis of the environmental impact of the assessment study options is contained in the consultants' stage 2 reports published on 14 December. The Pearce report findings will be taken into account along with all relevant factors when decisions are taken on what proposals, if any, should be taken forward.

Rail Electrification

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has now had with the chairman of British Rail on the time scale of the electrification of the Edinburgh-Linlithgow-Falkirk-Glasgow and Edinburgh-Dundee-Aberdeen lines.

Mr. Portillo: It is for British Rail to bring forward any worthwhile proposals for electrification.

Airmiss (Tranent)

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many passengers and crew were on the BAC1-11 flight which was involved in an airmiss with a Tornado aircraft over Tranent on 2 August 1989; what airline it belonged to; what was its flight number; and from which airport it was flying.

Mr. McLoughlin: Anonymity in airmiss investigation is preserved in the interest of full and frank reporting of incidents. This does not inhibit thorough investigation or follow-up action to remedy any failings which are uncovered. There is no reason to change this practice over the incident at Tranent on 2 August 1989.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will amend the air traffic regulations to establish the responsibility of an air traffic controller for vectoring aircraft in controlled or special rules airspace in respect of both the vertical and horizontal planes, in line with the recommendation of the joint airmiss working group following the incident over Tranent on 2 August 1989.

Mr. McLoughlin: I understand that amendments to the manual of air traffic services in line with the joint airmiss working group recommendations have already been agreed and are included in the next amendment list to the regulations.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will amend the air traffic regulations to establish the responsibility of an air traffic controller to instruct and advise pilots in order to ensure that they remain in regulated airspace even when such pilots accept a visual approach or other relaxation from full control, as recommended by the joint airmiss working group following the incident over Tranent on 2 August 1989.

Mr. McLoughlin: I understand that amendments to the manual of air traffic services requiring controllers to ensure that the clearances they issue do not allow aircraft inadvertently to leave regulated airspace have already been agreed and are included in the next amendment list to the regulations. Regulations allow captains of aircraft to make a conscious decision to leave regulated airspace should they so require.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to ensure that civil pilots have readily available information as to the vertical limits of regulated airspace as recommended by the joint airmiss working group following the incident over Tranent on 2 August 1989.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Civil Aviation Authority has the statutory responsibility for the safety regulation of civil aviation. I understand that it is the CAA's view that the publication of the vertical limits of regulated airspace in the United Kingdom aeronautical information publication, on the CAA topographical maps and on commercially available approach charts and en route maps meets all reasonable requirements for the availability of this information.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, in the light of the deliberations of the joint airmiss working group into an incident over Tranent on 2 August 1989, he will now extend the area of controlled airspace around Edinburgh airport.

Mr. McLoughlin: The joint airmiss working group made no recommendation to change the dimensions of controlled airspace around Edinburgh airport. All regulated airspace in the United Kingdom is reviewed regularly to ensure that it remains appropriate to the traffic density. There are no plans to change the dimensions of the Edinburgh CTR/SRZ or those areas of the Scottish TMA associated with Edinburgh procedures.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, in view of the deliberations of the joint airmiss working group into an incident over Tranent on 2 August 1989, he will direct the Civil Aviation Authority to provide secondary surveillance radar at Edinburgh.

Mr. McLoughlin: As part of a national programme instituted before the Tranent airmiss secondary surveillance radar is being installed at Edinburgh airport and is expected to be operational before the end of May 1990.

Barton-le-Clay Bypass

Mr. John Carlisle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on what evidence and information he based his decision to decline the provision of a footbridge over the newly constructed A6 Barton-le-Clay bypass.

Mr. Atkins: The joint decision of the Secretaries of State for the Environment and Transport was based on evidence given at the public inquiries about forecast traffic flows, known pedestrian-cyclist movements and the estimated cost of a footbridge.

Mr. John Carlisle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received regarding the provision of a footbridge over the newly constructed A6 Barton-le-Clay bypass.

Mr. Atkins: Requests that a bridge be provided have been received from my hon. Friend, Barton-le-Clay parish council, South Bedfordshire district council and a small number of private individuals.

Mr. John Carlisle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will reconsider his decision to refuse the provision of a footbridge over the newly constructed A6 Barton-le-Clay bypass.

Mr. Atkins: I have undertaken to review the position once the bypass is open to traffic.

Pensioners (Bus Passes)

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish in the *Official Report* the estimated cost of providing free bus travel for pensioners in England and Wales.

Mr. Portillo: Total local authority expenditure on all travel concessions for pensioners, disabled persons and children in 1989-90 is estimated at £350 million. No information is available on how much of this expenditure is on free bus travel for pensioners.

Lorries

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has recently taken any initiatives to combat the environmental problems caused by lorries in residential areas and town centres.

Mr. Atkins: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 23 January the publication of two documents that address the environmental problem lorries can cause in residential areas and town centres. "Lorries in the Community" and the "Lorries and Traffic Management" manual were published following a lorry management study co-sponsored by my Department, the Civic Trust and the County Surveyors Society. Copies of these documents are in the House Libraries.

One of the aims of the trunk road programme is to improve the environment by removing through traffic from unsuitable roads in towns and villages. Since 1979, over 100 bypasses and relief roads have been completed. There are over 150 bypasses and relief roads in the current programme. Other roads also have a bypassing effect.

New limits on the harmful gases which can be emitted by all kinds of vehicles have now been agreed in Europe. They are being introduced during the early 1990s. A second stage of limits is going to be discussed later this year. Limits will be set on particulates as well as on gaseous emissions. This means that in the future we can look forward to lorries and cars which are much cleaner.

New rules will mean that the noise from the heaviest lorries will almost have been halved during the last decade. The European Commission is now working on further proposals for tighter vehicle noise limits. The Quite Heavy Vehicle 90 project has also been undertaken. This has been a collaborative partnership between industry, Government and research organisations to develop techniques to reduce noise from heavy lorries. The project included research into developing quieter engines, exhaust system panels and the enclosures around engines.

London Underground

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has received for investment in improving the conditions for passengers in the rush hours on the London Underground.

Mr. Portillo: The Government have already approved a major programme of investment, which includes the modernisation of the Central line, improvements to Liverpool Street and Angel stations, and the purchase of new trains. We have made financial provision for the extension of the Jubilee line, for congestion-relief measures at the most overcrowded stations, for a substantial programme of train-refurbishment, and for the modernisation of the Northern line. We expect to take a decision later this year on the introduction of a Bill for a new line to relieve congestion in the central area of London. Such investments will benefit all passengers, but will be particularly welcome to those who travel at the busiest peak periods.

Birmingham Cross-city Line

Dame Jill Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has now considered British Rail's formal investment case for the electrification of the Birmingham cross-city line; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Parkinson: I received British Rail's initial evaluation of tenders for electric rolling stock on 29 January 1990, and have now considered it in the light of earlier proposals for fixed works. The case for electrification is now fully established. I welcome the proposal. Passengers have had to put up with old and

worn-out trains for some time. The modernisation of this line will greatly improve the quality and reliability of the service for the people of the west midlands. The new rolling stock will offer a more comfortable ride, better lighting, sliding doors and faster journey times. The benefits will go wider than the cross-city line, as the stock will also be used on Coventry-Wolverhampton services in off-peak periods.

I have given approval to the whole scheme in principle and for works to electrify the line at a cost of about £18 million which will be completed by 1992. The scheme will be jointly funded by British Rail and the West Midlands passenger transport executive.

British Rail will select the type of electric rolling stock that it wishes to purchase later in the year when it has decided which of the offers it has had from manufacturers will give best value for money.

Planning Application (Redbridge)

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out the extent to which the proposal in the planning application No. 322/88, LRO(T) Reference GLRT 41 35027/3/0287, which the Department of Transport on 25 April 1988 directed the London borough of Redbridge to refuse, would have required modifications to the Made Line and Side Roads Order 1986.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 2 February 1990]:* The need to maintain minimum clearance of underground structures at Wanstead LT station would have required the centre line of the developers' wider tunnel to run about 1·5m north of that established for the Department's tunnel by the made London-Great Yarmouth Trunk Road (A12) (Eastway to Eastern Avenue) and (Slip Roads at Wanstead) Order 1986. The developers' tunnel needed to be wider to accommodate mechnical ventilation equipment made necessary by its extra length.

That would have required republication of the line order. The planning application would also have affected slip roads at the Green Man interchange and in turn related made side road orders.

Made Line and Side Roads Order 1986

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what modifications have been made since the date of Made Line and Side Roads Order 1986 by the Department of Transport to the intended line of the proposed London-Great Yarmouth trunk road (A12) in order to take account of sight restrictions or for any other reason; and whether such alteration will require modifications to the Made Line and Side Roads Order 1986.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 2 February 1990]:* The main line of the route is fixed by the London-Great Yarmouth Trunk Road (A12) (Eastway to Eastern Avenue and Slip Roads at Wanstead) Order 1986, made following the inquiry in 1983. The proposed line of the dual carriageway has remained unchanged since that date.

EMPLOYMENT

Employment and Training (Lancashire)

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what programmes designed to boost employment and training are available to employers in Lancashire; and what they will cost during the financial year 1990-91.

Mr. Nicholls: All my Department's employment, enterprise and training measures are available to boost employment and training in Lancashire, as elsewhere. Measures available to employers and the self-employed include the jobcentre service, business growth training and the enterprise allowance scheme; many employers also participate in programmes designed to equip the unemployed and young people for employment, such as employment training and YTS. My Department's expenditure plans for 1990-91 are contained in chapter 6 of the public expenditure White Paper, published last month.

Training Grants

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to increase a trainee's choice of skills he may acquire by paying training grants direct to young people.

Mr. Nicholls: Trainee choice will be widened under the new arrangements for youth training, to be run by training and enterprise councils from spring 1990 onwards. These arrangements will in themselves widen the range of training opportunities and offer higher level qualifications. The Government have no plans at present to give training grants directly to young people.

YTS

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people are currently involved in YTS.

Mr. Nicholls: At 31 December 1989, a toeal of 386,000 young people were in training on YTS schemes in Great Britain.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are currently unemployed.

Mr. Nicholls: The information is available in the Library. In December 1989 the level of unemployment, seasonally adjusted, in the United Kingdom was 1,635,000.

Training Costs

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of total Government spending on skills and competence for work and youth training programmes for 1989-90 and for 1992-93; and what is the cost *(a)* per capita of total population and *(b)* per trainee; what is his estimate of spending for these purposes on the same basis in (i) Holland, (ii) West Germany and (iii) France for the latest available year.

Mr. Eggar: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the public expenditure White Paper published on 30 January 1990.

The total spend on skills and competence for work is forecast at £2,481 million for 1989-90 and planned at £2,392 million for 1992-93. The cost per capita of the total population is £44·60 for 1989-90 and £42·62 for 1992-93. It is not possible to provide a cost per trainee, as some of the expenditure is on programmes not directed towards individual trainees. Comparable information is not available for Holland, West Germany or France.

Computer Security

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps his Department has and is taking to improve the security of its computer systems.

Mr. Eggar: It is not the policy of the Employment Department to make public details of computer security systems, as such information would be of assistance to potential attackers. During the development phase of all computer systems, the Employment Department undertakes a structured analysis of security risks and requirements. The adequacy of the installed countermeasures is periodically reviewed throughout the lifetime of such projects. All security analysis draws on central guidance, the applications of which is kept under continuous review and has been tightened recently.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what response he proposes to make to the Commission for Racial Equality report, "Ethnic Minorities and the Graduate Labour Market"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: The CRE report "Ethnic Minorities and the Graduate Labour Market" makes a number of useful recommendations on action that could be taken to help improve the employment opportunities of graduates from the ethnic minorities. The recommendations are directed to institutions of higher education and employers, who, it is hoped, will note them and, where necessary, take appropriate action. Unnecessarily restricting access to employment and higher education opportunities for ethnic minority graduates, or potential graduates, is not only morally wrong but makes bad business sense, particularly in the face of the recent tightening of the graduate labour market.

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many times the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service has been used to settle industrial disputes since 1979; and if he will publish a list of all references made and the outcome in each case.

Mr. Nicholls: Information on the overall number of disputes that ACAS has helped to settle is published in the ACAS annual reports, copies of which are held in the Library. The names of individual parties to such disputes, and the outcomes, are not comprehensively listed and this information is not available.

Small Business

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what evaluation his Department has made of the potential gains to small business through the formation of consorzi; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Tim Eggar: Italian consorzi are based on the principle of small firms combining to undertake marketing, distribution and other activities together. This has clear potential benefits for the firms involved. It is, however, a matter for firms themselves to decide whether to opt for this way of organising their activities.

Wages (North-West)

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures he proposes to introduce to increase wage rates in the north-west region.

Mr. Nicholls: Pay in the north-west, as elsewhere, is generally a matter for employers and employees to decide for themselves in the light of all the relevant circumstances. Any unnecessary intervention by the Government could only be harmful to business and to prospects for jobs.

Explosives Act

Mr. Alison: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the requirements in section 6 of the Explosives Act 1875, which relate to an applicant's submission for a draft licence for a new factory or magazine, for consideration by the Health and Safety Executive of the environmental and social repercussions which might follow from the approval of the draft licence.

Mr. Nicholls: Section 6 of the Explosives Act 1875 requires that a new explosives factory or magazine shall not be established on a site except in a manner specified in the licence issued by the Health and Safety Executive. The terms of the licence usually specify matters entirely concerned with the safety and security of the explosives at the proposed site.

Section 7 of the Act requires that the local authority grants assent to such a factory or magazine and must hear the applicant and any persons objecting. At such a hearing environmental and social considerations in addition to safety and security matters may be discussed. In addition, a proposed development for an explosives factory is subject to the normal requirements of the planning legislation.

Mr. Alison: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what draft licence under the Explosives Act 1875 has been received, approved, or rejected by the Health and Safety Executive in relation to a new factory or magazine at Steeton Hall farm, South Milford, near Leeds.

Mr. Nicholls: No draft licence has been received by the Health and Safety Executive in connection with Steeton Hall farm, South Milford, Leeds.

Trade Unions

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list those industries, professions and services in which more than 75 per cent. of the employees are represented by trade unions.

Mr. Nicholls: There are no data available on trade unions that enable a full answer to be given. However, there is information relating to the divisions of the standard industrial classification. The most recent data come from a specially commissioned survey of employees conducted for the Department in February and March 1989.

Regarding trade union membership, the survey showed that only in one division of the standard industrial classification—energy and water supply—does the level of trade union membership among employees exceed 75 per cent.

The survey also showed that in two divisions, over 75 per cent. of employees worked in establishments that recognised trade unions for purposes of collective bargaining. These are energy and water supply, and transport and communication.

Earnings

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the total earnings before tax, now and in 1979, for those on half and three quarters average earnings, both in cash terms and inflation adjusted terms.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested is provided in the following table:

Weekly earnings in 1979 and 1989, in cash and real terms.

	1979 in cash terms £	*1979 in cash terms £*	*1989 in cash terms £*
Half average earnings	44·6	93·8	119·9
Three quarters average earnings	66·8	140·7	179·8

Notes

1. Gross weekly earnings of all full-time adult employees. Figures as at April of each year.
2. 1979 real terms figures are the cash figures revalued to April 1989 prices using the RPI (all items) index.

Source: New Earnings Survey.

State Earnings-Related Pension Scheme

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, after how long a delay and under what conditions those opting out of SERPS and claiming incentive payments to do so can rejoin the scheme later.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: There are no restrictions on an individual who is a member of an occupational or personal pension scheme rejoining SERPS at any time.

WALES

Benefit Rules

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to review housing benefit rules in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: Decisions on housing benefit policy are made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security.

Environmental Health Officers

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the present number of environmental health officers presently employed by Welsh local authorities, listed by district area for the past five years; and what is the present number of environmental health officer vacancies throughout Wales.

Mr. Grist: The number of local authority non-manual staff employed in environmental health in Wales for each of the last five years is given in the table. It is not possible to identify separately the number of environmental health officers included in this number. Figures by authority are not available centrally, neither is information on vacancies.

Number of non-manual staff employed in environmental health[1]

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*[2]1989*
Districts	833	824	815	843	862
Counties	14	12	12	9	11
Total	847	836	827	852	873

[1] Full-time equivalents as at September for each year.
[2] Figures for September 1989 are provisional.

Doctors and Nurses

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will identify the number of doctors and nurses employed in Wales *(a)* now and *(b)* in June 1979.

Mr. Grist: The available information is shown in the tables:

Medical and dental staff (whole-time equivalents) in post at 30 September[1]

	Number
1979	2,181
1988	2,545

General medical practitioners[2] *(number) as at 1 October*

	Number
1979	1,339
1988	1,599

Nursing and midwifery staff (whole-time equivalents) in post at 30 September[1 3]

	Number
1979	23,031
1989	28,037

[1] Employed in the hospital and community service.
[2] Unrestricted principals.
[3] No adjustment has been made to take account of the change in working hours in 1980 from 40 to 37·5 hours a week.

Sewage Outlets

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the number and location of untreated sewage outlets into the rivers and coastal waters of Wales.

Mr. Grist: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) on 8 November 1989.

Anthrax (Llay)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will grant money to Clwyd county council as compensation for its unforeseen outlay consequent upon the anthrax outbreak at Llay; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Expenditure associated with local government's animal health responsibilities has been allowed for in the 1989-90 rate support grant settlement

and reflected in Clwyd county council's grant-related expenditure assessment for the rate support grant purposes.

Local authorities have discretionary powers to incur expenditure on unforeseen incidents such as the anthrax outbreak and would normally include an amount in their budgets for such contingencies.

The Government recognise that it would be unreasonable for substantial extra expenditure incurred in exceptional circumstances to fall wholly upon ratepayers. Consequently, the Bellwin scheme, which is designed to deal with extraordinary costs arising from emergencies, allows for the provision of special financial assistance to local authorities in certain circumstances. We are ready to consider a detailed and fully costed application. But, on the information available to the Department we do not believe that the scale of additional expenditure in this instance would justify use of the scheme.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will meet members of Clwyd county council and officials to discuss the financial impact of the 1989 anthrax outbreak.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: No.

Queensferry High School

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will meet members of staff of Queensferry high school concerning the future of the high school;

(2) if he will meet the Parent-Teachers Association of the Queensferry high school to discuss their concerns regarding the future of the high school;

(3) if he will visit the Queensferry high school.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: No. This is a matter initially for the local education authority which has a duty to consult interested persons before publishing statutory notices.

Cancer Treatment

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he proposes to make a statement on cancer treatment services for north Wales patients.

Mr. Grist: A comprehensive study of cancer treatment services in north Wales, commissioned by the Welsh Office, is presently the subject of wide consultation and responses have been invited by 31 March 1990. We do not propose to make any announcement until responses to consultation have been carefully considered.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the costs of collecting and administering the present rating system in Wales for the last five years; and what is the expected cost of collecting and administering the poll tax.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The costs of collecting and administering the present rating system in Wales for each of the last five years are shown in the table:

Net current expenditure

Year	£ million
1985-86	7·89
1986-87	8·41
1987-88	8·90
1988-89	9·76
1989-90	[1]9·80

[1] As recorded in local authority budgets for 1989-90.

The 1989 report of the expenditure sub-group to the settlement working group estimated that the cost of collection and administration of the community charge in Wales in 1990-91 would be £25·6 million.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list in appropriate order, according to the latest available information, the community charge for 1990-91 for each of the county councils in Wales and his own assessment;

(2) if he will list in appropriate order, according to the latest available information, the community charge for 1990-91 for each of the district councils in Wales and his own assessment.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: We have received no information from local authorities in Wales on 1990-91 community charge levels. Charging authorities are being asked to return this information in April. Details of my assessments of the county and district components of community charges for spending in line with the 1990-91 revenue support grant settlement are given in the following tables:

District component of community charge[1]

	For standard spending £	Assuming present spending patterns £
Alyn and Deeside	26·97	29
Colwyn	26·97	31
Delyn	26·97	45
Glyndwr	26·97	26
Rhuddlan	26·97	43
Wrexham Maelor	26·97	29
Carmarthen	26·97	10
Ceredigion	26·97	21
Dinefwr	26·97	8
Llanelli	29·23	42
Preseli Pembrokeshire	26·97	12
South Pembrokeshire	26·97	10
Blaenau Gwent	26·97	42
Islwyn	26·97	28
Monmouth	26·97	32
Newport	29·23	34
Torfaen	26·97	26
Aberconwy	26·97	38
Arfon	26·97	23
Dwyfor	26·97	19
Meirionnydd	26·97	44
Ynys Mon	26·97	38
Cynon Valley	29·23	23
Merthyr Tydfil	29·23	27
Ogwr	26·97	33
Rhondda	29·23	12
Rhymney Valley	26·97	38
Taff Ely	26·97	8
Brecknock	26·97	25
Montgomeryshire	26·97	11
Radnorshire	26·97	21
Cardiff	26·97	29
Vale of Glamorgan	26·97	19
Port Talbot	26·97	23
Lliw Valley	26·97	16
Neath	26·97	26
Swansea	26·97	31
Clwyd	145·55	155
Dyfed	145·12	142
Gwent	144·91	141
Gwynedd	145·55	130
Mid Glamorgan	144·81	145

	For standard spending £	Assuming present spending patterns £
Powys	145·55	108
South Glamorgan	145·55	128
West Glamorgan	145·55	184

[1] Includes community councils.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list in appropriate order, according to the latest available information, by how much in cash and percentage terms each of the district councils in Wales are planning to increase their spending in 1990-91;

(2) if he will list in appropriate order, according to the latest available information, the planned spending in 1990-91 of all district councils in Wales and the consequent percentage of his standard spending assessment;

(3) if he will list in appropriate order, according to the latest available information, by how much in cash and percentage terms each of the county councils in Wales are planning to increase their spending in 1990-91;

(4) if he will list in appropriate order, according to the latest available information, the planned spending in 1990-91 of all county councils in Wales and the consequent percentage of his standard spending assessment.

Mr. Grist: We have received no information from Welsh local authorities on their planned spending in 1990-91. Authorities are being asked to return budget details in March.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales pursuant to his statement on 24 January, *Official Report*, columns 993-94, what proposals he has received from South Glamorgan, Powys, Gwynedd, Newport and Cardiff councils for lower community charges for the forthcoming financial year.

Mr. Grist: My right hon. Friend has received no such proposals.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what analysis he has made of Cardiff city council's planned spending for 1990-91; and what is his assessment of how much of that planned spending will be expended in the financial year;

(2) what analysis he has made of South Glamorgan council's planned spending for 1990-91; and what is his assessment of how much of that planned spending will be expended in the financial year.

Mr. Grist: My right hon. Friend has made no such assessments.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the estimates published by the Council of Welsh District Councils on 20 December 1989 with regard to the average community charge for Wales in 1990-91 and the 1990-91 total community charge for Cardiff and South Glamorgan councils.

Mr. Grist: The estimates published by the Council of Welsh Districts on 20 December 1989 were of an average community charge in Wales of £209 and a community charge in Cardiff (including South Glamorgan county council's precept) of £193. It appears that these estimates were based on levels of spending 4 per cent. in excess of the 1990-91 local authority revenue settlement.

Our assessment is that such increases are too high. The 1990-91 settlement for Wales allows for an increase of 7·1 per cent. in local authority expenditure—entirely adequate to maintain and where appropriate develop council services. On this basis the average community charge in Wales would be £173. However, if Cardiff city council and South Glamorgan county council were to increase their spending line with the settlement the community charge in Cardiff need be only £157.

Press reports indicate that on the basis of the expenditure plans apparently under consideration by the two councils the community charge in Cardiff could be as high as £235. We have urged both councils to exercise restraints over their spending in order to contain it to levels nearer the Department's plans. Such action would bring very significant benefits for chargepayers in Cardiff whilst allowing services to be maintained and developed.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total budget of each county and district council in Gwynedd and Clwyd in *(a)* 1988-89 and *(b)* 1989-90.

Mr. Grist: The information requested is published in table 8.5 of "Welsh Local Government Financial Statistics" No. 13, 1989.

Abattoirs

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many abattoirs there are in each county in Wales; how many of them are up to EEC standards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: The number of abattoirs by county is as follows:

	Number
Clwyd	17
Dyfed	12
Gwent	3
Gwynedd	9
Mid Glamorgan	6
Powys	12
South Glamorgan	—
West Glamorgan	6

These include three establishments which are EEC approved.

Airfield (Mid-Wales)

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to build an airfield in mid-Wales during the next five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: We have no plans to do so. The provision of an airfield would be a commercial decision more appropriate for the private sector.

Hill Livestock Allowance

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total amount of hill livestock compensatory allowance contributions to the Meirionnydd Nant Conwy constituency in *(a)* 1988 and *(b)* 1989.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Hill livestock compensatory allowance (HLCA) statistics are not held on a constituency basis. However, the figures for Gwynedd for the two calendar years were:

(a) 1988—£5·82 million.
(b) 1989—£5·96 million.

Tourism

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total budget of the Wales tourist board in 1988-89 and 1989-90; and how much money was allocated to its north Wales office during both years.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The WTB's gross budget was £11,381,000 for 1988-89, and £13,692,000 for 1989-90. The board operates three regional offices in Swansea, Machynlleth and Colwyn Bay. The 1988-89 provision for the Colwyn Bay office was £471,260 and the corresponding figure for 1989-90 is £516,500. These funds are primarily for salaries and general administration. Much of the board's other expenditure, although administered from Cardiff, is of direct benefit to north Wales.

Radiation Hotspots

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action his Department has undertaken following the discovery of three radiation hotspots at Talycafn, Llanfairfechan and Trawsfynydd in Gwynedd.

Mr. Grist: A report that radiation hotspots had been discovered at Talycafn, Llanfairfechan and Trawsfynydd was investigated by Government scientists who found no evidence to support the claims.

Development Board for Rural Wales

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total budget of *(a)* the Development Board for Rural Wales and *(b)* Mid Wales Development in (i) 1988-89 and (ii) 1989-90.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Mid Wales Development was the former marketing title of the Development Board for Rural Wales, which the board no longer uses to promote its activities. It had no separate budget. The further information requested on the DBRW budget is as follows:

1988-89 Gross provision £	*1989-90 Gross provision* £
18,183,000	19,384,000

Land Authority

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total budget of the Land Authority in Wales in *(a)* 1988-89 and *(b)* 1989-90; and what proportion of these moneys were spent in Gwynedd and Clwyd.

Mr. Grist: Expenditure on land purchases by the Land Authority for Wales in 1988-89 was £9·5 million. I have asked the chairman of the authority if he would write to the hon. Gentleman to give an estimate of the authority's expenditure in the current financial year and details of the amounts spent in Gwynedd and Clwyd.

Tai Cymru

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total budget of Tai Cymru in *(a)* 1988-89 and *(b)* 1989-90; and what proportion of this money was spent in north Wales.

Mr. Grist: In 1988-89, the Housing Corporation in Wales' gross outturn was £72·89 million. Of this, 13·7 per cent. was spent in Gwynedd and Clwyd. The figures for 1989-90 are not yet available.

Sheltered Placement

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many employment opportunities the sheltered placement scheme currently offers in Wales; and how many places have been offered in total in Wales since the scheme started in 1985.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The number of sheltered placements offered in Wales has increased from 29 in 1985 to 395 as at 31 December 1989, the latest date for which information is available.

Disabled Employees

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales under the present disabled employee quota system, how many Welsh companies have been prosecuted since 1960; and what has been the average fine resulting from prosecutions.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: There has been one prosecution in Wales since 1960 under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944. The case was dismissed.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of registered disabled adults are in *(a)* full-time, *(b)* part-time and *(c)* home-based employment in Wales.

Mr. Grist: The information is not held centrally.

Earnings

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the latest figures for average gross earnings per week of *(a)* disabled adult men, *(b)* disabled adult women, *(c)* the male working population in general and *(d)* the female working population in general in Wales.

Mr. Grist: Figures for earnings of disabled persons in full-time employment in Great Britain are contained in table 3.1 of report 2 of the OPCS surveys of disability in Great Britain—"The financial circumstances of disabled adults living in private households"—published in November 1988 by HMSO and available in the House of Commons Library.

Corresponding statistics for the disabled in Wales are not available, but figures for average gross weekly earnings obtained from the new earnings surveys were £238·6 and £168 for all full-time adult males and females respectively in April 1989.

Disabled People

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total number of registered disabled people in Wales in each year since 1979.

Mr. Grist: The numbers of people in Wales on local authority registers for the disabled in each year since 1979 were as shown in the following table:

	Persons with a mental handicap	Others[1]
1979	n/a	70,043
1980	n/a	75,096
1981	n/a	84,291
1982	n/a	91,435
1983	n/a	100,037
1984	n/a	109,729
1985	n/a	119,091
1986	n/a	130,872
1987	n/a	138,302
1988	9,470	144,770
1989	9,726	149,612

[1] Includes the blind, deaf and persons with other classes of physical handicap.

River Quality Standards

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which rivers in Wales do not comply with European Community river quality standards; and what steps are being taken to improve them.

Mr. Grist: There is no EC legislation setting general quality standards for rivers. However, the United Kingdom has designated some 50,000 km of waterways for the purposes of the EC directive "Quality of freshwater needing protection or improvement in order to support fish life" (78/659/EEC). In 1984, a survey which formed the basis of a report to the European Commission and which was undertaken in England and Wales by the former water authorities showed that well over 90 per cent. of these waterways met all the directive's mandatory standards and in Wales only one length of designated river, a tributary of the Rhymney, failed. Another survey which is being conducted in England and Wales by the National Rivers Authority is currently under way and the results will be placed in the Library as soon as they are available. The NRA is now responsible for the control of water pollution in England and Wales and has wide powers to seek improvements in river quality when they may be needed.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

St. John the Baptist School, Dartmouth

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he hopes to make a substantive reply to the letter from the hon. Member for South Hams concerning the specific points made by the head teacher of St. John the Baptist primary school, Mildon lane, Dartmouth, in his letter of 3 November 1989 to the Secretary of State which were not covered in his letter to the head teacher of 6 December 1989.

Mr. Alan Howarth: A reply will be sent as soon as possible.

Computer Security

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps his Department has and is taking to improve the security of its computer systems.

Mrs. Rumbold: For unclassified but sensitive systems, Departments are expected to follow CCTA guidance covering all aspects of IT security and the application of this guidance has been tightened recently. CCTA advice is kept under continuous review and is based on analysis of security risks and requirements using structured methods such as CCTA's risk analysis and management methodology (CRAMM) which has also been made commercially available. More stringent conditions apply to classified systems.

Further Education (Grants)

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has as to how much each local education authority in England and Wales has allocated for discretionary grants to students undertaking full-time and sandwich further education courses for each of the last five years.

Mr. Jackson: The available data is listed in the table.

Discretionary awards made under section 2 of the 1962 Education Act for further education courses at polytechnics and colleges.

	1986-87 £000s	1987-88 £000s
Barking[1]	217·0	238·1
Barnet	203·3	191·5
Bexley	345·9	240·1
Brent	2,869·2	2,675·6
Bromley[1]	106·3	173·5
Croydon	251·6	315·2
Ealing[1]	220·6	297·3
Enfield[1]	239·6	321·8
Haringey[1]	346·1	326·5
Harrow	74·3	47·6
Havering[1]	183·1	256·1
Hillingdon	367·1	297·0
Hounslow	188·4	127·2
Kingston upon Thames	35·7	33·0
Merton[1]	119·5	55·6
Newham	329·4	386·5
Redbridge	43·2	68·2
Richmond upon Thames[1]	55·9	43·6
Sutton	152·0	186·2
Waltham Forest	407·6	535·2
Inner London[1]	1,498·7	1,854·0
Birmingham[1]	399·0	444·5
Coventry	314·4	360·6
Dudley	201·4	335·1
Sandwell[1]	201·7	385·6
Solihull[1]	4·7	3·4
Walsall	625·5	553·4
Wolverhampton	0·0	0·0
Knowsley	1,079·1	1,265·5
Liverpool[1]	1,886·4	2,158·1
St. Helens[1]	439·6	476·6
Sefton[1]	105·4	98·2
Wirral[1]	223·3	1,169·4
Bolton	779·0	750·9
Bury[1]	425·8	560·6
Manchester[1]	1,346·1	1,393·1
Oldham	338·3	343·2
Rochdale	293·7	267·9
Salford[1]	407·0	419·0
Stockport[1]	358·0	370·3
Tameside[1]	193·8	187·0
Trafford	208·5	176·4
Wigan[1]	655·0	595·6
Barnsley	508·4	716·0
Doncaster[1]	132·1	400·2
Rotherham	452·1	587·8
Sheffield[2]	1,139·6	1,383·7
Bradford	1,306·5	2,068·4
Calderdale	123·5	210·1
Kirklees[1]	877·2	944·4
Leeds	984·8	1,384·6

	1986-87 £000s	1987-88 £000s
Wakefield	595·5	758·6
Gateshead[1]	163·1	180·2
Newcastle-upon-Tyne[1]	300·6	368·6
North Tyneside[1]	585·8	730·8
South Tyneside[1]	170·5	223·8
Sunderland	1,024·0	909·7
Isles of Scilly[1]	73·6	82·9
Avon[1]	1,330·3	1,375·4
Bedfordshire	742·8	1,155·1
Berkshire[1]	120·8	610·2
Buckinghamshire[1]	159·8	261·2
Cambridgeshire	434·9	511·6
Cheshire	2,337·7	2,491·6
Cleveland	640·3	701·6
Cornwall	1,082·2	921·1
Cumbria[1]	594·6	2,068·3
Derbyshire[1]	2,186·2	2,048·9
Devon	2,874·9	2,662·0
Dorset	1,192·2	1,305·1
Durham[1]	500·2	403·7
East Sussex	874·4	840·4
Essex	3,439·7	3,237·4
Gloucestershire	1,685·7	1,466·0
Hampshire[1]	3,737·6	3,917·8
Hereford and Worcester	0·0	0·0
Hertfordshire	319·2	369·2
Humberside	1,761·3	1,968·5
Isle of Wight	171·2	199·4
Kent	4,073·4	3,610·2
Lancashire	3,026·5	2,862·8
Leicestershire	2,887·5	3,310·3
Lincolnshire	1,329·3	1,337·5
Norfolk[1]	825·0	811·7
North Yorkshire	3,675·3	4,234·9
Northamptonshire	253·1	216·1
Northumberland[1]	988·6	970·0
Nottinghamshire[1]	1,499·1	1,749·8
Oxfordshire	553·5	384·2
Shropshire	429·4	703·2
Somerset	463·2	703·2
Staffordshire[1]	350·5	862·1
Suffolk	1,294·4	1,378·0
Surrey[1]	473·7	559·5
Warwickshire	390·5	775·8
West Sussex[1]	307·5	299·4
Wiltshire	973·7	1,012·1
Clwyd	966·8	1,049·3
Dyfed[1]	1,002·7	879·7
Gwent	1,530·4	1,543·5
Gwynedd[1]	790·6	803·2
Mid-Glamorgan[1]	160·5	96·7
Powys	473·5	455·8
South Glamorgan	403·6	428·7
West Glamorgan[1]	111·8	76·2
England and Wales	82,597·4	91,762·5

[1] Some authorities are unable to distinguish awards made to all students attending courses of further education, and include some such payments in their returns for higher education. The figures given here are therefore under-estimates of the total amounts.

Preventable Loss

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment he has made of the extent of preventable loss arising from theft or misappropriation in his Department.

Mrs. Rumbold: There is no assessment as such, as known preventable losses are prevented. The Department takes all reasonable steps to ensure that loss arising from theft or misappropriation is prevented. Financial controls operate to this end and the Department's internal audit unit provides assurance on their adequacy, effectiveness and application. The annual internal risk assessment and plan of work takes account of potential exposure. The Department's annual report of fraud to Her Majesty's Treasury for the financial year 1988-89 contained no cases of fraud perpetrated within the Department. Reassessment would occur in the light of evidence of losses from theft or misappropriation in the Department.

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will list the number of professionally qualified loss prevention staff employed by his Department and the qualifications held by such staff, excluding qualifications obtained during police or military service.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Department does not employ any professionally qualified loss prevention staff. Physical security is provided by private security companies and the Property Services Agency.

DEFENCE

Community Charge

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the rates of pay of the 411 Royal Air Force apprentices and technicians classified as students for community charge purposes and referred to in his answer to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr of 29 January, *Official Report*, column *62*.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: These personnel are paid at various rates ranging from £3,708 per annum to £9,399 per annum.

Mr. Colin Wallace

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Arundel (Mr. Marshall) of 30 January, *Official Report*, columns *110-13*, if he will establish an internal inquiry into the reasons why certain relevant records were not made available to Ministers; and what steps he is taking to ensure that there is no recurrence of such circumstances.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State told the House on 1 February, an inquiry is in hand within the MOD into how papers were overlooked and the outcome will be reported to the House.

Airmiss (Tranent)

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will identify the unit and base of the Tornado aircraft which was involved in an airmiss with a civil BAC1-11 flight over Tranent on 2 August 1989.

Mr. Neubert: It is our policy to preserve the anonymity in airmiss publications in order to encourage full and frank reporting of airmisses and thus ensure that flight safety is not compromised.

DROPS Vehicles

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on incidents of a Leyland DROPS trials vehicle overturning, since the last

such incidents reported to the House, indicating whether the incidents occurred while being driven by Leyland-employed personnel or Ministry of Defence test drivers; and whether he is satisfied with the stability of these vehicles.

Mr. Alan Clark: While undergoing tests on 23 November 1989, a DROPS medium mobility vehicle was involved in an incident in which it fell on its side when negotiating a bend on the snake section of the track at RARDE Chertsey. The vehicle, owned by Leyland DAF, was being driven by a company employee. A subsequent inquiry established that excessive speed was the cause of the incident; the inherent stability of the vehicle is not in doubt.

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessments he has made of the safety of DROPS vehicles on the public roads; and on what grounds the decision was taken to use vehicles which exceed normal legal limits on size.

Mr. Alan Clark: As part of trials at RARDE Chertsey, all military vehicles have to be approved as suitable for road use before they are allowed on to public roads. It is MOD policy to keep within Department of Transport construction and use regulations wherever operational circumstances permit. However, because of the mobility necessary to meet its operational role, exceptionally it was necessary in the case of the DROPS improved medium mobility vehicle to invoke Crown exemption to exceed the limit laid down for axle widths by 0·4 m.

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been achieved towards achieving the last revised in-service date for DROPS and to state *(a)* which components of the complete DROPS supply system have been accepted for service, *(b)* which components of the complete DROPS supply system have now been ordered in production quantities and *(c)* when these individual components of the system will be in service.

Mr. Alan Clark: The DROPS medium-mobility vehicles, including the load handling system, and the standard flatracks, have been accepted for service and production quantities have been ordered. They will enter service some four to five months beyond the due date. The improved medium-mobility vehicles have been accepted for service subject to the reliability requirements being satisfied; their date of entry into service will depend upon the outcome of further trials. The rail transfer equipments have been accepted and ordered; deliveries are being made on schedule. The simple rail transfer equipments have yet to complete reliability trials and it is expected that these will enter service about a year late.

Production options for the DROPS long wheel-base trailers are expected to be exercised in the very near future and these should enter service about 12 months later than intended. It is anticipated that the MLRS trailers and flatracks, which are required in a later time scale, will enter service on schedule.

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the driver of the DROPS trials vehicle, 42 KC 12, was advised by his Department to plead guilty to a charge of driving without due care and attention; whether he was advised to enter or not to enter a plea of mitigation to the effect that, due to the size or design of the vehicle, he was unable to see the car he crushed; and whether the fine and costs imposed by Basingstoke magistrates court in December 1989 have been, or will be, reimbursed to the driver.

Mr. Alan Clark: The driver of the vehicle was given no advice and pleaded guilty of his own volition. He has considerable experience of driving this type of vehicle and freely admitted that the cause of the accident was driver error; a plea of mitigation was not made. He has not been and will not be reimbursed for the fine or the costs he incurred as a result.

Western European Union

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what response he has had from the Belgian Defence Minister, now president of the WEU, to his letter of early December 1989 suggesting closer ties between the independent European programme group and the WEU; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: It is assumed that my hon. Friend is referring to the letter sent last November by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Defence, to my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg), the leader of the United Kingdom delegation to the WEU assembly. That letter expressed merit in a closer association between the Independent European Programme Group (IEPG) and the WEU. A detailed information letter on the IEPG was subsequently sent to the WEU presidency by the IEPG chair. As yet there has been no response from the WEU.

Hunts

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many hunts have licences to hunt on Ministry of Defence land; and if he will provide details of the hunts, the areas they are permitted to hunt on and the conditions of the licences.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member.

Military Research and Development

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in exploiting military research and development for civilian purposes.

Mr. Neubert: Where technology developed for defence purposes also has civil applications, the Government are committed to maximising the benefit to the wider economy through spin-off to, and collaboration with, the civil sector. Some 70 technological transfer agreements with industry, mainly in the form of licences, have now been signed by Defence Technology Enterprises for the exploitation of innovative technology, and more are under negotiation. The civil industrial access scheme (CIAS), launched in February 1988, is designed to give commercial firms improved access to the facilities and expertise of the defence research establishments. They also undertake work funded by civil Departments, mainly in the fields of aerospace and electronics and participate in a range of collaborative initiatives with commercial firms.

SCOTLAND

Fishing Quotas

Mr. John Townend: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he intends to take to ensure that Scottish FPOs will not in the future exceed their quotas.

Mr. Lang: Fisheries Departments will closely monitor the uptake of United Kingdom quotas by all groups in 1990. As in previous years, Fisheries Departments will close a fishery to any FPO if it appears, on the basis of available catch statistics, that the organisation is near to taking its allocation. Under current management arrangements, any group exceeding its quota to the detriment of others must compensate those who have been disadvantaged in the following year. Latest catch statistics show that various groups, both English and Scottish, exceeded their quotas in 1989 to the detriment of other Scottish and English fishermen.

Incoming Firms

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much incoming firms, established since the formation of Locate in Scotland have contributed to *(a)* the Exchequer, *(b)* exports and *(c)* imports.

Mr. Lang: This information is not available.

Investment

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the instances of inward investment into Scotland made since the formation of Locate in Scotland; and what was *(a)* the total number of permanent new jobs created and *(b)* the number of companies created which had a research and development facility;

(2) if he will state the number of new jobs forecasted at the time of announcement of new inward investment projects by Locate in Scotland for each year of Locate in Scotland's operation, listing each project, the number of new jobs forecasted in the SDA/Scottish Office news release at the time of the announcement, and the actual number of jobs today.

Mr. Lang: It is not possible to provide details of individual projects, as much of the information concerned is supplied on a commercial in confidence basis; and information is not available on the numbers of inward investing companies which established a research and development facility.

However, the table shows the total number of new jobs forecast by companies at the time their plans were made.

Year	*New jobs*
1981-82	4,500
1982-83	4,200
1983-84	3,500
1984-85	8,169
1985-86	4,663
1986-87	4,106
1987-88	6,363
1988-89	4,846

For a variety of reasons, job achievement has varied as plans have changed; and many of the projects concerned have yet to be completed. Experience suggests, however, that on average the final direct employment outturn may be about two thirds of the planned level, although a significant number of additional jobs are also created indirectly in supply and service industries.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of industrial investment, inward investment has represented for each year since Locate in Scotland was formed.

Mr. Lang: The information requested is not readily available in the form required. The table shows manufacturing investment by foreign-owned enterprises as a percentage of total manufacturing investment from 1983 to the latest available figures for 1987.

Manufacturing investment by foreign-owned enterprises as a percentage of total manufacturing investment

Year	*Percentage*
1983	29·2
1984	25·9
1985	31·4
1986	29·1
1987	26·0

Note: Information is not available for 1982.
Source: Annual Census of Production.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of total employment in Scotland inward investment has represented for each year since Locate in Scotland was formed.

Mr. Lang: The information requested is not readily available in the form required. The table gives the information on employment in overseas-owned plants for the period 1982, when Locate in Scotland was formed, to 1988. Figures for 1988 should be regarded as provisional.

	Manufacturing employment in overseas-owned plants (thousands)	*Total manufacturing employment in Scotland (thousands)*	*Percentage of total manufacturing employment attributable to overseas-owned plants*
1982	80·2	421·7	19·0
1983	71·1	398·8	17·9
1984	70·9	382·0	18·5
1985	72·9	375·5	19·4
1986	70·2	368·6	19·0
1987	70·9	358·0	19·8
1988	70·0	351·0	20·0

Source: Industry Department for Scotland Regional Data System.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will outline the monitoring procedures for ensuring that inward investors use public money for spending on new jobs; how many breaches of the rules there have been; and how much money has been involved in such breaches.

Mr. Lang: Following the restructuring of regional assistance in 1984, all offers of grant, whether to foreign or United Kingdom-owned companies, have contained specific provisions for withholding grant payments, or securing recovery of grant already paid if, among other conditions, jobs are not created or safeguarded according to the conditions of the offer. Officials make periodic inspections to monitor progress of projects both before and after completion. Between April 1987 and January 1990, a total of about £1 million of regional assistance was recovered in Scotland because of failure to meet one or

more conditions of offer. Separate information for inward investors, and on grant recovered or withheld specifically because of failure to meet job targets, could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Investors and Companies (Financial Assistance)

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list under each category of public sector financial assistance available to both inward investors and established companies in Scotland between 1979 and the latest available figures the total amount granted to incoming companies and the total amount granted to established companies and the average grant per company in each category by size;

(2) what has been the total amount of public sector and central Government financial assistance made available to incoming firms since the formation of Locate in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: Comprehensive information in the form requested is not available. Between January 1979 and December 1989, a total of £321 million of regional selective assistance under section 7 of the Industrial Development Act 1982 was offered in Scotland to companies whose ultimate ownership lay outside the United Kingdom, and £297 million was offered to domestically owned companies. The average size of offer made to foreign owned companies was £0·81 million and to domestically owned companies £0·17 million, reflecting the fact that inward investors tend to set up larger projects. Not all of these offers were taken up. A total of £284 million of this assistance was offered to foreign owned companies since the formation of Locate in Scotland in 1981.

Corresponding information for other types of assistance and data by size of company are not available, or could be provided only at disproportionate costs.

Locate in Scotland

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total running cost of Locate in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: The total running cost of Locate in Scotland in the most recently completed year, 1988-89, was approximately £4 million.

Computer Security

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps his Department has taken, and is taking to improve the security of its computer systems.

Mr. Rifkind: For unclassified but sensitive systems my Department follows Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA) guidance covering all aspects of information technology security and the application of this has recently been tightened up. CCTA advice is kept under continuous review and is based on analysis of security risks and requirements using structured methods such as CCTA's risk analysis and management methodology (CRAMM) which has also been made commercially available. More stringent conditions apply to classified systems.

Pensioners (Bus Passes)

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the estimated cost *(a)* to community charge payers and *(b)* to business rate payers of providing free bus travel for pensioners in each of the regional councils in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: While community charge payers and business rate payers contribute to local authorities' income, from which the cost of services are met, it is not possible to attribute the cost of a service to a particular source of income.

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the estimated cost of providing free bus travel to pensioners in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Local authorities have estimated the cost of providing concessionary travel on public transport for pensioners and disabled persons in 1989-90 at £42·7 million. The cost for pensioners only is not available centrally.

"Ethnically-Based Statistics on School Pupils"

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his circular No. 8, "Ethnically-Based Statistics on School Pupils", with specific reference to *(a)* how widely he anticipates the circulation of the document to be, with specific reference to the preparation of individual schools within education authorities which he expects to receive it, *(b)* whether the onus of responsibility for circulation falls primarily upon the education authority or upon individual schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: These are matters for education authorities, to whom the circular is addressed. The circular invites authorities to issue appropriate guidance to schools and/or to offer training to staff involved in the collection of data.

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the organisations, firms and individual advisers which have advised or are now advising his Department on any aspect of the privatisation of electricity, including any jointly instructed for this purpose with the Department of Energy, giving in each case the dates of their involvement and the aspect on which they advise.

Mr. Rifkind: The information requested is set out in the table. Each of the advisers' involvement is continuing. No appointments have been made jointly with the Department of Energy.

Name	*Function*	*Date of appointment*
Barclays de Zoete Wedd Ltd.	Financial advisers	August 1987
The British Linen Bank	Financial advisers	August 1987
Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte	Regulation, accounting, contracts, tax advisers	October 1987

Name	*Function*	*Date of appointment*
McGrigor Donald	Legal advisers	October 1987
Merz and McLellan	Technical advisers	October 1987
Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte (formerly Deloitte Haskins and Sells)	Reporting accountants[2]	September 1988
KPMG Peat Marwick McLintock	Reporting accountants[3]	September 1988
de Zoete and Bevan	Stockbroking advisers	January 1989
Bell Lawrie Ltd.	Stockbroking advisers	January 1989
Citigate Communications Ltd.	PR and marketing advisers[1]	February 1989
PR Consultants Scotland	PR and marketing advisers[1]	February 1989
British Market Research Bureau	Market research advisers[1]	February 1989
Salomon Brothers International	Overseas financial advisers[1]	June 1989
Jones Lang Wootton	Property advisers	August 1989
Ernst and Young	Nuclear advisers	August 1989
James Barr and Son	Valuers[2]	November 1989
Ryden	Valuers[2]	November 1989
Knight Frank and Rutley	Valuers[2]	November 1989
Richard Ellis	Valuers[2]	November 1989
Lickley Procter and Burnett	Valuers[3]	November 1989
Finlayson Hughes	Valuers[3]	November 1989
Bidwells and King	Valuers[3]	November 1989
Strutt and Parker	Valuers[3]	November 1989
N. J. Coward	Valuers[3]	November 1989
David A. Adamson and Partners	Valuers[3]	November 1989
West Highland Estates Office	Valuers[3]	November 1989
Webster and Co.	Valuers[3]	November 1989
National Westminster Bank plc	Lead receiving bank	January 1990
Willis Wrightson Scotland Ltd.	Insurance advisers[1]	January 1990

[1] Jointly with SSEB and NSHEB.
[2] Jointly with SSEB.
[3] Jointly with NSHEB.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current estimate of the total fees which will be paid by his Department in connection with the privatisation of the Scottish electricity industry to the end of March 1989, for the current year, and in total.

Mr. Rifkind: Expenditure to the end of March 1989 amounted to £2·7 million and the revised provision for the current year is £4·95 million. Latest forecasts of requirements for 1990-91 will be published as part of the Supply Estimates in March. The overall costs of privatisation will be made available once flotation has been completed.

Greater Glasgow Health Board

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide detailed information on the contracts awarded by the Greater Glasgow health board in connection with the Government's competitive tendering initiative; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: As at 31 December 1989, Greater Glasgow health board had let 54 contracts—32 in-house and 22 to private contractors. Costs, savings and other relevant details are set out in the table:

Contract details	*Total price of successful bid* £	*Projected annual savings* £	*Unsuccessful in-house tender* £	*Estimated redundancy payments* £	*Number of redundancies*	*Redundancies (whole-time equivalent)*
Belvidere Group						
Domestic	432,399	231,806	—	241,740	113	72
Portering	372,206	192,851	442,335	179,394	46	44
Belvidere/Lightburn						
Catering	422,300	62,365	—	83,499	15	13
Canniesburn/Drumchapel						
Catering	449,260	119,046	—	143,999	34	23
Domestic	249,060	154,369	274,493	65,884	86	54
Portering	302,306	97,106	—	86,871	19	18
Community East						
Domestic	60,646	114,063	72,191	30,696	31	n/a
SE and SW						
Domestic	70,291		99,548		16	16
N and W						
Domestic	139,198	81,802	147,512	18,044	57	n/a
Gartloch						
Catering	447,943	35,464	—	31,155	8	n/a

Contract details	Total price of successful bid £	Projected annual savings £	Unsuccessful in-house tender £	Estimated redundancy payments £	Number of redundancies	Redundancies (whole-time equivalent)
Gartoch/Parkhead						
Domestic	459,978	45,275	—	24,001	45	n/a
Portering	205,638	80,404	—	8,883	5	5
Gartnavel						
Catering	1,376,117	266,765	—	16,434	7	n/a
Portering	314,687	315,168	371,256	63,761	73	70
Garnavel General						
Domestic	312,045	337,520	400,757	96,098	157	95
Garnavel Royal						
Domestic	360,118	59,448	390,220	135,786	102	54
Portering	161,400	84,991	181,272	60,660	21	18
Glasgow Royal						
Catering	1,545,364	406,949	1,884,700	203,016	161	n/a
Domestic	953,971	472,241	1,022,020	173,221	338	205
Portering	510,783	734,491	1,057,300	368,985	126	126
Knightswood Group						
Catering	331,189	93,758	—	74,937	31	n/a
Domestic	189,164	110,408	—	154,878	52	33
Portering	87,870	46,525	—	12,948	2	2
Lennox Castle						
Hotel	1,597,642	332,952	—	175,014	102	66
Leverndale						
Domestic	502,245	92,559	—	162,721	73	n/a
Portering	172,860	85,622	194,319	39,465	23	22
Leverndale/Cowglen						
Catering	774,603	459,276	—	123,576	61	48
Mearnskirk/Phillipshill						
Catering	417,936	72,968	—	98,902	22	20
Domestic	291,432	97,915	—	53,016	53	41
Portering	139,926	66,081	—	16,344	5	5
Parkhead/Duke Street						
Catering	325,802	104,486	—	13,320	8	7
Queen Mother/Royal Hospital for Sick Children						
Portering	253,469	171,429	283,400	122,349	37	35
Royal Maternity/Rutherglen						
Catering	308,250	107,428	—	88,511	27	20
Domestic	265,917	123,683	301,494	156,354	87	52
Portering	181,885	104,887	207,842	89,808	24	23
Ruchill Group						
Catering	653,391	58,345	—	57,702	17	13
Domestic	416,000	172,203	—	166,634	76	n/a
Portering	249,482	93,634	294,582	150,795	40	40
Southern General/Cowglen						
Portering	698,444	234,700	783,792	332,919	87	87
Southern General/Darnley						
Catering	1,302,850	154,093	—	135,570	77	48
Southern Group						
Domestic	856,893	537,108	—	297,337	106	n/a
Stobhill						
Catering	1,203,700	73,147	—	106,340	46	34
Domestic	820,381	531,211	1,033,300	190,497	333	n/a
Portering	518,944	462,995	610,658	408,120	93	91
Victoria Group						
Catering	841,201	402,143	—	150,012	44	n/a
Domestic	582,302	144,733	755,900	93,233	145	n/a
Portering	333,539	144,481	—	86,367	17	17

Contract details	Total price of successful bid £	Projected annual savings £	Unsuccessful in-house tender £	Estimated redundancy payments £	Number of redundancies	Redundancies (whole-time equivalent)
Western Infirmary						
Domestic	548,099	276,172	—	92,620	97	76
Portering	477,100	300,199	—	190,956	44	43
Woodilee/Stoneyetts						
Catering	536,393	49,504	—	63,450	38	n/a
Domestic	331,506	268,079	412,350	56,027	139	79
Portering	147,976	126,244	—	22,593	28	27
Yorkhill/Queen Mothers						
Catering	468,100	233,697	—	87,207	25	21
Domestic	425,550	173,094	—	174,117	91	n/a

n/a = Not available.

Education Expenditure

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the capital expenditure on local authority schools in each of the past 10 years in cash and constant price terms.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 5 February 1990]:* The information is given in the following table, which has been compiled from local authority financial returns. The reduction in expenditure in real terms during the period reflects a substantial and progressive decline in pupil numbers which in turn reduced the requirement for new school building.

Capital expenditure by local authorities on schools (£ million)

Year	At outturn prices	At 1988-89 prices
1979-80	47·598	89·625
1980-81	52·301	83·214
1981-82	60·404	87·534
1982-83	52·378	70·793
1983-84	45·098	58·235
1984-85	46·099	56·711
1985-86	51·276	59·864
1986-87	46·506	52·524
1987-88	48·260	51·761
[1]1988-89	59·392	59·392

[1] Provisional.

The figures include expenditure on nursery, primary, secondary and special schools. Outturn figures have been converted to 1988-89 prices using the GDP deflator.

Cochlear Implants

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much additional finance he has made available *(a)* in total to health boards in Scotland and *(b)* to each health board in Scotland, to enable a programme of cochlear implants to be established; and when he expects such programmes to commence.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 6 February 1990]:* With effect from 1 April 1990, a total of £200,000 will be made available each year for the next three years to support the programme of cochlear implants in Scotland which I announced on 11 January. Of that amount, £150,000 per annum will be allocated to Ayrshire and Arran health board which already has an established programme and has built up considerable expertise in this procedure.

A number of surgeons elsewhere in Scotland have expressed interest in developing this exciting new technique which greatly enhances the quality of life for some deaf people. Accordingly, bids will be invited from other health boards for the remaining £50,000 per annum to facilitate the development of a second centre.

SOCIAL SECURITY

SERPS

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the cost of *(a)* contribution rebates and *(b)* greater payments to those withdrawing from SERPS in (i) 1987-88, (ii) 1988-89 and (iii) 1989-90.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer the hon. Member to appendix 7 of the report by the Government Actuary on the Drafts of the Social Security Benefits Uprating Order 1990 and the Social Security (Contributions, Re-Rating) Order 1990 (Cm 948), a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the total number of contributors leaving SERPS by the end of this financial year; what has been the total cost of incentive payments to them; and what was the total loss of contributions to the fund in the financial year.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: It is not possible to give an estimate of the number of people who will have left SERPS in this financial year to become members of an occupational or personal pension scheme, but it is anticipated that the vast majority of those taking out a personal pension will previously have been in SERPS.

The Government Actuary's estimate of revenue forgone by the national insurance fund in 1990-91 through payment of the incentive for personal pensions and new contracted-out schemes in respect of 1989-90 is £615 million. His estimate of total revenue forgone in 1990-91 in respect of the incentive and the standard rebates is £2,115 million.

Community Charge

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are his present estimates of *(a)* expenditure on community charge benefit, *(b)* the average number of

benefit cases and *(c)* the number of charge payers that will be helped by community charge benefit in England, Scotland and Wales in 1990-91.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information is in the table.

Community Charge Benefit 1990-91

	England	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Great Britain*
Central Government grant to local authorities: (£ billion)	£1·45	£0·22	£0·07	£1·75
Average number of benefit cases (million)	6·5	0·9	0·4	7·9
Average number of chargepayers helped by Community Charge Benefit: (millions)	8·1	1·15	0·5	9·75

In addition, adjustments were made in April 1989 to the income-related benefits, to help claimants pay their minimum contribution to the community charge, at a cost of more than £500 million in Great Britain (£400 million in England).

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many persons in each of the past five years died before their claim for attendance allowance had been processed.

Mr. Scott: I regret that this information is not available.

Child Benefit

Mr. Raison: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage uprating of child benefit is allowed for in the Government's latest expenditure plans for 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer my right hon. Friend to paragraph 62 and table 14.1 of the public expenditure White Paper (Cm. 1014) published last month.

National Insurance

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in Scotland paid the appropriate national insurance contributions for self-employed status in every year since 1979.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I regret that the information requested is not available.

Pensioners (Australia, New Zealand and Canada)

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what plans he has to make pension increases when paid at home available to British pensioners living in *(a)* Australia and *(b)* New Zealand;

(2) whether he now has any plans to make pension increases when paid at home available to British pensioners living in Canada.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We have no plans at present to pay annual increases in retirement pensions to United Kingdom pensioners living in Australia, New Zealand or Canada.

Disability Allowance

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will ensure that existing beneficiaries of attendance allowance have their level of benefits protected and increased once the new disability allowance is introduced;

Mr. Scott: The introduction of the disability allowance will not affect the level of benefit paid to existing recipients of attendance allowance. We will continue to review the level of the benefit annually. The same procedure will apply to the new disability allowance when it is introduced.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will ensure that existing beneficiaries of mobility allowance have their level of benefits protected and increased once the new disability allowance is introduced.

Mr. Scott: The introduction of the disability allowance will not affect the level of benefit paid to existing recipients of mobility allowance. We will continue to review the level of the benefit annually. The same procedure will apply to the new disability allowance when introduced.

Disabled People

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people who are in receipt of severe disablement allowance are *(a)* in receipt of income support and *(b)* in receipt of another means-tested benefit.

Mr. Scott: I refer the right hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) on 7 February 1990 at columns *577-78*.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people who are in receipt of severe disablement allowance will gain an increase in their real disposable income as a result of the new proposed age-related additions to severe disablement allowance.

Mr. Scott: I refer the right hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Gr[illegible]ham, West (Mr. Meacher) on 19 January at columns *483-84*.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his Department's estimate of the number of disabled people who have extra costs above the existing rates of attendance and mobility allowance.

Mr. Scott: The most up-to-date information available is contained in the 1985 Office of Population Censuses and Surveys' surveys of disabled adults and disabled children

in private households and shows that about 95,000 recipients of attendance allowance or mobility allowance reported additional disability-related expenditure in excess of the amounts of those benefits which they were receiving. That takes no account of any additional help with disability-related costs which they may have been receiving through other benefits, including supplementary benefit. About 700,000 recipients of attendance allowance and mobility allowance reported additional disability-related expenditure that was less than the amounts of benefit received. The 1988 social security reforms have since introduced extra help specifically for disabled people on the lowest incomes.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to increase the level of severe disablement allowance to the level of basic invalidity benefit in line with the Social Security Advisory Committee's recommendation.

Mr. Scott: The Social Security Bill currently before the House introduces age-related additions to severe disablement allowance. We have no present plans to bring the rate of the allowance up to the level of invalidity benefit.

Hospital Visits

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, for each month since January 1989, what was the total number of grants awarded by the Caernarfon social security office to assist those visiting patients in hospitals.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, for each month since January 1989, what was the total amount of grants allowed by the Llangefni social security office to assist those visiting patients in hospitals.

Mr. Scott: I regret that this information is not collected.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Guatemala

15. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek to raise human rights violations in Guatemala at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

Mr. Maude: There is currently a UN special adviser on human rights in Guatemala. His report is likely to be discussed at the 46th session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

Helsinki Agreement

16. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement regarding the USSR's fulfilment of its outstanding human rights obligations following on from the Helsinki agreement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Despite substantial progress in Soviet human rights performance under Mr. Gorbachev, the Soviet Union is still some way from meeting its international obligations in full. In particular there are still a considerable number of unresolved refusenik cases, on which we continue to press the Soviet authorities.

Romania

17. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to visit Romania.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs hopes to be able to visit Romania in the next few months.

Iraq

18. **Mr. Sillars:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received about the position of Kurdish people in Iraq.

Mr. Waldegrave: We receive regular representations from individuals and organisations about the position of the Kurdish minorities in Iraq. We take every opportunity to make clear to the Iraqi Government at all levels our continuing disquiet at Iraq's human rights record and their treatment of its Kurdish population.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the United Kingdom's relations with Iraq.

Mr. Waldegrave: We attach importance to our bilateral relationship with Iraq and have regular contact with Iraqi Ministers. This allows us to discuss regional issues and to make clear our concerns on such matters as the continuing detention in Iraq of British subjects and reports of Iraqi human rights abuses. We also have important trading links: United Kingdom exports to Iraq in 1989 rose by over 9 per cent. compared with 1988.

Palestinian Self-Determination

19. **Mr. Marlow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will launch an initiative to encourage moves towards Palestinian self-determination.

Mr. Waldegrave: We support Palestinian self-determination and are closely involved in current efforts to promote a dialogue between Israel and representative Palestinians, as an important step towards a settlement.

South Africa

20. **Mr. Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a further statement on United Kingdom policy towards the latest developments in South Africa.

Mr. Waldegrave: The moves President de Klerk announced on 2 February are an historic landmark on the road to a new South Africa. We urge opposition groups such as the ANC, PAC and others, to respond positively and join in negotiations to achieve a peaceful transition to a non-racial South Africa.

21. **Mr Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent communications he has had with the Government of South Africa; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: We maintain regular contact with the South African authorities on a wide range of issues, both here and via Her Majesty's ambassador.

66. **Mr. Boyes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government have undertaken to secure the implementation of UNSCR 432 on Walvis bay.

Mr. Waldegrave: As we and other members of the contact group made clear when UNSCR 432 was adopted, we are prepared to offer diplomatic support to achieve a successful negotiation on the issue of Walvis bay between the Governments of an independent Namibia and South Africa.

59. **Mr. Clay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the implications for the United Nations arms embargo against South Africa of proposed changes in the COCOM system of controls of military and strategic exports.

Mr. Waldegrave: There are no implications for the United Nations arms embargo.

54. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contact he has had recently with the Foreign Minister of South Africa.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has not yet met Mr. Botha but has contact through normal diplomatic channels.

49. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the Republic of South Africa regarding the release of all political detainees.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have made frequent representations on behalf of detainees in South Africa. We will continue to urge the South African Government either to charge or release unconditionally all those so detained.

30. **Mr. Meale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the implications for stability in southern Africa of South Africa's expansion of military facilities in Walvis bay.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have no evidence of such expansion. On 19 January the South African Government announced that the naval base at Walvis bay would be scaled down as part of a wide-ranging package of defence cuts.

CSCE

22. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether, in the light of the recent changes in eastern Europe, he is in favour of reconvening the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe; to what extent he sees the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe as a vehicle for increased East-West European co-operation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: On 20 January, in Dublin, EC Foreign Ministers agreed in principle to a CSCE summit meeting in 1990. We view this as an opportune proposal. The CSCE process has a valuable role to play in overcoming East-West barriers. We should use it imaginatively in the months ahead.

25. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his European Community counterparts regarding the creation of a forum other than the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe to discuss European co-operation and security matters.

Mr. Maude: None. At the European Council in Strasbourg on 8-9 December 1989, EC Heads of State and Government pointed to the vitality of the CSCE process, describing it as a means of establishing new relations among European countries in the areas of security, economic and technical co-operation and of human rights.

Inter-governmental Conference

23. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out his objectives for the forthcoming European Community inter-governmental conference.

Mr. Maude: Our objective is practical progress towards a robust and realistic form of economic and monetary union, with full regard to democratic accountability and the doctrine of subsidiarity.

85. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he is satisfied with the progress being made in the EEC Council of Ministers on preparations for the December 1990 inter-governmental conference of the Community; and if he will make a statement on current proposals to augment the terms of reference and scope of the conference.

Mr. Maude: The Strasbourg Council noted the Commission's intention to submit, before April, a composite paper on economic and monetary union. The ECOFIN Council on 18 December 1989 asked the Monetary Committee to undertake further work and report in March. Our EC colleagues and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs briefly discussed the work programme at the Foreign Affairs Council on 5 February. The Strasbourg Council decided that the inter-governmental conference would set its own agenda.

African National Congress

24. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any plans to meet senior members of the African National Congress.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no current plans to do so. However, he has made it clear that if Mr. Walter Sisulu visits this country he would be happy to meet him.

Israel

26. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations between Britain and Israel.

Mr. Waldegrave: Relations with Israel are good.

27. **Mr. David Young:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he

intends taking as a signatory to the fourth Geneva convention on the recent report by Amnesty International on the Israeli Government's treatment of Palestinians in the occupied territories.

38. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he intends taking as a signatory to the fourth Geneva convention on the recent report by Amnesty International on the Israeli Government's treatment of Palestinians in the occupied territories.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Israelis are well aware that we deplore their repressive policies in the occupied territories. We have already raised with them some of the cases cited by Amnesty.

84. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met a representative of the Israeli Government.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs looks forward to maintaining the close working relationship which his predecessors enjoyed with Israeli Ministers. I saw the Israeli ambassador on 30 January and 1 February.

56. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Israeli Government about the intifada and the way in which Israeli troops are being used.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have repeatedly urged the Israeli authorities to administer the occupied territories in accordance with international law and human rights obligations, pending their withdrawal in the context of a negotiated settlement of the Arab/Israel dispute.

57. **Mr. Galloway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to support the decision of the European Parliament to suspend scientific co-operation with Israel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: No.

Cricket Tour, South Africa

28. **Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the South African authorities concerning the action of the South African police at Jan Smuts airport on 19 January against those objecting to the rebel cricket tour of South Africa and against British journalists covering the protests.

Mr. Waldegrave: We deplore the use of violence from whatever quarter in South Africa. We have expressed our concern to the South African authorities over recent incidents. We note that the South African Government are committed to allowing peaceful demonstrations provided proper authority is sought.

Hong Kong

29. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet Chinese leaders to discuss elections to the Hong Kong Legislative Council.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no present plans to meet Chinese leaders.

48. **Dr. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what communications he has received from the committee meeting held on the weekend of 20 and 21 January to discuss a basic law for Hong Kong post-1997.

Mr. Maude: None. The drafting of the basic law is a matter for the Chinese Government. However, we are following the drafting process extremely closely and, where necessary, seek clarification from and make representations to the Chinese Government. The content of those exchanges is confidential.

43. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations there have been between his Department and the Chinese Government about the percentage of Hong Kong legislature positions to be directly elected post-1997.

Mr. Maude: The Chinese Government are currently finalising the drafting of the political structure provisions of the basic law. We have made clear to the Chinese Government, on a number of occasions, the importance of a basic law which fully reflects Hong Kong people's views, especially in this important area.

44. **Sir David Steel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current emigration situation in Hong Kong.

Mr. Maude: Some 42,000 people emigrated from Hong Kong in 1989, of whom about 20,000 were part of the working population. Of these, about 50 per cent. were professional, technical, administrative and management personnel.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what training the immigration officers, currently involved in the screening process of the Vietnam refugees in Hong Kong, have undertaken.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 24 January 1990]:* Immigration officers assigned to screening duties have attended training courses conducted by the immigration department and the UNHCR's legal officers from the department of law and doctrine. In addition, there are frequent formal and informal in-service training sessions designed to ensure that the screening procedures are being carried out in accordance with UNHCR guidelines.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the refugee status review board in Hong Kong is obliged to give reason for a negative decision.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 24 January 1990]:* The refugee status review board is not obliged to state its reasons for upholding a decision for the director of immigration.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Vietnamese asylum seekers, their representatives or the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees are allowed to be present at the meeting, where the refugee status review board considers individual cases.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 24 January 1990]:* No. But the representatives of the asylum seekers and the UNHCR have an opportunity to put all the relevant information to the board before their cases are considered. The board may also interview asylum seekers if it requires clarification of any matter of fact.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many punishment cells there are at present in the Hong Kong camps; what are the dimensions of such cells; what is the average stay of each individual in the cells; and how widespread is their use.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 24 January 1990]:* Of the 10 Vietnamese boat people detention centres in Hong Kong, four have segregation sections, containing a combined total of 133 cubicles. The dimensions of these varies from 3·5 sq m to 7·5 sq m. The average length of stay is 14 days. They are used only for persons who seriously and repeatedly breach detention centre rules.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will commission a fully independent and impartial inquiry into the methods used by the correctional services department and the tactical response squad in the Hong Kong camps.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 24 January 1990]:* No. We are fully satisfied with the work of correctional services department (CSD) staff and the tactical response squad.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the number of disturbances that have taken place in the closed camps in Hong Kong since June 1988 and the number of detainees involved.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 24 January 1990]:* Most disturbances in the detention centres since June 1988 have been caused by clashes between rival groups of boat people. There were 25 such incidents during the period June 1988 to January 1990 involving groups of between 50 and 400 people. In addition, there were three serious disturbances directed against police or correctional services department officers. These were:

Place	*Time*	*Numbers involved*
Sek Kong	July 1989	2,000
Tai a Chau	August 1989	1,000
Chi Ma Wan	December 1989	3,000

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what processes the detainees in the Hong Kong camps have open to them to complain about alleged attacks and ill-treatment at the hands of the police and correctional services department.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 24 January 1990]:* Complaints may be made to visiting justices of the peace, to the UNHCR protection and field officers who work in all camps or, in the case of the police, to the complaints against the police office. All such complaints are thoroughly investigated.

Somalia

31. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of international efforts to achieve peace in Somalia.

Mr. Waldegrave: The achievement of peace in Somalia must be primarily a matter for the Somali people. We continue to support all constructive efforts to promote this process. Regrettably there is little sign of progress so far.

European Single Market

32. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what implications the 1992 changes will have for international relations between Britain and *(a)* other European Community member states and *(b)* developing or undeveloped countries.

Mr. Maude: The single market programme will integrate the economies of the EC member states more closely. By removing barriers to trade, and increasing the size of the market, it should provide new opportunities for those of our trading partners who are outside the Community.

Immigration

33. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department is taking to ensure that the operation of immigration controls overseas is made more effective.

Mr. Maude: Applications made overseas for entry clearance to come to the United Kingdom are dealt with in accordance with the immigration rules (HC 388). The entry clearance operation is kept under continual review and we are satisfied that it operates effectively.

Nelson Mandela

34. **Mr. Orme:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the impending release of Nelson Mandela.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have been at the forefront of those calling for Mr. Mandela's early and unconditional release. We warmly welcome the decision announced by President de Klerk on 2 February that Mr. Mandela will shortly be released.

Eastern Europe

35. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further steps his Department will take to help support the political and economic reforms taking place among the countries of eastern Europe.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have said that we will extend the know-how fund to other eastern European countries once they are fully committed to reform. Meanwhile we will also support the reforms through an expanded programme of ministerial contacts, visits, seminars and training schemes. We will continue to play a major role in international efforts to support the reform process.

36. **Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what Her Majesty's Government are doing to ensure that European Community aid to eastern Europe is properly utilised in projects that will enable successful market economies to emerge.

Mr. Maude: EC Heads of Government agreed at the Strasbourg European Council that a major objective in

responding to developments in eastern Europe should be consolidation of democratic reform and promotion of market-based economies. British Ministers and officials consult closely the European Commission, EC partners and other members of the Western Group of 24 on the best means of achieving this objective. Commission proposals for EC aid made against this background are considered fully in the Council and in the management committee which oversees expenditure of the EC's aid budget for eastern Europe. Member states' agreement is required before aid projects are implemented.

81. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further assessment he has made of the impact on future Government policy of recent events in eastern Europe.

Mr. Maude: We warmly welcome the recent historic changes in eastern Europe and we shall continue to support the political and economic reforms which are now occurring. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs was glad to announce on 22 January that our know-how funds for Poland and Hungary will now be expanded to include the remaining countries of the region, as they move decisively toward democracy and the adoption of market-based economic systems.

76. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the desirability of institutional changes in the European Community following the developments in eastern Europe.

Mr. Maude: We welcome the process of economic and political reform which has swept eastern Europe. We agree the Community must continue to develop, and want faster integration. The immediate priority is for pressing ahead with completing the single market programme on which the United Kingdom has taken a leading role. Proposals for institutional change should be considered on their merits.

40. **Sir Anthony Meyer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with other EC Ministers about future relations with the states of eastern Europe.

Mr. Maude: Eastern Europe was the focus of the Dublin meeting of EC Foreign Ministers on 20 January. Those discussions resumed at the Foreign Affairs Council on 5 February. The Community intends to complete the network of agreements covering trade and commercial and economic co-operation with the emerging democracies of eastern Europe. As their economic and political reforms progress, the Council will consider wider forms of association and the criteria that are appropriate.

European Commission

37. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet the President of the European Commission; and what will be discussed.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs next expects to meet the President of the European Commission at the Foreign Affairs Council meeting on 5 March, when a range of EC issues will be discussed.

61. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors; and what was discussed.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs met Mr. Delors at the Foreign Affairs Council on 5 February at which a range of European Community issues were discussed.

Middle East

39. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Britain's contribution towards finding a diplomatic and peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict acceptable to the international community.

55. **Sir Dennis Walters:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards peace in the middle east.

Mr. Waldegrave: We support the current efforts to promote a dialogue between Israel and representative Palestinians as an important step towards a settlement.

China

41. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet the Chinese Foreign Minister; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no plans to do so.

83. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations between Britain and the People's Republic of China.

Mr. Maude: I refer the hon.Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) on 20 October, column *267*.

63. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will comment on his most recent discussions with the Government of the People's Republic of China.

67. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Chinese ambassador; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs is in touch with the Chinese Government on a number of issues, including the future of Hong Kong, on which he reported to the House on 17 January.

50. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government policy on human rights violations in China.

Mr. Maude: We have been unequivocal in our condemnation of the suppression of the pro-democracy movement in Peking last year. We and our partners will continue to take suitable opportunities to register our concerns.

Palestinian Liberation Organisation

42. **Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government will desist from any further contacts with the Palestinian Liberation Organisation as long as it is its policy that Arab countries should open their borders to Palestinian Fedayeen action.

Mr. Waldegrave: Through its renunciation of terrorism and its recognition of Israel, the PLO has earned the right to participate in the peace process. Our dialogue with it is conducted on that basis.

Ethiopia

45. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the prospects for peace in Ethiopia.

Mr. Waldegrave: The respective talks between the Ethiopian Government and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front and the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front have not yet got beyond procedural matters. We urge all involved to persevere since negotiations offer the only prospect of a lasting peace.

Nicaragua

46. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on plans by EEC countries to observe the Nicaraguan elections.

Mr. Maude: The United Kingdom is sending an official observer, Dr. David Browning. No other EC Government will be sending official observers to the Nicaraguan elections. However, we understand that a number of parliamentarians from EC countries will observe the election, some as members of the UN observer mission. A group of Members of the European Parliament will also observe the elections.

Yugoslavia

47. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Yugoslavia about human rights in Kosovo.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have frequently raised human rights matters with the Yugoslav authorities. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs discussed the question of Kosovo with the Yugoslav ambassor, Mr. Rikonovic, on 22 November.

British Hostages

51. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made about the fate of Terry Waite and other British hostages; and to whom.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have raised the matter with a wide range of Governments and organisations which might have influence on the hostage holders, but we do not make public confidential exchanges between Governments.

Know-how Funds

52. **Miss Emma Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what aid his Department is channelling to Romania; and if he has considered the extension of the know-how fund beyond Poland and Hungary.

Mr. Waldegrave: As well as the initial consignment of medical supplies sent to Romania on 24 December, we have given medical equipment and literature. Five victims of the December fighting arrived in the United Kingdom for urgent treatment on 31 January. We made a major contribution to the £7·5 million of emergency medical and food supplies sent by the EC between 22 and 31 December, and shall also do so in relation to the further £27 million food aid package which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs agreed with EC colleagues on 20 January. Furthermore, my right hon. Friend announced on 22 January that the know-how fund will be expanded to include other countries of eastern Europe, as well as Poland and Hungary, once they are firmly committed to reform.

Drugs

53. **Mr. Rathbone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what particular initiative he is hoping to take at the forthcoming special United Nations session on drug misuse and trafficking.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will be going to the special session. The United Kingdom will be working for a commitment to improving the effectiveness of the United Nations effort against drugs, and for agreement on a practical programme of international and national action—including ratification of relevant United Nations conventions, measures to strengthen the monitoring of precursor chemical movements, and undertakings to develop a network of agreements to trace, freeze and confiscate the proceeds of drug trafficking.

64. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will next meet heads of state of the Andean group of countries to discuss drug trafficking.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs expects to meet President Barco of Colombia when he attends the London drugs summit conference in April. He hopes then also to meet the representatives of the other Andean countries to the conference.

Vietnamese Boat People

58. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the latest figures for numbers of Vietnamese boat people repatriated forcibly and voluntarily from Hong Kong.

Mr. Maude: Eleven hundred and one Vietnamese have returned voluntarily from Hong Kong to Vietnam. Fifty-one Vietnamese, who had not volunteered to return, were repatriated on 12 December 1989. No force was used.

Cyprus

60. **Mr. Holt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Greek Cypriot leader to discuss the future of Cyprus.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs last met President Vassiliou of Cyprus on 28 November 1989.

82. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last discussed with the Secretary-General of the United Nations the present position in Cyprus; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has not yet discussed the Cyprus question with the United Nations Secretary-General. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister did so on 8 November. Officials are in frequent touch with the Secretary-General in connection with the Cyprus good offices mission, which we fully support.

Baltic States

62. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to discuss the future of the Baltic states with his Soviet counterpart.

Mr. Waldegrave: No. The Soviet Union is well aware of our policy towards the Baltic states.

Amazon Rain Forest

65. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will next meet the Peruvian ambassador to discuss the destruction of the Amazon rain forest.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no plans to meet the Peruvian ambassador for this purpose.

George Belitsky

68. **Mr. Geraint Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will raise with the Soviet authorities the case of George Belitsky who is unable to apply for an exit visa until 2010.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have raised the case of George Belitsky on numerous occasions, most recently when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs met Mr. Shevardnadze in London on 19 December. The case was also raised at senior official level during Anglo-Soviet talks on human rights held in Moscow on 9 January. We shall continue to press the Soviet authorities until there is a satisfactory outcome.

Cambodia

69. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of international efforts to secure an urgent peaceful settlement in the Cambodian conflict.

Mr. Maude: Asia directors of the five permanent members of the Security Council met on 15-16 January in Paris to discuss the problem of Cambodia. They agreed a set of principles to guide them in working for a resolution of the Cambodia problem, including an enhanced role for the United Nations. A further meeting is planned in New York in the first half of February.

78. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last discussed Cambodia or Vietnam with the American Secretary of State.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs last discussed Cambodia with Secretary of State Baker on 11 December 1989. They discussed the problem of Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong on 29 January 1990.

Third World

70. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent meetings he has had with other European Economic Community Foreign Ministers to discuss relations with Third world countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: Relations with developing countries and regions are regularly discussed both within the Council and in political co-operation. The European Council of 8-9 December issued statements on the middle east, Lebanon, the Euro-Arab conference, Southern Africa, Ethiopia, Chile and Central America. A new Lomé convention providing for comprehensive trade, aid and co-operation was agreed in December between the EC and 68 developing countries in Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific.

Diplomatic Links

71. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries do not have full diplomatic links with Britain; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 14 November 1989 by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry).

Falkland Islands

72. **Mr. Summerson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what the population of the Falkland Islands was in 1982; and what it is at the present time.

Mr. Maude: According to the December 1980 census the population of the Falkland Islands was then 1,813. The figure for the next census, in December 1986, was 1,947. We do not know precisely what the population was in 1982, but local estimates place it at around 1,700. The estimated current population is about 2,050.

Sri Lanka

73. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Government of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Maude: We have a regular dialogue with the Government of Sri Lanka on a wide range of matters. These have in the last few months included a number of representations on human rights issues.

EC Policies

74. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further proposals he intends to place before his European Community partners for the development of Community policies.

Mr. Maude: We shall continue to play a full and leading part in the development of the Community.

Vietnam (Emigration)

75. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made by his Department since December to the Vietnamese Government concerning the potential of further emigration from north Vietnam to Hong Kong when the South China sea sailing season commences.

Mr. Maude: Her Majesty's embassy in Hanoi is in regular contact with the Vietnamese Government over aspects of the boat people problem, in particular the possibility of further large-scale emigration during the forthcoming sailing season. Under the terms of the comprehensive plan of action agreed in Geneva last June, the Vietnamese authorities are obliged to take measures to deter people from leaving clandestinely and to encourage those who wish to leave to do so through the orderly departure programme.

Warsaw Pact

77. **Mr. Cartwright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government are taking to encourage the moves towards democracy amongst the member nations of the Warsaw pact.

Mr. Maude: We are actively considering ways in which we can help the countries of eastern Europe in this field. Groups of Hungarian and Polish politicians have already participated in successful seminars on the United Kingdom parliamentary system organised by the Great Britain/East Europe Centre. Budding politicians from Bulgaria, Romania, Czechoslovakia and the GDR will attend similar seminars in the coming months to look at our political and parliamentary system in order to help them organise their parties and electoral campaigns.

In addition, the IPU is sending factfinding missions to these four countries to determine how the IPU could be of assistance in the parliamentary field.

Lithuania

79. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to establish diplomatic relations with Lithuania.

Mr. Waldegrave: We cannot establish diplomatic relations with Lithuania, which is not a sovereign independent state. It was unlawfully incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1940.

East Germany

80. **Mr. Madel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what matters were discussed during his visit to East Germany in January; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) on 1 February.

86. **Mr. Franks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his recent visit to Germany.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs visited Bonn on 6 February to give a speech to the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. He met Chancellor Kohl, Herr Genscher and Herr Rühe, for a broad range of discussions on topics of current interest. He visited East Berlin and the GDR from 22-24 January, and I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) on 1 February.

Lorrain Osman

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will now make a statement on the future of Lorrain Osman.

Mr. John Patten: I have been asked to reply.

Mr. Osman is the subject of an extradition request from Hong Kong and has been committed for return there. The delay in his return reflects both the complexity of the case and the series of appeals which Mr. Osman has made against his extradition, since the law provides that a fugitive cannot be surrendered while proceedings on such appeals are pending. The sequence of events demonstrates how it is Mr. Osman's own use of the appeal channels open to him which has led to his substantial period in prison:

6 December 1985
Mr. Osman arrested on provisional extradition warrant.

7 December 1985
Mr. Osman remanded in custody.

24 January 1986
Home Office issued authority to Bow street magistrates to proceed with extradition case under Fugitive Offenders Act 1967, in respect of an arrest warrant issued in Hong Kong on 20 January 1986.

25 April 1986
Further warrant of arrest issued in Hong Kong in respect of 43 offences.

13 May 1986
Second authority to proceed issued superseding the authority to proceed of 24 January 1986.

27 May 1986
Committal proceedings began at Bow street.

1 June 1987
Bow street magistrates committed Mr. Osman to await the Home Secretary's order for surrender to Hong Kong.

9 June 1987
Application by Mr. Osman for writ of habeas corpus to have the magistrate's decision set aside.

30 June 1987
Complaint to European Commission of Human Rights.

30 March 1988
After four weeks hearing Divisional Court dismissed application for writ of habeas corpus.

29 April 1988
Divisional Court refused leave to appeal to House of Lords.

13 May 1988

Mr. Osman petitioned House of Lords direct for leave to appeal and made second application for writ of habeas corpus on grounds of diplomatic immunity.

14 July 1988

Petition to House of Lords rejected.

21 October 1988

Divisional Court hearing of second application for writ of habeas corpus.

21 December 1988

Divisional Court dismissed second application for writ of habeas corpus.

14 February 1989

Divisional Court refused leave to appeal to the House of Lords.

24 February 1989

Mr. Osman petitioned House of Lords direct for leave to appeal.

13 March 1989

European Commission declared inadmissible Mr. Osman's complaint under the European Convention on Human Rights.

4 May 1989

Court of Appeal, Hong Kong, quashed the arrest warrant issued in Hong Kong on 30 November 1985, on the ground that it had been vitiated by bias.

9 May 1989

Mr. Osman's solicitors sought adjournment of their petition for leave to appeal to the House of Lords and gave notice of their intention to make a third application for habeas corpus because of the quashing in Hong Kong of the warrant of 30 November 1985, and the issue of a diplomatic note by the Liberian Ambassador relating to Mr. Osman's claim of diplomatic immunity.

6 June 1989

The High Court granted leave to apply for a third writ of habeas corpus.

26 July 1989

The Divisional Court refused Mr. Osman's application for bail.

26 September 1989

Application for judicial review deferred to start of habeas corpus proceedings which were due in the Divisional Court on 3 October.

4 October 1989

Judicial review proceedings began, to be followed by habeas corpus proceedings on the question of what constituted "relevant offences" for the purposes of Mr. Osman's extradition.

5 October 1989

Application for independent inquiry refused. Application for bail refused. Case adjourned to 19 October.

26 October 1989

The Divisional Court adjourned for judgment on both judicial review and habeas corpus proceedings.

17 November 1989

The Divisional Court dismissed Mr. Osman's applications for judicial review and habeas corpus. The Court decided that Mr. Osman had been lawfully arrested and there had been no dishonesty or abuse of process. It also decided that all of the charges faced by Mr. Osman were relevant offences for the purposes of extradition, although it was agreed that a phrase objected to in the wording of one charge would be deleted.

5 December 1989

The Divisional Court refused leave to appeal to the House of Lords.

15 December 1989

Mr. Osman lodged a further petition for leave to appeal to the House of Lords direct, against the Divisional Court's judgment on the third habeas corpus application.

1 February 1990

Mr. Osman's outstanding petitions for leave to appeal to the House of Lords were refused by the House of Lords Appeal Committee.

2 February 1990

Mr. Osman lodged his fourth habeas corpus application.

Mr. Osman cannot be surrendered to the Hong Kong authorities until this further application has been heard.

Women Diplomats

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement concerning his Department's policies to encourage the appointment of more women to senior diplomatic posts.

Mr. Maude: The FCO makes all appointments on the basis of merit. The FCO is fully committed to being an equal opportunities employer.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Leicester, East of 12 January, *Official Report*, column *794*, where the five women ambassadors and high commissioners are posted; and how long they have been in post.

Mr. Maude: Four women are currently serving as ambassadors to Ivory Coast (June 1987), Luxembourg (February 1988), Mozambique (September 1989) and Chad (non-Resident, September 1989). A fifth woman is the leader of the United Kingdom delegation to the conference in Geneva and has been in post since October 1987.

Kashmir

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Indian Government about its suppression of the nationalist uprising in Kashmir.

Mr. Maude: We have made clear in our regular contacts with the Indian and Pakistan Governments that we believe the status of Kashmir can be settled only by agreement between the two sides. We have also made clear that we have no sympathy with those who espouse violence for political ends.

Computer Security

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department has taken and is taking to improve the security of its computer systems.

Mr. Maude: For unclassified but sensitive systems Departments are expected to follow CCTA guidance covering all aspects of IT security and the application of this has been tightened recently. CCTA advice is kept under continuous review and is based on analysis of security risks and requirements using structured methods such as CCTA's risk analysis and management methodology (CRAMM) which has also been made commercially available.

More stringent conditions apply to classified systems.

Germany

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last had meetings with the ambassadors of the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic; what subjects were discussed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs last met the ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany on 6

February during his visit to Bonn, when he discussed a wide range of issues. He last met the ambassador of the German Democratic Republic when he visited East Berlin and the GDR on 22-24 January, about which I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham), on 1 February, Vol. 166, column *307*.

HEALTH

Cervical Cancer

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent reports and evidence he has received about the incidence of cervical cancer among over-65-year-olds; whether he has any plans to alter his Department's guidelines to include regular provision of regular cervical smears for women over 65 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information about the incidence of cervical cancer is regularly published by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. Guidance issued by the Department of Health to health authorities, family practitioner committees and general practitioners in January 1988, a copy of which is in the Library, stated: "women aged 65 and over who have not had two consecutive negative smears in the last ten years should also be screened." GPs are well placed to carry this out. Our most recent figures show that women over the age of 65 already consult their doctor more than six times a year on average. Under the GPs' new contract much greater emphasis is being placed on health promotion and the prevention of ill health, including the requirement to offer health checks in specific circumstances (for example annually to patients aged 75 and over) and encouraging doctors to hold more health promotion clinics. This will mean that GPs will have even more opportunities to advise women patients over 65 of the wisdom of accepting these effective preventive measures.

National Health Service (Cost)

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the contribution is for an average family of four, on a weekly basis, towards the cost of the National Health Service *(a)* at the latest available date, *(b)* in 1979 and *(c)* at constant prices.

Mr. Freeman: It is not possible to provide the information requested. The greatest part of National Health Service funding comes from the Consolidated Fund and it is not possible to distinguish between the proportion contributed by private taxpayers and taxation raised from other sources. However it is possible to calculate figures for National Health Service expenditure per notional family of four and these are as follows:

	£ per week
1989-90	35
1979-80	13
[1]1979-80	27

[1] At current (ie. 1989-90) prices.

Consultants

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the criterion under which whole-time consultants employed in the National Health Service are allowed to earn a percentage of their gross income from private practice without losing their status and payment qualifications as full-time National Health Service consultants.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The terms and conditions of service for hospital medical and dental staff provide that a whole-time consultant can earn up to 10 per cent. of his gross whole-time salary, including the value of any distinction award held, from private practice.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the Government have any plans to end the practice of paying whole-time medical consultants higher salaries to partly compensate them for their dedication to the National Health Service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No.

Durham Health Authority

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all capital spending projects and their costs to Durham district health authority since 1974.

Mr. Freeman: Information on building schemes held centrally does not include small schemes or schemes carried out before 1980. The hon. Member may like to contact the chairman of the Northern regional health authority for a full list from the regional records.

Student Nurses

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many student nurses will qualify as students for community charge purposes.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Students on undergraduate nursing courses and those undertaking Project 2000 training will be eligible for student relief for the purpose of the personal community charge. No precise estimate can be made of the numbers likely to be involved. Thirteen Project 2000 schemes will be in operation by 1 April 1990, and it is planned to start further schemes during 1990-91.

Case Managers

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that case managers are trained to take full account of the views of the disabled person, authorised representative and carer when assessing their community care needs.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A key objective of the White Paper "Caring for People" is to ensure that assessment of needs for social care services takes full account of the views of the client and his or her carer. The Department will be issuing guidance to local authorities on assessment and case management. Training in the skills required by case managers will be addressed in improved qualifying training programmes, in new post qualifying training programmes, and in enhanced vocational training.

Community Care

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that the new arrangements for community care take full account of the needs of young disabled people.

Mr. Roger Freeman: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave my hon. Friends the Members for Dover (Mr. Shaw) and for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) on 12 December at column *605*. Our proposals are intended to benefit all people in need of community care.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to ensure joint planning by health and local authorities prior to the implementation of the proposed changes in community care.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 6 February 1990]:* A key component of the Government's policy on community care, set out in the White Paper "Caring for People" is the production by local authorities of community care plans. Health authorities will also be expected to produce community health care plans. The two should be prepared collaboratively. The Department will bring forward guidance in support of the requirement to produce these plans. The precise form of collaboration over the production of plans is for local decision and agreement.

Medical Advances

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department takes to keep doctors informed of the latest medical advances.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Every medical practitioner has the responsibility of keeping up to date with medical knowledge appropriate to his or her chosen specialty. To assist in this, the Department and health authorities allocate funds for the provision of courses and other educational activities and for the expenses of attending such activities. The content of educational activities is largely determined by the profession itself. In addition, from 1 April 1990, a new postgraduate education allowance will be payable to family doctors who maintain regular programmes of approved education and training.

Applied Microbiology

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future of the centre for applied microbiology and research.

Mr. Freeman: I am carefully considering the way ahead for CAMR in the light of advice from scientific and financial advisers. It is clear that the essential public health work must remain under the responsibility of the public health laboratory service. As one of the options for the future of the non-public health work at CAMR, we are considering an approach to acquire CAMR by Porton International plc. We will be advised by Hambros plc. I am not persuaded that these non-public health functions of the centre are of a nature that need necessarily be carried out within the public sector. When we have considered Porton's approach we will make a further statement, taking into account the interests of staff and public health.

Disabled People

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to monitor the implementation of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The Department's social services inspectorate has carried out a number of exercises to monitor the implementation of the Act. The results of an inspection of the operation of all sections of the Act in force were published on 6 February under the title "Developing Services for Disabled People". The findings of a more specific study of the progress of six authorities towards implementation of sections 5 and 6 are due to be published shortly. Copies of both reports will be placed in the Library.

Maternity Hospitals

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress his Department is making with implementing the maternity hospital episode system; how many districts are unable to provide all the items of information in the minimum data sets; and whether all National Health Service hospital trusts and private hospitals in England will be required to provide this information in the future.

Mr. Freeman: The collection of Korner maternity data commenced in September 1988. It is not possible to give a precise figure for the number of districts providing all items of the data set but approximately 70 per cent. have supplied all or most of the data required. The shortfall has been caused by technical difficulties between local maternity information systems and district information systems. Recommendations for changes to information systems consequent to the White Paper "Working for Patients" are currently the subject of consultation with the NHS. For maternity data the recommendation is that all providers to the district of residence will produce a minimum data set for hospital episodes of care. Those "contract" minimum data sets will include the data required under current maternity systems.

Eye Tests

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if, pursuant to his reply of 15 January to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), *Official Report*, column *87*, he will now place in the Library full details of the questions and sample questionnaires being circulated for the purposes of drawing up a survey of the level of eye tests for the first quarter of 1990; if he will indicate to whom such details are being circulated; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A sight test volume survey is being conducted by NOP Market Research Limited as part of its regular omnibus survey. The field work will be carried out between mid-March and mid-April. It will involve a random sample of 10,000 adults being asked the following questions:

"i. Have you had your sight tested at an opticians—not at a hospital or at your doctors—since Christmas?

and if yes,

ii. Was it an NHS sight test or did you pay for a private sight test?"

Abortions

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many abortions have been carried out since the passing of the 1967 Act for minor facial deformities.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is not available.

Cardiac Unit, North Western RHA

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will seek to expedite a reply to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe's letter of 16 January to the chairman of the North Western regional health authority about urgent problems facing the regional cardiac unit, raised with the right hon. Member by all the consultant cardiologists and cardiac surgeons at Wythenshawe hospital.

Mr. Freeman: I have been assured that the chairman of the North Western regional health authority will reply shortly to the letter of 16 January from the right hon. Member.

Nursing Staff

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department has conducted any exercises in computer modelling in relation to the supply of nursing staff, similar to those conducted by the Institute of Manpower Studies in relation to the supply of teaching staff in its study, "The Supply of Teachers 1989".

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In 1988 the Department initiated, on a national basis, a computer model which looks at the impact of Project 2000 (the new system of nurse education), together with demographic change and the changing patterns of nurse recruitment and retention, on the supply of trained nurses up to and beyond the year 2000. The model was made available to the NHS in 1989.

Deaths (South Yorkshire)

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many deaths on arrival were delivered by the police, armed services and voluntary organisations in December 1989 for each of the health authorities operating in south Yorkshire; and what was the cause of death;

(2) how many deaths on arrival were delivered to the health authorities operating in south Yorkshire in December 1987 and December 1988.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* The number of deaths on arrival recorded at south Yorkshire hospitals during December 1987, 1988 and 1989 were as follows:

	1987	*1988*	*1989*
Barnsley health authority[1]	32	30	34
Doncaster health authority	54	53	74
Rotherham health authority	15	28	26
Sheffield health authority	49	33	67

[1] The figures do not distinguish between deaths on arrival at the accident and emergency department and bodies delivered to the public mortuary at the Barnsley district general hospital.

Details of cause of death could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

These figures do not provide any sensible statistical basis for drawing any conclusions at all about the effect of the industrial action by the ambulance trades unions upon patients. The number of deaths on arrival at a hospital can fluctuate widely in normal circumstances depending on the range of cases in a particular month and if there has been any temporary increase in illness locally, for example, as a result of a flu epidemic. As further illustration there were 60 cases of deaths on arrival at Sheffield hospitals and 21 at Rotherham hospitals in December 1985.

Welfare Milk

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the total number of welfare milk scheme beneficiaries for each year since 1979 in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 16 January 1990]:* I regret that the information is not available in the form requested. The information that is available is in the table.

Estimate of the weekly number of welfare milk recipients in Great Britain 1979 to 1989

Year[1]	*Number*
November 1979	339,000
December 1980	449,000
December 1981	646,000
December 1982	809,000
December 1983	884,000
December 1984	976,000
February 1986	1,068,000
May 1987	1,096,000
June 1987 to May 1988[2]	932,000
May 1988 to December 1989	741,000

[1] Information to May 1987 is from the Annual Statistical Enquiry carried out in Social Security local offices. No information is available for 1985.

[2] From June 1987 it is an average based on the number of milk tokens surrendered for reimbursement by suppliers of liquid milk. Tokens used to obtain dried baby-milk are not included.

Social Workers

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many statutory child care cases are not currently supervised by local authority social workers because of staff shortages.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 6 February 1990]:* The information requested is not collected centrally.

Spiramycin

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he is satisfied that there are adequate supplies of the drug spiramycim in syrup for babies suffering from toxoplasmosis.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 6 February 1990]:* No product licence has been applied for in respect of spiramycin. Without a licence, the drug could not be imported on a commercial basis, though a doctor might arrange with the manufacturing company to supply it to him on a named-patient basis.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Arable Sector

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the current state of the arable sector.

Mr. Curry: In 1989-90, United Kingdom beet sugar production was just over 1·25 million tonnes. Devaluation of the green pound more than offset the 2 per cent. reduction in the EC sugar price.

Rapeseed production in the United Kingdom is estimated at 953,000 tonnes in 1989-90. Under the EC stabiliser mechanism, the target price has been reduced by 3·1 per cent. because Community production has exceeded the maximum guaranteed quantity. This amounts to a price increase of nearly 5 per cent. over 1988-89, when the price was reduced by 7·65 per cent. Taking account of the green pound changes, the support price increase in sterling is over 12 per cent. Market prices in 1989-90 have been considerably higher than in the previous year. Production of protein crops in the United Kingdom in 1989-90 is estimated at 703,000 tonnes. Institutional prices have been reduced by around 10 per cent. under the stabiliser mechanism as they were in the previous year. In sterling terms this has resulted in a price rise of over 7 per cent. taking account of green pound changes. Market prices have been higher in 1989-90 than in the previous year

For potatoes, estimated United Kingdom production in the current July-June crop year was 6,221,000 tonnes compared with 6,899,000 tonnes in 1987-88, but the shortfall has been partially offset by lower wastage. Weekly average producer prices are running at over £90 per tonne compared with less than £60 at this time last year.

Grain

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many days' supply of grain are currently in store in the United Kingdom *(a)* in intervention storage and *(b)* in all storage; and what were the figures for each of the past three years.

Mr. Curry: United Kingdom intervention stocks of cereals at the end of January 1990 represented around 11 days' supply compared with 21 days, 20 days and 52 days at the end of January 1989, 1988 and 1987 respectively.

The latest available information on the quantity of grain in commercial storage is in the form of estimates of stocks of wheat, barley and oats at 31 December 1989. Adding these estimates to the intervention stocks at the time gives total storage figures representing about 267, 282, 281 and 324 days' supply for December 1989, 1988, 1987 and 1986 respectively.

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the latest estimate of the stocks of grain which will be in store at the end of June 1990 *(a)* in Britain, *(b)* in the European Economic Community and *(c)* in the world, expressed in tonnes and days' supply; and what is the latest estimate of the stocks of grain at the present time in *(a)* Britain *(b)* the European Economic Community and *(c)* in the world expressed in tonnes and days' supply.

Mr. Curry: Current estimates of cereals likely to be in store in the United Kingdom and the European Community as a whole at the end of the 1989-90 marketing year on 30 June 1990 are as follows:

	Million tonnes	*Days' supply*
United Kingdom	3	55
EC	26	70

These figures are based on the Commission of the European Communities' balance sheet for cereals.

The International Wheat Council's estimate of world stocks of grain is an aggregate of national figures based on different definitions of marketing years and therefore does not relate to a particular date. However, the council's latest estimate for world stocks for the end of the 1989-90 crop year is 225 million tonnes or around 60 days' supply.

The latest estimate of current stocks of grain in the United Kingdom is for 31 December 1989 when the total was 15 million tonnes, representing about 267 days' supply. Estimates for the European Community and the world are not available.

Cereals

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the level of imports into the United Kingdom of *(a)* cereals and *(b)* cereals substitutes in each year since 1979.

Mr. Curry: The information is as follows:

Calendar year	*Imports of cereals (000 tonnes)*	*Imports of cereal substitutes (000 tonnes)*[2]
1979	6,216	432
1980	5,333	519
1981	4,197	1,382
1982	3,728	1,928
1983	3,225	1,439
1984	2,744	1,048
1985	3,286	1,038
1986	3,490	1,035
1987	3,484	1,091
1988	3,341	1,108
[1]1989	2,398	796

[1] To end November.
[2] As listed in Annex D to Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2727/75.
Source: HM Customs and Excise.

Meat and Bonemeal Exports

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has issued any notice to countries which import meat and bonemeal from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: Countries determine whether or not to import meat and bonemeal from the United Kingdom and the conditions which apply to such trade on the basis of this country's health status, about which they are kept fully informed.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice he has given to other European Community member states on the risks to their livestock posed by the feeding of British meat and bonemeal.

Mr. Maclean: Other member states of the European Community have been kept fully informed about BSE since it was identified as a new cattle disease, including its likely cause.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has on restrictions in other European Community member states on the incorporation of meat and bonemeal into ruminant feeds.

Mr. Maclean: The Netherlands have imposed a ban on the feeding of ruminant-based meat and bonemeal to ruminants.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has imposed any restrictions on the importation of meat and bonemeal into the United Kingdom; and what regulations exist governing the incorporation of imported meat and bonemeal into United Kingdom livestock feed.

Mr. Maclean: On 1 May 1989 new measures were introduced under the Importation of Processed Animal Protein 1981 and the Importation of Animal Protein and Poultry Products 1980 (as amended) Orders which stengthened safeguards against the importation of animal disease, including salmonella. These included the provision of veterinary certification confirming treatment to destroy salmonellae where consignments have come from countries that have previously shown the presence of salmonellae. On arrival at British ports, consignments may be sampled and tested for salmonellae. Subsequent action is appropriate to the results obtained.

Ruminant-based meat and bonemeal whether domestically produced or imported, is banned from use in ruminant rations.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the different types of grant aid available under the environmentally sensitive area system; and what is the average size of farms awarded grant aid when an environmentally sensitive area is developed.

Mr. Curry: Under the environmentally sensitive areas scheme farmers receive annual payments for following agricultural practices beneficial to the environment. Each scheme focuses on the environmental features characteristic of the area concerned. Since individual management agreements do not generally relate to the whole farm, it is not possible to state the average size of the farms involved.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total annual cost to public funds of the environmentally sensitive areas system; and what is the total annual budget for each environmentally sensitive area.

Mr. Curry: United Kingdom expenditure under the environmentally sensitive area schemes (ESAs) for the current financial year is forecast to be £12·6 million. The level of expenditure is determined by the number of agreements made with individual farmers. Budgets are not fixed for each separate ESA.

Agricultural Development Advisory Service

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total budget of the Agricultural Development Advisory Service in Wales in *(a)* 1988-89 and *(b)* 1989-90; and what proportion of this money was allocated to Gwynedd and Clwyd.

Mr. Curry: The budget of the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service in Wales for 1988-89 was £7·42 million, of which £1·18 million was allocated to Gwynedd and Clwyd. The budget for 1989-90 is £7·68 million, of which £1·19 million is allocated to Gwynedd and Clwyd.

Farm Animals

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what initiatives he proposes to take to improve the welfare of farm animals.

Mr. Gummer: I am determined that the special concern which the United Kingdom has shown towards animal welfare is carried across to our partners in the European Community. The protection of farm animals is now inevitably a European issue and Britain will have to play an active part in getting higher standards of animal welfare throughout the Community.

Animal welfare is an issue which transcends national boundaries and has to be tackled on a Community basis. While in some circumstances we have to reserve the right to maintain national controls, we must avoid encouraging imports from countries where standards are lower than our own. The way forward therefore is to seek the fullest degree of harmonisation so that all countries of the Community operate to the same high standards.

The Community has already taken some action in this area but much remains to be done. We will in particular press for action in the Community in the following areas:

Protection of animals in transit. There must be proper standards for transport including requirements for feeding, resting and adequate ventilation. Community rules must allow for surveillance during journeys particularly at key points such as sea and air ports.

Protection of horses. The Government recognise the concern about this issue. We will press for controls to be maintained on exports of horses for slaughter and for legislation to ensure proper welfare safeguards whenever horses are transported or slaughtered.

Welfare of pigs and calves. The Commission has made proposals but these need to be revised to take more account of the very real concern about certain farming systems such as veal crates (which have already been banned in the United Kingdom) and stall and tether systems for dry sows.

Poultry. When the battery hens directive was under negotiation the United Kingdom maintained that the minimum space allowance of 450 sq cm per bird (as finally agreed) was inadequate. This continues to be our view and in the review of the directive, which the Commission is required to complete by the end of 1992, we will press for an allowance of at least 600 sq cm. The review should also address improvements to the design of cages, and the welfare problems which can arise in alternative systems. For broilers Community rules are required to establish proper standards for husbandry, collection and transport.

Other species. Common standards are needed for the keeping of all farm livestock. These should cover specific issues such as the use of electric goads and rules on stocking densities, ventilation of buildings etc.

Slaughter. Common standards must be introduced as part of the completion of the single market. Community rules will have to have proper regard to the religious beliefs of citizens.

Enforcement. There are claims that observation of welfare legislation is not uniform throughout the Community. The

legislation must be rigorously enforced and there must be a Commission inspectorate to ensure uniform application by the authorities in all the member states.

The United Kingdom will press for action in these areas in order to achieve the improvements in farm animal welfare which are urgently needed in the Community.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 8 February 1990

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Civil Legal Aid

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the numbers of those who in 1989 and each of the preceding four years *(a)* applied for civil legal aid, *(b)* had their application for civil legal aid refused because they did not have a reasonable case, *(c)* had their application for civil legal aid refused because they did not meet the financial requirements and *(d)* were successful in securing civil legal aid on appeal against not having a reasonable case.

The Attorney-General: An analysis of applications for legal aid, which includes the number of applications made and the number refused on legal and financial grounds, is set out at appendix 2B(1)(a) of the Law Society's annual reports.

Statistics relating to appeals are set out in appendix 2F of the reports for 1987-88 and 1988-89. Information on appeals for earlier years is not available.

Figures for 1989 are currently available only to 31 March of that year.

THE ARTS

Arts Funding (North-west)

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Minster for the Arts if he will make a statement on funding of art galleries and museums in the north-west.

Mr. Luce: Grants to centrally funded museums and galleries in the north-west are as follows:

£ million

	1988-89	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
Greater Manchester Museum of Science and Industry	1·473	1·561	1·725	1·829	1·906
National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside	10·220	11·006	12·302	12·258	12·852
Tate Gallery (Liverpool)	0·700	0·800	n/a	n/a	n/a

n/a = figures not available.

I understand that for local museums and galleries, the north-west museum and art gallery service grant-in-aid assistance, and funding of conservation and design services, amounted to £326,602 in 1987-88 and £348,374 in 1988-89. I also understand that the Museums and Galleries Commission has provided capital grants of £89,499 in 1987-88 and £95,900 in 1988-89 to north-west museums and art galleries.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Tobacco

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the annual income to the Exchequer from tobacco-related taxes and duties.

Mr. Ryder: In 1988-89 excise duty revenue from tobacco taxation was £4,990 million; value added tax of around £1,050 million would also have accrued.

European Commission

Mr. Pike: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last had discussions with the president of the European Commission; and what was discused.

Mr. Ryder: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer last met Mr. Delors at the Council of Economic and Finance Ministers on 18 December last year, as I reported to the House on 20 December, *Official Report*, Vol. 166, c. *244*.

Self-employment

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how, for tax purposes, the Inland Revenue defines self-employed.

Mr. Lilley: The Inland Revenue applies case law laid down by the courts to the facts of particular cases. The essential question is, "Are you in business on your own account?"

A joint Inland Revenue—Department of Social Security leaflet provides guidance to those who are unsure about their employment status. Copies of the leaflet (IR56/NI39), available from any local tax office or DSS office, are held in the Library.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Angola

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total outstanding debt owed to Her Majesty's Government by the MPLA Government; what arrangements have been made for repayments and if he will make a statement; how much MPLA debt to this country is guaranteed by Her Majesty's Government for repayment; if he will place in the Library a copy of an agreed debt cut between Her Majesty's Government and the MPLA Government; and if he will estimate the amount of private sector debt owed to companies in the United Kingdom by the MPLA Government.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of any debt list agreed between Her Majesty's Government and the Government of Angola.

Mr. Maude: Angola's outstanding debt to Her Majesty's Government is all owed to ECGD. For commercial reasons, ECGD does not reveal detailed figures for debt that it is owed by individual countries, or for its outstanding guarantees. A copy of the United Kingdom-Angola debt agreement No. 1 (1987) which rescheduled some of Angola's debt payments to ECGD is available in the Library of the House. A second rescheduling was negotiated last year and an agreement will be signed shortly. Lists of debt covered by the rescheduling are not published. As for private sector debt, figures for debts to United Kingdom banks are given in table 15 of the Bank of England's *Quarterly Bulletin*, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. Figures for debts to other private sector institutions are not available.

Bangladesh

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met members or officials of the Government of Bangladesh; what issues are outstanding; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs looks forward to making his first contacts with Bangladeshi Ministers when opportunity arises. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development is visiting Bangladesh at the moment and plans to call on President Ershad today. We have excellent relations with Bangladesh, and are not aware of any major outstanding issues between us.

Preventable Loss

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the extent of preventable loss arising from theft or misappropriation in his Department.

Mr. Maude: A revision of the inventory of valuable items in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is in train and should be completed shortly.

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will list the number of professionally qualified loss prevention staff employed by his Department and the qualifications held by such staff, excluding qualifications obtained during police or military service.

Mr. Maude: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office employs no specialist loss prevention staff, but we employ our own cadres of security officers, at home and overseas, to supervise security arrangements in buildings for which we are responsible. They receive training in all aspects of their duties, which include loss prevention.

Hong Kong

Mr. Stanbrook: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the Hong Kong Government have made provision for war service to be included in the calculation of pensions for their expatriate staff.

Mr. Maude: The Hong Kong Government are still considering whether to include war service in the calculation of pensions for expatriate staff. At the turn of the year they sought, and were given, further information about the British Government's war service credit scheme for colonial pensioners. I will inform my hon. Friend when a decision has been made.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what he is doing to improve the living and sanitation conditions at detention camps for Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong.

Mr. Maude: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) on 12 January, c. *791-92*.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total number of Vietnamese boat people who have tried to commit suicide in detainment camps in Hong Kong in 1990.

Mr. Maude: Since 1 January 1990, seven people have inflicted injuries upon themselves in Hong Kong's detention centres. None of the injuries has been serious.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to give assistance to improve the environmental health conditions and housing in the Kwun Tong public housing area in Hong Kong.

Mr. Maude: As part of a comprehensive redevelopment programme to renew the urban environment, over 58,000 old public housing flats will be demolished, and about 55,000 new flats will be constructed between 1990 and 2001 in the Kwun Tong area, partly to provide replacement accommodation and partly to provide new housing for those in need. Planned environmental health improvements include the closure of a local refuse dump, restrictions on the sulphur content of industrial fuel oil, and the introduction of vehicle emission controls.

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council on 5 February.

Mr. Hurd: The Foreign Affairs Council met in Brussels on 5 February. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my noble Friend the Minister for Trade and I represented the United Kingdom.

Following our informal discussions in Dublin on 20 January, Ministers had a preliminary discussion of the prospects for extending the Community's relations with, and assistance to, the countries of eastern Europe. Preliminary suggestions from the Commission closely reflect United Kingdom ideas, which we put to partners before the Strasbourg European Council. The Commission also presented its proposals for the creation of a European training foundation and a mobility scheme for students (TEMPUS). These fulfil the mandate from the Strasbourg European Council to extend training assistance to the countries of eastern Europe. The Council separately agreed on the importance of the forthcoming CSCE economic conference in Bonn as an opportunity to monitor and encourage the development of market

economies in eastern Europe, and considered a Commission proposal for a draft concluding document of the conference.

Ministers issued a statement welcoming the reforms announced by President de Klerk of South Africa on 2 February. We looked forward to their early implementation, and hoped for further measures leading to the complete abolition of apartheid. Our statement noted that, to the degree that dialogue is instituted in South Africa, the Twelve will be prepared to reconsider their position in respect of sanctions in accordance with the European Council declaration at Strasbourg on 9 December. We agreed to discuss developments in South Africa on this basis at the next meeting on European political co-operation issues, which will be in Dublin on 20 February.

The Council discussed the future regime for imports of Japanese cars, and will revert to the issue in March. The Council expressed its support for the Commission's opinion on Turkey's EC membership application and asked the Commission to draw up detailed proposals for strengthening EC-Turkey relations within the context of the association agreement.

The Council discussed a Commission outline paper on a new Mediterranean policy and asked the Commission to produce detailed proposals taking into account the full range of views expressed at the meeting. The United Kingdom argued for a differentiated approach to individual Mediterranean countries, and in favour of measures to promote trade.

The Council noted with approval the EC's acceptance at the January GATT Council of the GATT panel report on the EC's oilseeds regime. Ministers discussed possible solutions to the hormones dispute and invited the Commission to put forward further proposals for discussion at official level

The Council took note of the Commission's proposals for assistance to Colombia's special co-operation programme and agreed on the importance of supporting the Government of Colombia in their courageous efforts to combat the drugs problem.

Ministers reviewed preparations for the inter-governmental conference on economic and monetary union.

Ethiopia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the Goverment are taking to encourage a negotiated long-term solution to the war in northern Ethiopia.

Mr. Waldegrave: Negotiations between the parties to the conflict in Ethiopia offer the only hope of a lasting solution. We have therefore been active in encouraging the parties, both directly and through others who have influence, to pursue seriously the peace talks initiated last autumn.

Middle East

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the number of people killed by terrorist action in the middle east in each of the last three years, setting out in each case the numbers killed by *(a)* Israelis and *(b)* Arabs.

Mr. Waldegrave: We do not keep statistics in the form requested.

Cash Limits

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he proposes to make any changes in his Department's diplomatic wing cash limits and running cost limits for 1989-90.

Mr. Maude *[pursuant to the reply 29 January 1990, c. 16]:* On changes to this Department's diplomatic wing cash limits and running cost limits for 1989-90, the details in the second paragraph refer to class II vote 2 (Other External Relations).

HOME DEPARTMENT

Bangladesh

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is undertaking to obtain a dependable estimate of the number of *(a)* spouses and *(b)* children who are currently awaiting entry clearance from Bangladesh.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Such estimates are available for all three countries in the Indian sub-continent; 1,700 spouses and 2,300 children in Bangladesh were awaiting a decision on their application for entry clearance for settlement in the United Kingdom at 30 November 1989. Aggregate information for (i) wives, children and persons applying for entry clearance for immediate settlement, and (ii) husbands and male fiances are published in tables 6 and 11 respectively of the annual Command Paper "Control of Immigration: Statistics, United Kingdom" (most recently, for 1988, in Cm. 726), a copy of which is in the Library.

Preventable Loss

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the extent of preventable loss arriving from theft or misappropriation in his Department.

Mr. Waddington: The extent of such loss in the Home Office is believed to be very small. Where losses do occur, appropriate measures are taken to minimise the risk of recurrence, including the recovery of moneys obtained by fraud.

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will list the number of professionally qualified loss prevention staff employed by his Department and the qualifications held by such staff, excluding qualifications obtained during police or military service.

Mr. Waddington: Staff employed by the Home Office have professional qualifications in several relevant disciplines, such as accountancy, auditing, fire prevention and health and safety. It would require a disproportionate use of resources to list them and their qualifications.

All-seater Stadiums

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a timetable for the possible all-seater status of stadiums included under schedules in the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. and learned Friend's statement on 29 January, at column 19, and to the schedule placed in the Library on the same date responding to recommendations 1 to 4 of the final report of the Hillsborough inquiry which set out the timetable for admitting spectators to seated accommodation only.

Deer

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will send to the hon. Member for Mansfield a copy of the Nature Conservancy Council report by V. P. W. Lowe on wild and feral deer in Great Britain, reference number NCC NERC Contract HF3/05/43.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No spare copies of this interim report, which was produced in 1979, are held by either the Home Office or the Nature Conservancy Council. However I will arrange for a photocopy to be sent to the hon. Member as soon as possible and for another to be placed in the Library.

Entry Clearance

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is undertaking to obtain a dependable estimate of the number of *(a)* spouses and *(b)* children who are currently awaiting entry clearance other than in the Indian sub-continent.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: None is planned. The collection of data on persons outside the Indian sub-continent applying for entry clearance for settlement in the United Kingdom was terminated at the end of 1979 because it was considered that its usefulness did not justify the resources required to undertake it. Information continues to be collected on persons applying in the sub-continent because of the large number of applications there. Some information on applications for entry clearance by persons in Hong Kong has been collected since the end of 1984; this information includes the numbers of spouses and children awaiting first interview but not the total numbers awaiting a decision on their application.

Computer Security

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps his Department has taken and is taking to improve the security of its computer systems.

Mr. Waddington: A wide range of steps have been and are being taken to ensure the security of my Department's computer systems: it would not be sensible to make details public. The measures needed to maintain adequate security are kept under review, and take due account of guidance issued centrally.

Abortion Clinics

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his reply of 7 December, *Official Report*, column *256*, what information is available about arrests in the vicinity of abortion clinics and the reasons for those arrests.

Mr. John Patten: None. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to her on 6 December 1989 at column *256*.

John McGranaghan

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the reason for the transfer into segregation of John McGranaghan on 17 October 1989; what is the reason for keeping him in segregation since that time; what is the reason for the delay in informing him of the reason for his segregation; and when he will be informed of the detailed reasons.

Mr. Mellor: Under the terms of prison rule 43(1), Mr. McGranaghan was removed from normal association on 17 October 1989 for the maintenance of good order or discipline. He returned to an ordinary location though in a different establishment on 14 November but from 22 November until 15 January 1990 he was again removed from normal association for similar reasons. These were explained to him by prison staff on both occasions.

Metropolitan Police Officers

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis on the cost to public funds of *(a)* training a Metropolitan police officer and *(b)* the estimated cost of wastage during the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available, arising from resignations, early retirement and transfers of officers to other forces.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The cost of the initial training provided for Metropolitan police officers is estimated at about £12,000 per officer. Continuing training is provided throughout an officer's service. Figures for the numbers of officers leaving the Metropolitan police are given in table 13(iii) of volume 2 of the report of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis for 1988. Information on the cost of this wastage is not available.

Prisoners' Complaints

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department from what sources he receives complaints from prisoners regarding conditions or treatment; and approximately what proportion of these complaints would come under the jurisdiction of the Parliamentary Ombudsman.

Mr. Mellor: The majority of prisoners' complaints are received directly as petitions to the Secretary of State or indirectly through Members of Parliament, prisoners' friends, relatives or legal advisers. It is not possible to make any reliable estimate of the number which might fall within the jurisdiction of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many complaints he has received from prisoners or from organisations concerned with prisons that hon. Members have not passed on prisoners' complaints to the Parliamentary Ombudsman.

Mr. Mellor: We have no record of having received such a complaint in an individual case.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to appoint a prison ombudsman; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: We are considering the comments made on this matter in response to the report of the working group on an improved system of grievance procedures for prisoners' complaints and requests.

Sentencing

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the proportion of 17 to 20-year-olds being given a prison sentence for criminal damage by area of the country where the case is heard.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is given in the table. Data for 1989 will not be available until autumn 1990.

Percentage of persons aged 17 to 20 sentenced for criminal damage offences who received immediate custody by police force area and type of court—1988

England and Wales	*Percentage of total persons sentenced*	
Police force area	*Magistrates' courts*	*Crown Court*
Avon and Somerset	1	[2]—
Bedfordshire	[2]17	[2]38
Cambridgeshire	4	[2]67
Cheshire	7	[2]64
Cleveland	7	[2]63
Cumbria	7	[2]100
Derbyshire	4	[2]65
Devon and Cornwall	7	[2]40
Dorset	—	[2]43
Durham	[2]—	[2]46
Essex	4	[2]75
Gloucestershire	—	[2]10
Greater Manchester	3	39
Hampshire	2	[2]24
Hertfordshire	[2]—	[2]14
Humberside	5	[2]73
Kent	4	[2]42
Lancashire	8	[2]65
Leicestershire	3	[2]45
Lincolnshire	3	[2]40
Merseyside	—	26
Metropolitan Police District[1]	2	26
Norfolk	[2]13	[2]50
Northamptonshire	6	[2]50
Northumbria	6	32
North Yorkshire	10	[2]33
Nottinghamshire	2	[2]67
South Yorkshire	7	46
Staffordshire	8	[2]48
Suffolk	4	[2]56
Surrey	3	[2]31
Sussex	7	[2]50
Thames Valley	1	42
Warwickshire	—	[2]40
West Mercia	2	[2]50
West Midlands	9	56
West Yorkshire	2	35
Wiltshire	2	[2]100
England	4	43
Dyfed-Powys	2	[2]40
Gwent	8	[2]67
North Wales	3	[2]67
South Wales	3	[2]67
Wales	4	63
England and Wales	4	44

[1]Includes City of London.
[2]Denotes fewer than 25 persons sentenced in this age group.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to establish limits on the variation in the probability of an offender being given a custodial sentence in different areas of the country for similar offences.

Mr. John Patten: Our proposals for a more coherent statutory framework to achieve greater consistency in sentencing are set out in the White Paper "Crime, Justice and Protecting the Public" (Cm 965), published on 6 February.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department with which individuals and organisations he has discussed the issue of an agreed national sentencing framework; and what advice he received.

Mr. John Patten: A wide variety of organisations and individuals have contributed to the public debate about criminal justice which preceded publication of our White Paper "Crime, Justice and Protecting the Public" (Cm 965) on 6 February.

Ambulance Duties

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call upon the chief constables of Hertfordshire, Lincolnshire, Bedfordshire, Derbyshire, South Yorkshire, Hereford and Worcester and Dorset for a report as to the cost per policeman hour of deploying the police on ambulance duties within their police districts.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the chief constables of Lincolnshire, Bedfordshire, West Mercia and Dorset that they are charging the relevant regional health authorities an average of £8·48, £8·95, £7·91 and £9·75 respectively per police constable per hour for assisting ambulance services. This basic charge does not include pensions and national insurance contributions, and rent allowance, which will be charged separately.

In Hertfordshire, Derbyshire and South Yorkshire, I understand that the charge is about £20·55, £20·55 and £19·90 respectively per police constable per hour, but that this does include pensions and national insurance contributions and rent allowance.

Charges will also be made for vehicle conversion and running costs, meal and subsistence allowances, civilian costs, and other sundry items.

Firearms

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applicants in the Greater Manchester area have handed in firearms for compensation under the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988; and how many claims have been *(a)* allowed and *(b)* refused.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Private Remand Centres

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish the results of the consultancy study by Deloitte, Haskins and Sells into the practical feasibility of involving the private sector in the operation of remand centres.

Mr. Mellor: The report by Deloitte, Haskins and Sells, "Practicality of Private Sector Involvement in the Remand

System", was made public on 1 March 1989. A copy was placed in the Library. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd) announced in his statement on that date at columns 277-78, further studies were needed before final decisions could be taken, and we are now considering the results of those studies.

Mr. Mohammed Azem

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when a decision will be taken on a request made by the representative of Mr. Mohammed Azem, Ref. OVS/41524/88, for refusal to allow him to enter the United Kingdom from Hong Kong to be reconsidered.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The grounds of appeal submitted by Bradford law centre on behalf of Mr. Mohammed Azem in its letter of 16 June 1989 were carefully considered but it was decided to maintain the original refusal decision. An explanatory statement setting out the facts and the reasons for the decision was submitted to the appellate authorities on 9 January.

Mr. Sodagar Hussain

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will call for a report from the post in Islamabad explaining why Mr. Sodagar Hussain, who was born on 21 July 1959, has been refused entry to join his wife in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The post in Islamabad refused the application on Home Office instructions on the ground that we were not satisfied that it was not the primary purpose of the marriage to obtain Mr. Hussain's admission to the United Kingdom. Mr. Hussain has appealed against that decision and the Home Office will shortly be sending an explanatory statement setting out the facts and reasons for the decision to the independent appellate authorities.

ENERGY

Preventable Loss

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what assessment he has made of the extent of preventable loss arising from theft or misappropriation in his Department.

Mr. Wakeham: Assessments are carried out on a regular basis and include reviews of physical security measures and internal financial and non-financial control systems.

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will list the number of professionally qualified loss prevention staff employed by his Department and the qualifications held by such staff, excluding qualifications obtained during police or military service.

Mr. Wakeham: The Department's policy is that staff in its internal audit branch are professionally qualified. Currently there are five fully qualified Members of the Institute of Internal Auditors (MIIA) and five under training.

Non-fossil Fuel Obligation

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether electricity supplied to English boards from Scottish Power and Scottish Hydro Electric will qualify as part of the non-fossil fuel obligation of the respective English companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The interconnectors between England and Scotland are used for electricity trading in both directions. Because of this, electricity supplied through the interconnectors will not qualify for inclusion in the non-fossil fuel obligation.

Fuel Prices

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish a table showing how prices for petrol and diesel have changed during the last 10 years.

Mr. Wakeham: Prices of petrol and diesel (derv) from 1972 are published in table 66 of the "Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics 1989". The latest monthly prices are published in "Energy Trends" (table 21).

PRIME MINISTER

Sovereignty

Q70. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Prime Minister if she has ever raised the sovereignty of the Parliaments of the member states of the European Community with the other Heads of Government.

The Prime Minister: The final work on EC decisions lies with member states in the Council of Ministers, who remain accountable to national Parliaments. The European Council in Strasbourg in December 1989 emphasised the need to ensure the proper observances of democratic control in each of the member states.

Hungary

Q136. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Prime Minister what is the Government's policy towards the European Community decision to provide a loan of 1 billion ecu to Hungary to help overcome structural adjustment problems; and whether any conditions have been imposed in terms of democratisation of political institutions in that country.

The Prime Minister: In the communiqué issued at our meeting in Strasbourg on 8 and 9 December, I and fellow EC Heads of Government referred to Hungary's need for an adjustment loan of $1 billion. EC Governments are now negotiating its terms and conditions. The United Kingdom would welcome additional contributions by non-Community countries. The loan will be conditional on a firm IMF programme of economic reform and adjustment. A central principle of all our assistance to eastern Europe is the encouragement of democracy and economic reform.

Culture

Q169. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Prime Minister what recent representations she has received on the projection of British culture overseas.

The Prime Minister: The British Council is doing a splendid job projecting our culture overseas. I have received no particular representations recently, but the demands placed on the council are increasing, especially now from east European countries, and I am glad that the Government have been able to increase their grant substantially for the second successive year.

Community Charge

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list the ground rules that Ministers must observe in their use of local and regional newspaper articles when referring to the community charge; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Ministerial articles on Government policy, when issued through Government Departments, are subject to the Cabinet Office guidance and conventions on Government publicity. When written in a party political capacity they are not. A copy of the guidance and conventions is in the Library of the House.

Mexico

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Prime Minister if during her recent meeting with the President of Mexico she discussed *(a)* the forthcoming fourth review conference of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and *(b)* the policies being developed by Mexico as part of the Non-Aligned Group of 77 towards nuclear non-proliferation and the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

The Prime Minister: No.

Kincora Boys' Home

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Prime Minister what steps her office has taken to investigate the allegations by Mr. Colin Wallace concerning the Kincora boys' hostel.

The Prime Minister: Allegations from a variety of sources concerning the Kincora Boys' hostel have been thoroughly investigated by successive inquiries conducted by the Royal Ulster Constabulary, by Sir George Terry and by Judge Hughes. Attempts were made to persuade Mr. Wallace to co-operate with these injuries, but without success. If Mr. Wallace has allegations that he wishes to press about criminal activity or other wrongdoing in Northern Ireland, the best way for him to deal with this is to give any information in his possession to the RUC in the first instance. If this information is classified, he should first consult the Director of Army Security.

Engagements

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her engagements for Thursday 8 February.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her engagements for Thursday 8 February.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her engagements for Thursday 8 February.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her engagements for Thursday 8 February.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her engagements for Thursday 8 February.

Mr. French: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her engagements for Thursday 8 February.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 8 February.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today, including one with the President-elect of Brazil.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Farming Diversification

2. **Mr. Forman:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reports he has received since taking office on the extent and scope of farm diversification schemes.

Mr. Gummer: Two Government-sponsored reports published recently give, for the first time, a clear picture of farm diversification in the United Kingdom. These reports show that about one third of the farmers who responded have developed some form of farm diversified business activity. This result gives a clear demonstration of the success of the Government's policy in this area.

Scotch Whisky

15. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what subjects he expects to discuss at his next meeting with representatives of the Scotch whisky industry.

Mr. Curry: I will discuss any issues of current commercial interest to the industry.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

16. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to review the level of compensation to farmers for the slaughter of cattle infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Mr. Maclean: I keep all aspects of my policy to deal with this disease under continuous reveiw.

33. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received recently concerning mad cow disease; whether he is contemplating any further action; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I have received a variety of representations about bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE). The Government have introduced a comprehensive package of measures to tackle the disease and to eliminate the remote risk to public health.

54. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on progress of research into the vertical transmission of bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Mr. Maclean: A research programme, costing about £5 million, is in hand to determine whether maternal

transmission of BSE occurs. However, because of the long incubation period, results may not be available for several years.

58. **Mr. Key:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a further statement about bovine spongiform encephalopathy containment measures and associated compensation arrangements.

Mr. Maclean: The probable cause of bovine spongiform encephalopathy was through the feeding of ruminant-derived protein. This practice was banned from July 1988. In addition, from August 1988 all cattle suspected of having BSE have been compulsorily slaughtered and their carcases burned or buried. The owners are compensated for the loss of animals at 50 per cent. of the value for cases confirmed on post mortem as BSE-infected and at 100 per cent. of the value where BSE is not confirmed.

However, the compensation element is not the mechanism designed to contain BSE or to prevent it becoming a risk to human health. The slaughter policy and removal of specific offals from all bovine animals does that.

66. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to increase research into bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Mr. Maclean: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on 9 January at columns *572-73*.

75. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cows have died or been destroyed as a result of bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Mr. Maclean: From the introduction of the compulsory slaughter policy on 8 August 1988 to 31 December 1989, a total of 9,884 suspected cases of BSE were slaughtered in Great Britain.

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any further plans to discuss with agricultural interests the subject of bovine spongiform encephalopathy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I and my officials have frequent discussions on a variety of subjects, including BSE, with groups representing agricultural and food interests.

Sheepmeat Regime

17. **Ms. Armstrong:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the arrangements for hill farmers under the sheepmeat regime.

Mr. Gummer: The reformed sheepmeat regime offers excellent opportunities to the United Kingdom sheep sector, including hill producers many of whom will also benefit from the increased HLCA payments I announced last week.

Farming Diversification

18. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total amount of land in England that has been put into set-aside.

Mr. Curry: About 87,000 hectares of land in England have so far been entered for the set-aside scheme.

Veterinary Service

19. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the duties of veterinaries employed by his Ministry.

Mr. Maclean: The state veterinary service has a wide range of duties including the control of animal disease of economic and public health significance, animal welfare and the import and export of live animals and their products.

They are also involved in food safety on the farm and in the slaughterhouse.

80. **Mr. McWilliam:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many veterinarians he employs within the state veterinary service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The state veterinary service currently employs 427 veterinary surgeons. It is likely that this number will increase particularly for food safety work including meat hygiene. This was recognised in the recent review of veterinary manpower under the chairmanship of Dr. Ewan Page.

90. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the operation of the state veterinary service.

Mr. Maclean: Since its inception in 1865 the state veterinary service has dealt successfully with many outbreaks of farm animal disease of both economic and public health significance. It continues to do so today. In addition, its responsibilities include animal welfare and the import and export of live animals and their products. It also undertakes important research and development work.

Milk Deliveries

20. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many pints of milk have been hand delivered in *(a)* the latest available year and *(b)* 10 years previously.

Mr. Curry: In the United Kingdom approximately 7 billion pints of milk were delivered to the doorstep in 1989, as opposed to 10 billion pints in 1979.

Pesticides

21. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about his review of pesticides.

Mr. Maclean: All pesticides approved prior to 1981 are to be reviewed. Approval holders are providing information relative to their products and will be required to submit full data packages covering safety for the operator, the consumer and for the environment. Where data packages are not provided within an agreed period approvals will be withdrawn. Reviews will be undertaken in an order to be determined by the Advisory Committee on Pesticides.

Intellectual Property

22. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to exploit the intellectual property of his Department to provide additional resources for research.

46. **Mr. David Davis:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to exploit the intellectual property of his Department to provide additional resources for research.

87. **Mr. Wood:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to exploit fully his Ministry's intellectual property.

Mr. Gummer: An intellectual property liaison unit has been established within my Department. Its task is to facilitate the identification, legal protection, marketing and sale of intellectual property and usage of returns therefrom.

North Sea Fish

23. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the conservation of North sea fish stocks.

Mr. Curry: Conservation of fish stocks in the North sea is a high priority. At the December Fisheries Council we took tough decisions to have a much lower total allowable catches (TACs) in 1990 by key stocks. We have sent the Commission a paper setting out possible further technical conservation measures. We will participate strongly in the high-level working group called by the Council to intensify discussions on conservation measures in the North sea. Success has been achieved. The herring stock has recovered from the low levels of 10 years ago and exceptional measures taken by the European Community in 1989 to protect the 1987 year class of sole has meant that a considerably higher TAC is possible this year.

Dogs

24. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to which countries dogs were exported for experimental purposes in each of the last five years.

Mr. Gummer: This information is not available.

70. **Mr. Sean Hughes:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many dogs were imported for experimental purposes each year in each of the last five years.

Mr Gummer: A total of 647 dogs were imported for research purposes during 1989. Details for earlier years are not available.

72. **Mr. Lewis:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food from which countries dogs were imported for experimental purposes in each of the last five years.

Mr. Gummer: Dogs were imported for research purposes only from the United States of America during 1989. Details are not available for earlier years.

Contaminated Feed

25. **Mr. Robert Hicks:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the current position regarding the lead-contaminated animal feed problem; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: A total of 1,512 farms in England, and a further 156 in Wales remain subject to Livestock restrictions. The Government are doing everything possible to scale down the restrictions as quickly as possible consistent with the need to ensure that the food chain remains fully protected.

34. **Mr. John P. Smith:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will introduce an indemnity scheme for farmers suffering financial loss as a result of lead contamination in animal feed.

55. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to compensate farmers in full for losses resulting from the supply of lead-contaminated feeding stuffs.

67. **Miss Emma Nicholson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consideration he has given to the need for financial help for farmers affected by lead in feed contamination.

Mr. Gummer: I have no such plans. There is no statutory provision for Government compensation in such cases. Liability is a matter for the courts to decide in the light of the contractual obligations of feed suppliers, or others, towards individual farmers. I understand that the National Farmers Union has established a co-ordinated procedure which it hopes will assist farmers wishing to pursue claims. The Milk Marketing Board has made loans available to affected milk producers pending a resolution of the issues of liability and costs of disposal. In addition I met senior representatives of the major banks towards the end of last year to explain the situation and to urge them to take a sympathetic view where farmers find themselves with immediate cash flow problems.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans the Government have to remove restrictions on movements of sheep as a result of the lead contaminated feed episode.

Mr. Curry: Under livestock release scheme II, groups of sheep which did not receive contaminated feed could be cleared from restrictions following confirmatory blood tests.

Until recently, the conditions applying to the release of animals for slaughter under livestock release scheme III had the practical effect of preventing sheep which received contaminated feed from being sold for slaughter. However, as I announced on 1 February, the results of our monitoring and research programme have enabled us to ease significantly the restrictions applying under scheme III. As a result, sheep can now be released for slaughter subject to conditions designed to ensure that liver and kidney do not go for human consumption.

We have also reintroduced scheme II which may allow the further release of groups of sheep which did not receive contaminated feed.

Our monitoring and research programme is continuing and the remaining restrictions will be removed as soon as it is safe to do so.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress he is making towards introducing a scientific programme on contaminated animals to test lead levels in offal and bones, with a view to releasing animals still under restrictions; what investigations he has made of Dutch practices in testing and with what result; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: A monitoring and research programme was begun as soon as the seriousness of the feed contamination incident became apparent in early November. The results obtained so far, which I published on 1 February, have enabled restrictions to be lifted on bone and all offal except kidney and liver. Scientific work is continuing and as soon as results show that it is safe to do so I shall remove all remaining restrictions. Close touch has been maintained with the Dutch authorities throughout this incident and information has been exchanged on a regular basis.

Exotic Animals

26. **Mr. Donald Thompson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he proposes to take in response to the representations he has received on the import of parrots and other exotic animals.

Mr. Gummer: Measures were announced in a reply given to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on 20 December 1989, at column *350*. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary has since written to airlines stressing the need for proper care in transporting birds, and officials have met conservation and welfare organisations. Visits by veterinary staff to major exporting countries and further meetings are being arranged. The review of post-import quarantine arrangements is continuing.

Turkeys

27. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he is taking to protect the traditional farm fresh turkey sold uneviscerated.

Mr. Curry: We have ensured that the European Community Commission is in no doubt about the importance we attach to our right to permit farmers to market uneviscerated poultry. We shall oppose any proposal which might seek to prohibit this.

Agriculture Industry

28. **Mr. Geraint Howells:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent discussions he has had on the present state of the agricultural industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I have frequent discussions with a range of organisations on the state of the agricultural industry. Most recently, I met representatives of the National Farmers Union, the Scottish National Farmers Union and the Ulster Farmers Union on 30 January to discuss the state of the industry and the European Commission's price proposals.

59. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which agriculture industry leaders he has met in the last six months; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Gummer: I meet leaders of the agriculture industry frequently to discuss a wide range of issues. Most recently I met representatives of the National Farmers Union, the Scottish National Farmers Union, and the Ulster Farmers Union on 30 January to discuss the state of the industry and the European Commission's price proposals.

Irradiation

29. **Mr. Irvine:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the reports he has received from independent scientific committees on the safety of food irradiation.

53. **Mr. Stevens:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the reports he has received from independent scientific committees on the safety of food irradiation.

Mr. Maclean: The Government received advice from the independent Advisory Committee on Irradiated and Novel Foods (ACINF) in its report entitled "Safety and Wholesomeness of Irradiated Foods" published in 1986. Annexed to this report were reports on specific aspects of food irradiation from the National Radiological Protection Board, the standing panel on hazards from microbial contamination of food, the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment, the panel on novel foods and the Food Advisory Committee.

The Government received a second report from the ACINF in 1987 in which the committee assessed scientific comment received on matters raised in its first report.

I am also aware of a number of reports from national and international scientific bodies, among which I would particularly mention: the 1977 and 1980 reports of the joint expert committee of food irradiation, convened by the World Health Organisation and the other international bodies; the 1982 report of the board of the International Committee of Food Microbiology and Hygiene of the International Union of Microbiological Societies; the 1986 report of the European Community scientific committee for food; and a number of reports from the United States Food and Drug Administration published in the Federal Register.

Berlin

30. **Mr. Ward:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last visited Berlin; what matters he discussed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I visited Berlin from 25 to 27 January. In the course of my visit I had meetings with the Ministers of Agriculture for the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. Among other matters I discussed developments in eastern Europe and, with the West German Minister, German restrictions on imports of British beef imposed in connection with bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Green Pound

31. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the current value of the green pound.

Mr. Gummer: The current level of the real monetary gaps, which represent the difference between green and market exchange rates of the pound, range from −9·566 for pigmeat to −17·990 for sheepmeat.

68. **Mrs. Currie:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to remove any discrepancy in the value of the green pound.

Mr. Gummer: As I have made clear to the House, I am seeking a substantial devaluation of the green pound in the current negotiations on the Commission's 1990 price proposals.

Common Agricultural Policy

32. **Sir Anthony Meyer:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether in the light of the changing situation in eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union, he will review the food export policies of the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Gummer: Part of the EC's response to the remarkable changes in eastern Europe has been to agree, with commendable speed and generosity, to a very considerable package of food aid and other measures. There are at present no plans to alter in addition the existing export policies of the common agricultural policy. The best way to assist countries in eastern Europe is, of course, to encourage the development in those countries of their own economics, and in particular their own agricultural sectors. We would certainly want to avoid any action which hindered this process. The Community, together with other major exporters, will continue to monitor the situation as the consequences of the recent changes unfold.

Organic Food

35. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he is taking to stimulate the development of organic food production.

65. **Mr. Waller:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what support his Department is giving to the development of organic methods of cultivation in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Gummer: It is for those who produce, process or market organic produce to respond to the growing demand for organic foods and to lessen our dependence on imported supplies. However, my Department has already taken a number of steps to encourage this process while additional proposals are currently under consideration.

Of particular significance has been the setting up of the United Kingdom Register of Organic Food Standards (UKROFS) which in May 1989 launched production and processing standards for organic produce and an independent certification and inspection system. We understand that the UKROFS board has now reached an advanced stage in its discussions on registration with the organic sector bodies through which it is expected the large majority of registrations will be effected. Once the board has satisfied itself on the inspection and certification arrangements to be operated by these bodies consumers will be able with confidence to purchase British organic produce backed by the UKROFS standards and monitoring provisions.

Other steps being taken, or under consideration, by the Government include the funding of a comprehensive economic survey of organic farming; the provision of R and D and of specialised ADAS advice; the help for conversion available through the fallow option of the set-aside scheme; and the benefits available through the farm and conservation grant scheme and from assistance towards establishing co-operatives. In addition, we are proposing shortly to issue a consultation document on an organic conversion option under the EC extensification scheme.

37. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with the Organic Farmers Association regarding organic extensification.

Mr. Gummer: I intend to consult interested parties on this subject shortly.

Horses and Ponies

36. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with his EEC counterparts about the retention of minimum values on the export of horses and ponies after 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Discussions on EC proposals on animals' welfare during transport are at an early stage. We will seek to maintain the minimum value controls or measures having similar effect.

Consumer Panel

38. **Dr. Reid:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the appointees to his consumer panel.

Mr. Maclean: I hope to announce the membership of the consumer panel in the near future.

50. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects his consumer panel will meet for the first time.

Mr. Maclean: I hope to hold the first meeting in the next few weeks.

Yorkshire Dales

39. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has any plans to visit the Yorkshire Dales.

Mr. Gummer: I have at present no plans to visit the Yorkshire Dales.

Dairy Farming

40. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next intends to meet the president of the National Farmers Union to discuss the dairy sector.

Mr. Gummer: I have regular meetings with the president of the National Farmers Union to discuss a wide variety of agricultural issues.

Nitrate-sensitive Areas

41. **Mr. John Garrett:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received regarding the nitrate-sensitive areas scheme.

Mr. Gummer: I have received representations from a wide range of interests as a result of our national and local consultations on the nitrate scheme. In general, our proposals have been welcomed.

Energy Efficiency

42. **Mr. Lord:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the contribution agriculture can make to the efficient use and generation of energy.

Mr. Curry: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce).

Intervention Board

43. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will be in a position to announce the future location of the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce.

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to his question on 25 January 1990 at columns *823-24*.

Hill Sheep Farmers

44. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the level of hill sheep farmers' income in *(a)* the last five years and *(b)* the next five years.

Mr. Gummer: As with all types of farm, the incomes of sheep farmers in the hill areas are influenced by a wide range of factors, including the weather, market conditions, size of enterprise and the skills of individual farmers. As a result, there have been fluctuations in income levels over the last five years, and there will no doubt be further fluctuations over the next five years. However, the outcome of the reform of the sheepmeat regime was highly satisfactory in providing increased opportunities for our sheep industry as a whole, including producers in hill areas. Producers in the high hills will also benefit from the proposed increase in the rate of hill livestock compensatory allowance for hardy breed ewes, which I announced in my statement to the House on 30 January.

Surplus Food (Fraud)

45. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many prosecutions were brought during the last four years and how many are pending in regard to fraudulent or other criminal practice on the management or storage of surplus food; and in how many cases conviction was secured.

Mr. Curry: I take it that the hon. Member is referring to the storage and management of intervention stocks. In this area one prosecution was brought during the last four years, and this resulted in a conviction. One further case is under investigation.

Fish Stocks

47. **Mr. Doran:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next proposes to discuss the conservation of fish stocks with the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Curry: On 27 June when the next Fisheries Council meets it should have the report it requested from the high level working party on improving conservation measures. The Commission is to submit appropriate proposals by 31 July 1990 which the Council will then need to discuss. In the meantime the prudent total allowable catches agreed in December in the interests of the conservation of fish stocks and existing technical conservation measures will be in full operation.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

48. **Dr. Marek:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the environmentally sensitive areas policy.

Mr. Gummer: There are 19 environmentally sensitive areas designated in the United Kingdom covering almost 800,000 hectares of agricultural land. The concept has been widely welcomed by farmers and conservation interests and the number of management agreements is well up to expectations. Comprehensive monitoring and assessment of the schemes is in hand and will guide my decisions on future arrangements when I review the policy next year.

Food Safety

49. **Mr. Fisher:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the financial resources available for food safety for 1990-91 in his Ministry.

Mr. Maclean: Following a reorganisation of the Ministry headquarters, resources have been transferred to strengthen the newly created food safety directorate. Details of the Ministry's expenditure plans for 1990-91, including those for food safety, are covered in chapter 3 (Cm. 1003) of the 1990 public expenditure White Paper which was published on 30 January. A more detailed analysis of the Ministry's expenditure plans for 1990-91 will be published in March in class III of the 1990-91 supply estimates.

57. **Mr. Fishburn:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what publications he has made available to the general public on the subject of chemical safety of food.

Mr. Maclean: Several publications are available, free of charge, in our "Food Sense" series including booklets on food additives, pesticides and food and food surveillance. The latter also lists the 26 individual food surveillance papers available from HMSO. A 27th entitled "Lead in Food: Progress Report" was published recently. Various reports from the Food Advisory Committee, the Veterinary Products Committee and the Advisory Committee on Pesticides are also available from HMSO.

61. **Mr. Caborn:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the operation of his food safety directorate.

Mr. Maclean: The food safety directorate brings together the divisions in the Department with the main responsibility for matters relating to the safe production and handling of foodstuffs and other consumer protection matters concerned with food. The directorate will report to me as Minister of food.

73. **Mr. Rooker:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what initiatives he has taken to improve food safety in the past three months.

Mr. Maclean: The major initiatives on food safety during the last three months have been the introduction of the Food Safety Bill and the establishment of a food safety directorate within my Department. In addition, work has continued on a large number of initiatives aimed at effective and comprehensive food safety controls.

81. **Mr. Hayward:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the European Community has awarded any contracts to the Institute of Food Research for work in the field of food safety and quality.

Mr. Gummer: The European Commission has selected the six shared-cost projects listed in the table, involving the Institute of Food Research for contract negotiation in the field of food safety and quality:

1. Application of oxidoreductases for food preservation.
2. New technologies and raw materials for nutritious and attractive cereal products.
3. Investigation of the minimum level of sulphur dioxide required for optimum red wine quality.
4. Mechanisms of food intolerance: relationship between gut mucosal integrity, allergy and adverse reactions.
5. Development of computer-aided process design procedures to improve quality and safety of products with a limited shelf life.
6. Study of production and utilisation of fibres with functional qualities and beneficial nutritional properties.

Cereals

51. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what benefits will accrue to the cereals sector from the current year's grants from the European Community for the improvement of marketing and processing facilities.

Mr. Maclean: Awards made by the Commission under EC regulation 355/77 to projects aimed at improving the marketing and processing of agricultural products are announced in June and December each year. The first awards for 1990 will be announced in June. For 1989, the Commission announced awards totalling £1,714,160 to seven projects in the cereals sector in the United Kingdom.

Food Industry

52. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which food industry leaders he has met in the last six months; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Curry: During the past six months the Minister has met many leading representatives from the food industry under a variety of circumstances, both formal and informal, when discussions have covered a wide range of topics of mutual concern.

Livestock (Slaughter)

56. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many live cattle and sheep were exported from Britain for slaughter elsewhere in the European Community in the most recent year for which figures are available.

Mr. Maclean: In 1989, a total of 358 cattle and 216,886 sheep were exported from Britain to the European Community for immediate slaughter.

60. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on live export for slaughter of United Kingdom livestock.

Mr. Gummer: Such a trade is acceptable provided exporters and hauliers comply with proper welfare standards. We will be pressing for the best possible welfare controls in negotiations on the Commission proposals for measures on protection of animals in transit.

Horticulture

62. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the benefits which will accrue to the horticultural sector from the current year's grants from the European Community for the improvement of marketing and processing facilities for agricultural commodities.

Mr. Maclean: Awards made by the Commission under EC regulation 355/77 to projects aimed at improving the marketing and processing of agricultural products are announced in June and December each year. The first awards for 1990 will be announced in June. For 1989 the Commission announced awards totaling £2,625,897 to 15 projects in the horticulture sector in the United Kingdom.

82. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on Government funding of horticultural research.

Mr. Curry: The Government are funding a substantial programme of horticultural R and D, including basic and strategic research, as well as work in the public interest.

Beef and Livestock Farmers

63. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has recently received from representatives of beef and livestock farmers.

Mr. Gummer: I am in regular contact with beef and livestock farmers' representatives. Issues that they have recently raised include BSE, lead contamination of animal feedingstuffs, support of livestock in the less-favoured areas and the Commission's proposals for the CAP price fixing.

Meat and Bone Meal

64. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has had any discussions with other European Community member-states about the export of meat and bone meal from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: My officials have had detailed discussions in the European Community's standing veterinary committee.

Fishing

69. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what benefits he assesses will accrue to the fishing industry from the current year's grant from the European Community for the improvement of marketing and processing facilities.

Mr. Maclean: Awards made by the Commission under EC regulation 355/77 to projects aimed at improving the marketing and processing of agricultural and fisheries products are announced in June and December each year. The first awards for 1990 will be announced in June. For

1989, the Commission announced awards totalling £2,538,668 to 22 projects in the fisheries sector in the United Kingdom.

71. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from, and what discussions he has had with, fishing industry representatives regarding prospects for the industry in 1990; and if he will make a statement on the outcome of these meetings.

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 6 February 1990 to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) at column *571*.

Hormones

74. **Mr. Rogers:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on illegal hormone use by United Kingdom livestock farmers.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell).

Poultry

76. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what grants are to be made in the current year to the poultry industry from the EC for the improvement of marketing and processing facilities.

Mr. Maclean: Awards made by the Commission under EC regulation 355/77 to projects aimed at improving the marketing and processing of agricultural products are announced in June and December each year. The first awards for 1990 will be announced in June. For 1989, the Commission announced awards totalling £1,911,009 to six projects in the eggs and poultry sector in the United Kingdom.

Coastal Protection

77. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much Government grant has been allocated to Bournemouth borough council for coastal protection and beach replenishment work since 1979.

Mr. Curry: Our records show that grant aid paid to Bournemouth borough council since 1 April 1979 in respect of all types of coast protection work amounts to £4·6 million.

Haddock

78. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with fishing industry representatives regarding his commitment to reduce fishing effort for haddock by 30 per cent.

Mr. Curry: We issued a consultation document on 23 January and it was discussed at a meeting with industry representatives in Edinburgh on 29 January. We are considering the industry's reactions to our proposals and I hope to be able to make an announcement shortly.

Pet Food

79. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the quality and safety of cat and dog food supplies.

Mr. Maclean: The safety and quality of pet food are protected by the detailed provisions of the Agriculture Act 1970 and the Feedingstuffs Regulations 1988. Manufacturers' performance in meeting these provisions is closely monitored by local trading standards officers.

Oilseed Rape

83. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give an estimate of the area of oilseed rape that will be grown in 1990.

Mr. Curry: Latest estimates suggest that between 350,000 and 360,000 hectares of oilseed rape will be grown in the United Kingdom in 1990.

Wildlife Habitats

84. **Mr. Michael J. Martin:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any plans to improve the quality of wildlife habitats.

Mr. Curry: While my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has primary responsibility for the preservation and mangement of wildlife habitats, the environmentally sensitive areas, farm woodlands and farm and conservation grant schemes also contribute to improvements in their quality.

Third World

85. **Mr. Kirkhope:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what aspects of United Kingdom agricultural and food policy are designed to assist Third world countries.

Mr. Gummer: The effect on Third world countries is one of the factors I take into account in assessment of all relevant United Kingdom agricultural and food policies. Developing countries benefit from a range of concessions on their agricultural and food exports to the United Kingdom, such as the generalised scheme of preferences and measures under the Lomé convention. I have adopted the Oxfam request that all relevant submissions to Ministers should specifically consider the effect on developing countries of the proposals being made.

Food Labelling

86. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what initiatives he is taking to promote British food via the use of labelling.

Mr. Curry: The Government support Food from Britain whose promotional activities include quality assurance schemes for a range of quality British products. Under these schemes, which are monitored by FFB's quality council, companies which meet the standards set may display an appropriate symbol. The latest of the quality council schemes to be launched concerns British extra fresh eggs. I am pleased to see that as a result of this and other Food from Britain initiatives there is a move by producers and retailers alike to make clear their British origin so that consumers can make an informed choice.

Hill Farmers

88. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on Government assistance to hill farmers in less-favoured areas.

Mr. Gummer: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement I made to the House on 30 January 1990 (*Official Report* columns 159-70).

Food Marketing

89. **Mr. Burt:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what contribution his Department is making to improve the marketing of British-produced food in 1990.

Mr. Curry: Food From Britain was set up in 1983 by my Department to improve the marketing of British food and drink both at home and abroad. In each of 1989-90 and 1990-91 the Government will provide FFB with £3·5 million for its establishment costs plus up to a further £1 million dependent on the level of industry funding. In addition agricultural and horticultural marketing co-operatives may be eligible for grant under the agricultural and horticultural co-operation scheme.

Cereal Sector

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the current state of the cereal sector.

Mr. Curry: The 1989 cereals harvest in the United Kingdom was 22·4 million tonnes, the fourth largest on record. About 5 million tonnes of this is surplus to domestic demand: I expect that this will find an export market elsewhere in the Community or be exported with Community export refunds to third countries. There is a good supply of milling wheat on the home market, and imports are likely to contribute no more than about 15 per cent. of United Kingdom millers' requirements. Intervention stocks are at lower levels than in recent years. Prices of cereals are generally above last season's levels, except for breadmaking wheat, on which premiums have narrowed. The Commission's proposals for the 1990 price fixing provide for further devaluation of the green pound. We shall be pressing for a devaluation which keeps us on course for the elimination of all monetary gaps by the end of 1992. Information on farm incomes from cereals is to be found on pages 66 and 68 of "Agriculture in the United Kingdom: 1989", which was published on 6 February.

Rain Forest Species

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what actions he has taken on the international trade in rain forest birds and reptiles since the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), answered the Consolidated Fund debate of the hon. Member for Linlithgow, *Official Report*, 20 December 1989, column 267.

Mr. Maclean: I refer to the answer given to the hon. Member on 29 January—*Official Report*, column 75. Officials from my Ministry and the Department of the Environment met conservation and welfare organisations on 30 January.

Nuclear Attack

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice he currently gives to farmers to protect their cattle in the event of a nuclear attack.

Mr. Maclean: The booklet, "Civil Defence and the Farmer", which was published in 1985, and is available in the Library of the House, contains advice on measures farmers might take to protect themselves and their livestock in the event of a nuclear attack.

School Milk

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he expects changes in the milk co-responsibility levy to affect the provision of milk in schools.

Mr. Curry: The school milk subsidy is provided for in EC regulations and is wholly financed by the Community. The EC Commission allocates part of the receipts from the milk co-responsibility levy to offset the cost of this and a number of other subsidies in the milk sector. I understand that the Commission intends to use co-responsibility levy receipts to offset the cost of the school milk subsidy by 117 mecu in 1990-91—the same amount as in 1989-90. It would be for the Commission and the Council of Ministers to determine whether any future reductions in milk co-responsibility levy receipts should be reflected in the arrangements for the school milk subsidy.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Stephens Inquiry (Fire)

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the progress of the inquiry into the cause of the fire at the Stephens inquiry team office.

Mr. Cope: I understand that the forensic scientists have now concluded their investigation and have reported that the most probable cause of the fire was an accident.

Coleraine, Ballymoney and Moyle Acute Hospital

Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the latest option appraisal for the acute hospital for Coleraine, Ballymoney and Moyle district will be the final one; if he will accept the findings of the option appraisal and proceed immediately to build on the basis of its conclusion; whether the currently available £20 million will be available to start building and at what date; and what will be the target for completion.

Mr. Needham: The option appraisal is being undertaken by the Northern health and social services board. Provided that it is carried out to the standards required under the Government's guidelines, the appraisal should lead to a final decision on the future provision of acute hospital services in the Coleraine, Ballymoney and Moyle area. It is not possible to give a definitive timescale for implementing the preferred option. The board has been informed that funds have been reserved provisionally for a phased redevelopment of the Coleraine hospital site starting in 1993. The substantial but so far unquantified additional resources required for a completely new hospital are unlikely to be available before 1997 at the earliest.

Firearms

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many firearms, listed by the category under which they are identified by the Royal Ulster Constabulary, are believed to have been stolen by terrorist organisations from *(a)* civilians, *(b)* Royal Ulster Constabulary, *(c)* Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve *(d)* the Ulster Defence Regiment, *(e)* the regular Army and *(f)* prison officers in each of the last five years for which figures are available;

(2) how many firearms, listed by the category under which they are identified by the Royal Ulster Constabulary, have been stolen from *(a)* civilians, *(b)* the Royal Ulster Constabulary, *(c)* the Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve, *(d)* Ulster Defence Regiment, *(e)* the regular Army and *(f)* prison officers in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and how many such firearms, and of which category were later recovered, or as much of such information as is available to him.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 9 January 1990]:* Readily available information is as follows:

Legally held firearms stolen in Northern Ireland

	Bullet firing	*Shotguns*	*Air weapons/ miscellaneous*
1989			
Civilians	15	41	4
Royal Ulster Constabulary / Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve	10	—	—
Ulster Defence Regiment	6	—	—
Regular Army	3	—	—
1988			
Civilians	16	54	13
Royal Ulster Constabulary / Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve	9	—	—
Ulster Defence Regiment	1	—	—
Regular Army	4	—	—
1987			
Civilians	34	91	13
Royal Ulster Constabulary / Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve	10	—	—
Ulster Defence Regiment	179	—	—
Regular Army	—	—	—
1986			
Civilians	13	96	20
Royal Ulster Constabulary / Royal Ulster Constabluary Reserve	11	—	1
Ulster Defence Regiment	1	—	—
Regular Army	2	—	—
1985			
Civilians	19	79	9
Royal Ulster Constabulary / Royal Ulster Constabulary Reserve	6	—	—
Ulster Defence Regiment	9	—	—
Regular Army	1	—	—

Note: Prison Officers are included in civilian category.

During 1989, a total of 246 firearms were found in Northern Ireland. Of these, 40 were recorded as having been stolen in Northern Ireland in previous years. Of these 40 stolen firearms, 25 were bullet firing and 15 were shotguns. Further information and details of weapons stolen by terrorist organisations are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Lough Mann (Development)

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for South Down of 11 December 1989, *Official Report*, column *450*, what action was taken by the Department of Environment town and country planning service to stop the development at the Shorts site at Lough Mann situated on the Downpatrick-Ballynahinch Road following the inspections which took place in May and September 1989.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 6 February 1990]:* None. On 15 January 1990, Down district council was consulted by the Department of the Environment (NI) with an opinion to approve the planning application referred to in my written reply. The council agreed with the Department's opinion.

Fair Employment Commission

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* to show *(a)* the number of employees of the Fair Employment Commission, *(b)* the number in each grade, Department and category and their religious affiliation, *(c)* the catchment area of the employees, *(d)* the religious composition by percentage of (i) the total population and (ii) the population of working age in the catchment area, *(e)* the number of employees born outside the United Kingdom and *(f)* the number of employees born in Great Britain.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 6 February 1990]:* At 2 February 1990, the Fair Employment Commission had 35 employees, including the chairman. Under the control of the chief executive, staff are distributed as follows:—

Fair Employment Commission (FEC) Departments

NICS Grade Equivalents	*Administration*	*Advice and Information*	*Complaints*	*General Operations*
Principal	Solicitor and Secretary to FEC (1)	Director (1)	Director (1)	Director (1)
Deputy Principal	—	Manager (1) Press Officer (1)	Senior Complaints Officer (2)	Manager (2) Computer Systems Manager (1)
Staff Officer	Finance and Admin Officer (1)	Advice and Information Officers (4)	Complaints Officers (4)	General Operations Officers (3)
Executive Officer (Grade 1)	Office Supervisor (1)	Adertising Officer (1)	—	Assistant General Operations Officer (1)
Executive Officer (Grade 2)	—	—	—	—
Admin Officer	Admin Officer (6)	—	Admin Officer (1)	—
Total	9	8	8	8

The commission is currently in the process of recruiting employees and will be submitting a monitoring return in accordance with section 27 of the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989. Once the final staffing complement has been reached the commission intends to publish detailed information on the religious composition of its staff and the progress of its affirmative action programme as a follow-up to the information published on 22 February 1989.

Mr. Colin Wallace

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he has taken to investigate the files of the Northern Ireland Office in Northern Ireland and in London to discover whether information about the activities engaged in by Mr. Colin Wallace and his section is recorded in those files.

Mr. Brooke *[holding answer 6 February 1990]:* A detailed study has recently been made of all relevant Northern Ireland Office files.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Agriculture Colleges

93. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many students were attending full-time courses in agricultural colleges in 1989; and what was the comparable figure for 1984.

Mr. Jackson: Available figures for full-time students attending agricultural colleges in England which were local education authority maintained or assisted or in receipt of direct grant from the Department of Education and Science are as follows:

	Number
November 1984	8,700
November 1988[1]	8,200

[1] Provisional.

Statistics for colleges in other parts of the United Kingdom are the responsibility of the respective Secretaries of State.

Further Education

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the numbers of 16 to 18-year-olds staying on in full-time education in *(a)* school and *(b)* further education colleges in 1988-89; and the target numbers for 1992-93 in (i) school and (ii) further education colleges.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The information requested is as follows:

16 to 18-year-olds in full-time education

England (000s)

	1988-89 (provisional)	*1992-93 (projected)*
Schools	389	343
Further education	261	227

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what were the numbers of 16-year olds in full-time education in 1987-88 and 1988-89.

Mr. Alan Howarth: There were 336,000 full-time students in England attending schools and colleges of further education in 1987-88 and the same number in 1988-89.

Primary School Teachers

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make it his policy that all primary school teachers enjoy a minimum of 10 per cent. non-contract time during their working day.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The organisation of the school day and the duties to be undertaken by teachers in their 1,265 hours of directed time are matters for head teachers.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on teachers' pay.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my hon. Friend gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) on 1 February, *Official Report* columns *287-89*.

Goldsmiths Youth Orchestra

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received seeking funding for the Goldsmiths youth orchestra; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend has received no representation about this matter which is for Goldsmiths college to decide.

Expenditure

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list all shire counties in England in rank order of expenditure per secondary pupil per year, starting with the highest spending authority, together with their position in the table of examination results for school leavers achieving grades A to C at GCSE in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The table gives the net institutional expenditure per secondary school pupil in shire counties in England in the financial year 1987-88, and averaged examination results for the three years 1985-86 to 1987-88. The purpose of averaging is to reduce sampling error within the derived percentages.

Secondary schools in shire counties in England: Net institutional expenditure per pupil and examination achievements at GCSE[1]

Shire County	*Net expenditure per pupil (£ cash)*[2,3]	*Numbers of leavers with five or more GCSE results at grades A to C*[4,5] *As a per cent. of all school leavers*	*Rank*
Leicestershire	1,565	23·4	30
Oxfordshire	1,560	26·2	21
Cleveland	1,545	27·1	16
Nottinghamshire	1,540	21·6	36
Derbyshire	1,530	22·5	35
Cumbria	1,510	26·9	17
Buckinghamshire	1,505	33·4	2
Hertfordshire	1,490	30·3	5
Shropshire	1,470	27·7	11
Humberside	1,460	21·5	37
Bedfordshire	1,455	26·0	24
Lancashire	1,450	25·7	25
Avon	1,435	26·1	22
Essex	1,420	26·3	20
Staffordshire	1,420	23·4	31
Surrey	1,415	36·4	1
Durham	1,405	21·0	38
Hampshire	1,405	27·7	12
Warwickshire	1,400	26·6	18
Cheshire	1,390	28·3	10
Northumberland	1,390	29·8	6
East Sussex	1,385	27·4	13
Gloucestershire	1,385	29·1	8
Norfolk	1,385	22·8	32
Devon	1,380	24·4	28
North Yorkshire	1,375	32·8	3
Northamptonshire	1,375	22·7	34
West Sussex	1,360	32·6	4
Somerset	1,355	24·5	27
Isle of Wight	1,350	17·0	39
Wiltshire	1,350	24·0	29
Cornwall and Scilly Isles	1,350	27·3	14
Hereford and Worcester	1,330	28·5	9
Dorset	1,320	27·2	15
Cambridgeshire	1,315	26·1	23
Suffolk	1,305	22·7	33
Kent	1,290	26·5	19
Lincolnshire	1,280	25·3	26
Berkshire	n/a	29·4	7

[1] The figures in the table have not been adjusted to take account of variations in LEA's socio-economic circumstances.
[2] Net institutional expenditure includes the cost of salaries and wages, premises, and certain supplies and services. It does not include the cost of school meals, central administration and inspection, debt charges or revenue contributions to capital outlay.
[3] The unit spending figures are based on LEA expenditure returns to the Department of the Environment for the financial year 1987-88, and pupil number returns to DES.
[4] The examination data are aggregated from the results of a sample survey for the academic years 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88. The survey is based on a 10 per cent. sample of pupils in maintained and independent schools (excluding special schools) who have reached the minimum school leaving age. The percentages quoted do not reflect the achievements of pupils at O-level, CSE or GCSE after leaving school; nor their attainments in examinations leading to vocational or other qualifications at school or elsewhere.
[5] Includes grades A-C at O-level and CSE grade 1.

Higher Education

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many students have been enrolled in higher education in the current academic year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The table sets out the relevant figures with a comparison with those for 1988-89:—

	Thousands of students	
	1988-89 Final actual	*1989-90 Provisional estimate*
1. Home full-time and sandwich courses		
(a) *Initial entrants* (excluding postgraduates)		
Universities (GB)	76	82
Polytechnics and colleges funding council (PCFC) sector	85	95
Other	3	3
(b) *Total* (including postgraduates)		
Universities (GB)	[1]271	283
PCFC funding sector	[1]239	261
Other	6	6
2. Overseas full-time and sandwich courses	63	66
3. Part-time (including Open University)	344	358
4. Total full-time and part-time (FTE)	700	741
5. Age participation index (GB)	15·2	16·8

[1] These figures have been adjusted to include students at Bulmershe College in the universities figure so as to allow direct comparison with the 1989-80 figures following the College's merger with the University of Reading.

Note:

The number of home full-time and sandwich course students entering universities and the PCFC sector increased this academic year by 8 per cent. and 12 per cent. respectively. I congratulate universities, polytechnics and colleges for promoting their courses and for their readiness to respond to the increase in demand. This welcome expansion reflects the success of the Government's policies in schools as well as in further and higher education. One in six of all young people now enter higher education compared with one in eight in 1979-80. This will bring benefits both for individual students and for the nation's prosperity.

City Technology Colleges

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will update the table given in answer to the hon. Member for Blackburn, *Official Report*, 29 June 1989, columns *533-36*, giving the latest available information in respect of each city technology college or proposed or planned city technology college.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 6 February 1990]:* The table covers the agreed and announced CTCs in England.

Name	*Kingshurst*	*Tyneside*	*Bradford*	*Dartford*	*Britschool*	*Djanogly*	*Macmillan College*
Site	Kingshurst School site	St. John Fisher School site	Newby Square, Bradford	Downs School site	Site of Selhurst Tertiary Centre	Sherwood Rise, Nottingham	St. Michael RC School, Middlesbrough
LEA	Solihull	Gateshead	Bradford	Kent	Croydon	Nottinghamshire	Cleveland
Planned number of pupils	1,000	900	980	1,250	720	990	1,050
Total capital cost[1]	£9·65 million	£7·8 million	£8·2 million	£8·3 million	To be determined	£9·05 million	£7·5 million
Exchequer contribution	£7·55 million	£6·24 million	£6·56 million	£6·64 million	To be determined	£7·80 million	£5·625 million
Sponsors' contribution							
(i) Committed[2]	£1·93 million	£1·54 million	£1·64 million	£1·66 million	To be determined	£1·25 million	To be determined
(ii) Confirmed	£2·5 million	£1·5 million	£2·8 million	£1·2 million	£1·1 million	£1·7 million	£1·4 million
Principal sponsors	Hanson Trust	Peter Vardy	Dixons plc, Mr. Hakim Wong	Mr. G. Leigh	The British Record Industry Trust	Mr. Harry Djanogly	BAT Industries
Contracts awarded to sponsors	None	Building contract Laings Northern	None	None	None	None	None
School closure involved	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Has a ballot of parents been held and with what result	No	No	No	No[3]	No	No	No

Notes:

[1] In addition the Exchequer bears revenue costs on a basis comparable to those of maintained schools in similar areas.

[2] Sponsors' contribution to date. Fund raising continues in each project. This includes contributions in kind which are as yet uncosted.

[3] Public consultations were held by Kent on its proposals to close the Downs School. One statutory objection containing 62 signatures was made

to the section 12 proposal subsequently published.
[4] A further £13 million is promised but not committed to agreed and announced projects.
[5] At December 1989.
[6] Includes estimated value of premises.

Name	*Harris*	*Bacon's*	*Haberdashers'*	*Brighton*	*Derby*	*Corby*
Site	Sylvan School site, Croydon	Bacon's School site, Southwark	Haberdashers' Aske's Hatcham School site	Fitzherbert School site, Brighton	Wood Street	Greenfield site at Great Oakley, Corby
LEA	Croydon	Southwark	Lewisham	East Sussex	Derbyshire	Northants
Planned number of pupils	1,100	1,100		750	900	1,075
Total Capital Cost[1]	£7·981 million	£13·1 million	To be determined	£9 million	To be determined	£9·39 million
Exchequer contribution	£6·385 million	£10 million	To be determined	£7·2 million	To be determined	To be determined
Sponsors' contribution						
(i) Committed	£1·596 million	£3·1 million	To be determined	£1·8 million	To be determined	To be determined
(ii) Confirmed[4,5]	£1·5 million	£2·5 million	£5 million[6]	£1·1 million	£1·2 million	£1·9 million
Principal sponsors	Philip and Pauline Harris Trust	Philip and Pauline Harris Trust	Haberdashers' Aske's Charity	Greenleaf Planters	The Landau Foundation	Mr. Hugh de Capell Brooke
Contracts awarded to sponsors	None	None	None	None	None	None
School closure involved	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Has a ballot of parents been held and with what result	Yes Majority against	No	Yes Majority in favour	No	No	No

Notes:
[1] In addition the Exchequer bears revenue costs on a basis comparable to those of maintained schools in similar areas.
[2] Sponsors' contribution to date. Fund raising continues in each project. This includes contributions in kind which are as yet uncosted.
[3] Public consultations were held by Kent on its proposals to close the Downs School. One statutory objection containing 62 signatures was made to the section 12 proposal subsequently published.
[4] A further £13 million is promised but not committed to agreed and announced projects.
[5] At December 1989.
[6] Includes estimated value of premises.

Euro-Science

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was his assessment of the validity of the European Commission's calculation that Euro-Science needs at least 7·7 billion ecu over the next five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have been asked to reply.

I represent Her Majesty's Government at the Council of Ministers (Research). Having given full consideration to the European Commission's proposal, the Research Council agreed on 15 December to a total budget of 5·7 becu (£4·2 billion) for a new framework programme for research and technological development, from 1990 to 1994 (I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave on 17 January, *Hansard* column *318* and 24 January, *Hansard* column *699*).

As I said in my answer of 17 January, we consider that this was a very satisfactory outcome.

WALES

Radon

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those towns and villages in Wales in which there may be significant effects on houses arising from radon; and if he will issue guidance as to what step householders in these locations should take to minimise any dangers.

Mr. Grist: The Welsh Office commissioned survey and that carried out by the National Radiological Protection Board to date have not revealed any towns and villages in which here may be significant effect on houses arising from radon. The surveys have demonstrated levels of radon above the action levels in very few houses but these have been included in the second phase of the NRPB survey where measurements are being taken over a period of 12 months. It is not possible to anticipate the findings of the second part of the survey the result of which should be available towards the end of the year.

Two free advice booklets "Radon in Houses" and "The Householder's Guide to Radon" have been distributed to homeowners in the surveys and are available on request.

Computer Security

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps his Department has taken and is taking to improve the security of its computer systems.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Department follows CCTA guidance which covers all aspects of information technology security, and keeps its application of this advice under continuous review.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to increase the hill livestock compensatory allowance for cattle.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: No.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will meet the farmers' unions in Wales to discuss their call for an increase in allowances for cows and ewes, other than those classified as hardy.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The views and priorities of the farmers' unions in Wales were fully taken into account in the recent autumn review of hill livestock compensatory allowances.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will increase the hardy ewes allowance on the higher hills in line with inflation since 1986; what would be the cost; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: No. Hill livestock compensatory allowances are set annually after all economic conditions affecting upland farmers' incomes have been taken into account.

Dyslexia

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the measures he has taken since 1979, and the initiatives he intends to take, to assist dyslexic children in Wales.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Education Act 1981 imposes duties on all local education authorities to identify, assess and make appropriate provision for all children with special educational needs, including dyslexics. Under the Education Reform Act 1988 all children, including those with special educational needs, will follow the national curriculum as far as is practicable.

Local Government Legislation

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the subsidiary legislation having effect in Wales that is planned subsequent to the passage of the Local Government Act 1989, and if he will indicate *(a)* when he hopes to publish each item of subsidiary legislation and *(b)* when he intends that each should take effect.

Mr. Grist: The following regulations have so far been made under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989:

The Charging Authorities (Population for Precepts) (Wales) Regulations (SI 1989/12268)

The Charging Authorities (Notification of Precept Population) (Wales) Regulations (SI 1989/12305)

The Local Government (Politically Restricted Posts) Regulations 1990 (SI 1990/42)

Further secondary legislation will be introduced as required to ensure the progressive implementation of the Act. The Government's policy will be to ensure, whenever possible, that all interested parties will have an opportunity to comment.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will make it his policy to ensure that adequate time is given between publication of subordinate legislation relative to Wales subsequent to the passing of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and the implementation of the Act.

Mr. Grist: The Government will continue to give as much time as practicable.

Community Care

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidance he has offered to local authorities in Wales on the contribution he expects them to make towards the provision of suitable homes for *(a)* disabled people and *(b)* elderly and very elderly people as part of the implementation of community care policies outlined in his recent White Paper.

Mr. Grist: I fully recognise the importance of housing in relation to community care. This has been clearly reflected both in the Welsh chapter of the recently published White Paper, and in the draft planning guidance on the development of social care plans for the relevant client groups in Wales, which issued for consultation on 26 January. This covered the involvement of housing associations and local authorities. I await the result of the consultation exercise with interest.

Companies (Local Authority Interests)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is now his proposed implementation date for the parts of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 relating to companies in which local authorities have an interest.

Mr. Grist: The proposed implementation date is 1 April 1990.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he intends to publish a revised version of his draft circular regarding companies in which local authorities have interests dated 27 October 1989 in the light of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

Mr. Grist: The revised circular will be published when the provisions of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 regulating local authority companies come into force. I will provide local authority associations in Wales with an advance draft of the order bringing into effect the regulations on companies, for comment.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many civil servants in his Department, and at what cost, have been involved in production and dissemination of articles for newspapers in Wales concerning the revenue support grant and the community charge, and if he will make a statement;

(2) what is the individual and total cost of his articles in each of the local and regional newspapers of Wales concerning the revenue support grant for Wales and the community charge; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Articles published under my right hon. Friend's name may or may not be based on a corpus of information provided in the normal way by civil servants. It is not possible to attribute to the Department the cost of such information. Articles disseminated by the Department are given free of charge to newspapers and the costs incurred are de minimis.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether his Department made any payment to the *Chester Chronicle* in relation to the publication of his article on the revenue support grant for Wales and the community charge in the *Chester Chronicle*, Deeside edition of 2 February.

Mr. Grist: No.

Waste Sites

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a survey in Wales of waste sites which might pollute water supplies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: A survey of contaminated land in Wales which included abandoned waste disposal sites was undertaken in Wales in 1982 and updated in 1988. The results of the survey have been widely publicised and a copy of the survey has been placed on the Library of the House. Current sites are licensed by district councils in Wales who are under a duty to ensure that waste disposal sites do not cause pollution of water.

Stroke Victims (Therapy)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he intends to introduce to help stroke victims in need of *(a)* physiotherapy and *(b)* speech therapy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: The level of provision of physiotherapy and speech therapy services for stroke victims is a matter for district health authorities in the light of their assessment of local need and competing demands for resources. From April 1991 we shall expect the social care needs of such patients to be included in the joint social care plans prepared by social services authorities in co-operation with health authorities and others.

Radioactive Waste Incinerator (Trawsfynydd)

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the proposal to build a new radioactive waste incinerator at Trawsfynydd nuclear power station.

Mr. Baldry: I have been asked to reply.

This is a matter for Nuclear Electric. I have asked the chairman to write to the hon. Member.

ENVIRONMENT

Contaminated Land

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce a grant regime to provide financial assistance specifically for contaminated land.

Mr. Trippier: There is already extensive grant aid for dealing with contaminated derelict land. The Government are currently considering the report of the Environment Select Committee on contaminated land which recommends that existing grant systems should give greater priority to sites which are contaminated or polluting and that separate financial support should be given for demonstration projects for cleaning up contaminated land.

Private Tenants

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what redress is available to private tenants who at present pay combined rates and rent and who find that their landlords are not taking account of the abolition of domestic rates in April 1990.

Mr. Chope: Redress available to private tenants who at present pay combined rent and rates depends on the type and terms of the tenancy agreement they have. A substantial majority are covered by the Rent Act 1977 and can have a fair rent registered which will be exclusive of rates. Many new assured tenants under the Housing Act 1988 will have covered the issue in their tenancy agreements. Assured shorthold tenants, who make up a significant proportion of new tenants, have the right to apply to the rent assessment committee for a rates exclusive market rent to be registered during the initial fixed term of their tenancies. The Department will shortly be issuing a leaflet explaining the position.

Search Fees

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to collect information on the varying levels of local authority search fees and issue guidance on standardisation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The Lord Chancellor sets a standard fee for statutory searches of local land charges registers. In addition, local authorities supply answers to supplementary inquiries, under a voluntary agreement between the local authority associations and the Law Society. It is for authorities themselves to decide what fees to charge for this service. Information about the fees charged for processing supplementary inquiries is available from the Law Society, which publishes details from time to time in its gazette.

Radioactive Waste

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the inquiries made by his Department into the decrease in the amounts of radioactive material being sent for disposal to the official low-level waste site at Drigg, Cumbria.

Mr. Trippier: My Department is making no such inquiries, but I am advised that the radioactive waste management advisory committee is reviewing the general question of low-level waste disposal.

Trees, Leicestershire

Mr. Ashby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the level of tree coverage in Leicestershire; and what plans he has to improve this aspect of the environment in Leicestershire.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The census of woodlands and trees carried out by the Forestry Commission in 1980 revealed that there were nearly 8,000 hectares of woodland in Leicestershire—some 3 per cent. of the total area of the county—and, in addition, more than 1 million other trees. Currently sites in Leicestershire are among a number that the Countryside Commission is considering as a possible location for its proposed new national forest in the Midlands: a consultation paper issued by the Commission in November gave further details and carried a foreword by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The Government are also promoting planting of trees through their existing schemes of aid, and the Forestry Commission is co-operating with the county council in planning further planting on reclaimed mineral workings.

Lead Pollution

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when pollution report No. 28 on lead will be published.

Mr. Trippier: Pollution report No. 28, "UK Blood Lead Monitoring Programme 1984-1987: Results for 1987" will be published in the spring. Summary results from the 1987 survey were published in "Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics No. 11" last year and detailed tables for 1987 will be published as additional tables to digest No. 12.

Arpley Meadows

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the provenance of the low-level radioactive wastes to be disposed of at the Arpley Meadows site; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: The wastes originate at the Royal Liverpool hospital and Liverpool university.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what level of radioactive dosage would be received per year by local residents consequent upon the dumping of solid radioactive wastes at Arpley Meadows domestic landfill site.

Mr. Trippier: The radiological impact of the proposed disposals will be less than one thousandth of the average radiation dose received from natural background radiation.

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what notification he has received as to the cubic volume of low-level solid radioactive wastes to be dumped at the Arpley Meadows domestic landfill site.

Mr. Trippier: It is proposed that some 12 to 24 cu m of clinical and laboratory waste will be disposed of at Walton Arpley.

Housing, Bradford

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Bradford, West of 19 January, *Official Report*, column *443*, when he expects to announce his decisions on city grant and estate action grant applications in respect of new homes to rent and for sale on the Lower Grange estate in Bradford.

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities hopes to be in a position to make final decisions on Lower Grange shortly.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received concerning proposals to establish a certificate of competence for waste handlers and carriers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Environmental Protection Bill includes a power for the Secretary of State to prescribe qualifications and experience for applicants for waste management licences to demonstrate that they are fit and proper persons to hold a licence. Of the few representations received on this proposal, none opposed it in principle. A certificate of competence is now being devised by the recently formed waste management industry training and advisory board. When this certificate is available it is intended that it should be suitable for prescription by regulations under the Bill as evidence of technical competence.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much was raised by domestic rates in 1988-89 and 1989-90; and what is the amount that should be raised if councils spend at SSA levels, and the amount he anticipates that councils will charge.

Mr. Chope: I estimate from local authority budgets that the following amounts were raised by domestic rates in 1988-89 and 1989-90:

	Before rate rebates £ million	*After rate rebates £ million*
1988-89	8,847	7,674
1989-90	9,754	8,499

If local authority spending in 1990-91 is equal to total standard spending, £9·7 billion will be raised from charge payers before benefits and £7·55 billion after community charge benefit and income support. I expect local authorities to make every effort to keep their spending within the Government's assumptions. Figures are not directly comparable between years because of changes in local authority functions

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of local authority expenditure in 1990-91 he estimates will be met by community charge payers.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 5 February 1990]:* Taking account of community charge benefit (including income

support) and transitional relief, I estimate that if local authorities in England spend at the level of total standard spending in 1990-91, 23 per cent. of that expenditure will be met by community charge payers.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will amend poll tax regulations to extend exemption to those single persons serving short custodial sentences and defendants remanded in custody, in order that local authorities will not consider them eligible for payment for unoccupied premises before the passing of 52 weeks in custody.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 6 February 1990]:* Guidance already issued by the Department has suggested that local authorities should use the wide discretion available to them to specify this class of circumstance as one where the standard community charge multiplier is zero.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce a provision that every person who pays poll tax is entitled to his own dustbin.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 6 February 1990]:* No.

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance his Department has issued to local authority community charges registration officers in relation to nursing students registering for the poll tax.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 7 February 1990]:* Guidance on the eligibility of student nurses for the student relief is contained in "The Community Charge: Students and the Community Charge" (community charge practice note No. 23) which has been sent to all community charge registration officers. A copy is in the Library of the House.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice his Department is giving to rating authorities about making available photocopies of the non-domestic rating list to members of the public, under the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 7 February 1990]:* My right hon. Friend has not given any advice to charging authorities on this matter. The provisions for inspection of non-domestic rating lists are contained in paragraph 8 of schedule 9 to the Local Government Finance Act 1988, inserted by paragraph 48 of schedule 5 to the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Under this provision members of the public have a right to require the authority to provide a photograhic copy of the list, or an extract from it. Authorities may make a reasonable charge for doing so.

Housing, Leicester

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money will be allocated to Leicester city council housing department in the coming financial year; and how much will be allocated for new build programmes.

Mr. Chope: Leicester city council was informed on 21 December 1989 that its housing investment programme (HIP) allocation for 1990-91 was £18·32 million. This compares favourably with allocations to other authorities of a similar size. In addition, up to a further £2·5 million is available for new Estate Action schemes. It is for the council to decide how much of its HIP allocation should be spent on a new build programme.

Right to Buy

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to bring into force section 164 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

Mr. Chope: On 1 March. From that date housing particularly suitable for people of pensionable age, other than sheltered housing, first let before 1 January 1990 will be excluded from the right to buy only if the Secretary of State so determines on the application of the landlord; and a house or flat first let on or after 1 January will no longer be excluded as elderly persons' housing unless it forms part of a sheltered scheme.

These changes will be good news for elderly and disabled people who feel they have been unfairly denied the right to buy on the ground that their home is particularly suitable for elderly people. They may wish to apply again from 1 March.

Housing Repairs

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the numbers of tenants who have *(a)* applied for and *(b)* received payment for repairs carried out under the right to repairs scheme introduced under the Housing and Building Control Act 1984 in (i) 1986, (ii) 1987, (iii) 1988 and (iv) 1989; what is the total cost of payments made under this scheme in each of these years; and what has been the cost to the Government and local authorities in introducing and administering this scheme.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 29 January 1990]:* The number of claims received and agreed in each of these years is shown in the table, together with the total amount agreed. The Department has incurred total costs of some £40,000 in informing tenants of the scheme and on training them; administrative costs for the scheme are not identified separately. Information on local authorities' costs other than on meeting claims is not collected by the Department.

England	*Total number of claims received for payment*	*Total number of claims agreed[1] for payment*	*Total amount agreed[1] £*
1986 1st quarter	6	5	500
1986-87	48	44	4,500
1987-88	18	17	1,700
1988-89	9	9	600
Total	81	75	7,300

[1] Accepted by landlords as payable.

Landfill Sites

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many landfill sites he considers it necessary for Her Majesty's inspectors of pollution to visit each year in order to establish that waste disposal authorities are complying with their statutory duties.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 6 February 1990]:* The number of landfills visited in the course of an audit will vary between waste disposal authorities. The inspectorate anticipates that in the course of a complete full year's audit programme, up to 500 licensed facilities will be visited. This, together with the other information obtained during the audits, will permit the inspectorate to take a view on the overall standard of waste regulation.

Car Pollution

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to fund a research project into ways of reducing car pollution along the lines of that being financed by the French Government.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have been asked to reply.

The Department has allocated £2·3 million to support a three-year collaborative research programme with industry of 11 projects on diesel and petrol vehicle engine emissions. The work is being carried out by a consortium of diesel and petrol engine manufacturers, component and oil and fuel additive suppliers. The programme supplements work already being done by the industrial members of the consortium as part of their own R and D programmes.

SCOTLAND

Forestry

91. **Mr. Robert Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the proportion of land in the United Kingdom given over to forestry.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: About 10 per cent.

Psychiatric Nurses

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he intends to introduce regulations regarding the training of community psychiatric nurses; and if he will make a statement on the current situation.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Standards of training are laid down and monitored by the United Kingdom central council for nursing, midwifery and health visiting and the national board for nursing, midwifery and health visiting for Scotland. The skills and knowledge required by these nurses may vary from post to post, and it is a matter for individual health boards as employers to determine what post-registration training individual community psychiatric nurses may require.

Electricity Board Reports

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if, pursuant to his answer of 20 December 1989, *Official Report*, column *292*, he will now publish in the *Official Report* the dates on which the annual reports of the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board and the South of Scotland Electricity Board have been published in each year since nationalisation, either for existing or predecessor corporations.

Mr. Rifkind: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 20 December 1989. Annual reports published by the North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board and South of Scotland Electricity Board are available in the Library of the House. I received the annual reports for 1988-89 on 21 December 1989.

Cervical Smear Tests

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will reconsider the system of bonus payments to general practitioners for cervical smear tests.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Incentives to general practitioners to provide full preventive cover are an important feature of the Government's plans for improving general medical services.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has decided the amount of fee remission grant to allocate to schools participating in the assisted places scheme in respect of session 1990-91.

Mr. Lang: The allocations of fee remission grant for 1990-91 are shown in the table. As in 1989-90, 59 schools will participate in the scheme and overall these allocations should increase the number of pupils benefiting from the current level of about 2,800 to about 2,900. Further expansion is planned for the 1991-92 academic session which will extend to more families the option of education in the independent sector.

School	*Allocation* £
Aberlour House School, Moray	22,000
Albyn School for Girls, Aberdeen	48,000
Ardvreck School, Crieff	3,000
Beaconhurst Grange School, Bridge of Allan	14,000
Belhaven Hill School, Dunbar	13,000
Belmont House School, Newton Mearns	54,000
Blairmore School, Huntly	17,000
Butterstone House School, Dunkeld	16,000
Cargilfield School, Edinburgh	17,000
Clifton Hall School, Midlothian	15,000
Craigclowan Preparatory School, Perth	14,000
Craigholme School for Girls, Glasgow	78,000
Crawfordton House School, Dumfriesshire	17,000
Croftinloan School, Pitlochry	14,000
Daniel Stewart's and Melville College / The Mary Erskine School	690,000
Dollar Academy	148,000
Drumley House School, Ayrshire	15,000
Edinburgh Academy	158,000
Fernhill School, Glasgow	50,000
Fettes College, Edinburgh	151,000
Fort Augustus Abbey School	110,000
George Heriot's School, Edinburgh	535,000
George Watson's College	613,000
Glasgow Academy	97,000
Glenalmond College, Perthshire	160,000
Gordonstoun School, Morayshire	114,000
Hamilton College	20,000
The High School of Dundee	430,000
The High School of Glasgow	80,000
Hutchesons' Grammar School, Glasgow	280,000
Keil School, Dumbarton	170,000
Kelvinside Academy, Glasgow	155,000
Kilgraston School, Perthshire	133,000
Kilquhanity House School, Castle Douglas	40,000
Lathallan School, Montrose	17,000
Lomond School, Helensburgh	123,000
Loretto School, Musselburgh	132,000
Merchiston Castle School, Edinburgh	237,000
Morrison's Academy, Crieff	387,000
New Park School, St. Andrews	12,000
Oxenfoord Castle School, Midlothian	25,000

School	Allocation £
Park Lodge School, Helensburgh	3,000
Rannoch School, Perthshire	110,000
Robert Gordon's College, Aberdeen	125,000
Rudolf Steiner School of Edinburgh	135,000
St. Aloysius' College, Glasgow	307,000
St. Denis and Cranley School, Edinburgh	88,000
St. George's School for Girls, Edinburgh	47,000
St. Leonard's School, St. Andrews	104,000
St. Margaret's School for Girls, Aberdeen	36,000
St. Margaret's School for Girls, Edinburgh	168,000
St. Mary's School, Melrose	16,000
Strathallan School, Forgandenny, Perthshire	210,000
Wellington School, Ayr	117,000
West of Scotland School Company	560,000
TOTAL	7,450,000

Self-employed People

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many self-employed people there were in Scotland in every year since 1979; and how this figure is calculated.

Mr. Lang: The table shows the estimated number of self-employed people in Scotland in September of each year from 1979 to 1989, the latest date for which estimates are available. Self-employment in Scotland is estimated to have increased by over 40 per cent. in the past 10 years.

Estimates of the self-employed in Scotland up to mid-1988 are based on the 1981 census of population and the results of the labour force surveys carried out between 1981 and 1988. The provisional estimates for dates after June 1988 have been made on the assumption that the average annual rate of growth in self-employment in Scotland between June 1981 and June 1988, as shown by the labour force survey, has continued.

Estimated number of self-employed in Scotland

September	Number Thousands
1979	159
1980	153
1981	153
1982	168
1983	181
1984	189
1985	201
1986	202
1987	199
1988	217
1989	227

Source: Department of Employment.

South of Scotland Electricity Board

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will call for a report from the South of Scotland Electricity Board as to how much it has paid British Nuclear Fuels plc for *(a)* reprocessing and *(b)* decommissioning for each year from 1985 to 1989.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 31 January 1990]:* I am informed by the South of Scotland Electricity Board that the amounts paid to British Nuclear Fuels by the board for reprocessing and decommissioning for each of the years specified are as follows:

	Reprocessing £'000	Decommissioning[1] £'000
1984-85	21,415	1,135
1985-86	45,117	983
1986-87	59,718	956
1987-88	71,314	1,120
1988-89	74,506	1,585

[1] The decommissioning payments are in respect of BNFL plant.

HEALTH

Consultants

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether concessions on financial status given to whole-time medical consultants in the National Health Service on percentage allowances for private practice have altered the numbers of National Health Service only consultants.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Since 1979-80 whole-time NHS consultants have been permitted to undertake a limited amount of private practice. In 1980 44 per cent. of all medical consultants in England and Wales had whole-time contracts. This figure had risen to 49 per cent. by 1988.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether full-time contracts are to be continued to be offered to National Health Service consultant candidates; and whether any reductions in numbers of National Health Service whole-time consultants have been recorded in the regions.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Yes. Health authorities will continue to offer whole-time contracts to consultants.

Between 1979 and 1988 all regions in England have recorded an increase in whole-time consultant numbers.

Helicopters

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which ambulance authorities own and operate a helicopter.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Helicopter ambulances at present in service within the National Health Service are not owned by health authorities; they are funded in several different ways, including sponsorship, and operated by commercial helicopter operating companies.

Dentistry

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will collect centrally DMF levels.

Mr. Freeman: Decennial surveys of the dental health of children and adults in the United Kingdom are conducted on behalf of the Department by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. The results of the adult dental health survey which has recently been carried out are due to be published later this year. The next survey of children's dental health is proposed for 1993.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will commission a dental health education project to assess tooth decay in north Staffordshire.

Mr. Freeman: Health authorities are responsible for monitoring the dental health of all age groups in the

population of their areas and for providing dental health education and preventive programmes. I refer the hon. Member to the North Staffordshire health authority for the information she requires.

Hospital Operations (Cancellations)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the main factors according to the information available to his Department for the cancellation of operations in hospitals.

Mr. Freeman: Statistical information on reasons for the cancellation of operations is not held centrally. A study of 12 hospitals carried out in 1988 by the Department's value for money unit showed that planned levels of theatre utilisation were affected by factors including: patients not attending; absence of medical staff; emergency procedures; equipment breakdown; and unavailability of technicians. In many cases it is possible to reallocate sessions. The Department is currently consulting health authorities and others about guidance following the recommendations made in the study report. These include a suggested 90 per cent. target level for operating theatre utilisation. Copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

Nurses

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by district health authority in the north-west region *(a)* the current nursing staff establishment, *(b)* the number in post at the last available date and *(c)* the number who have left the service of the National Health Service in the past year.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The numbers of nursing and midwifery staff in post by district health authority in the North-Western region are set out in the table.

NHS Nursing and Midwifery staff in post at 30 September 1988

	Number
Lancaster	2,125
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	2,544
Preston	2,490
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley	1,935
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	3,237
West Lancashire	918
Chorley and South Ribble	606
Bolton	1,903
Bury	1,103
North Manchester	2,451
Central Manchester	2,073
South Manchester	3,121
Oldham	1,485
Rochdale	1,174
Salford	3,318
Stockport	2,162
Tameside and Glossop	1,420
Trafford	1,230
Wigan	2,114

Source: Annual Census of NHS Non-Medical Manpower.
(I)—Includes agency staff: figures are rounded to the nearest whole time equivalent.

Current nursing establishments in each district health authority in the north-western region are not available centrally. Data on the number of nursing and midwifery staff who have left the National Health Service in the 1988-89 year are not yet available.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by district health authorities in the north-west region the number of people on waiting lists for urgent and non-urgent operations for each year since 1985.

Mr. Freeman: The available information is given in the table. Following the implementation of the recommendations of the steering group on health services information (the Korner committee) starting in April 1987, no distinction is now made between urgent and non-urgent cases since the committee regarded such distinctions as unreliable. Between 1985 and 1989 the number of inpatient cases treated in the north-west region increased by 4 per cent. from 617,600 to 640,500.

In-patient waiting list, surgical specialties[1], by district health authority
North Western region, as at 31 March 1985 to 1989

Health authority	*1985*			*1986*			*1987*			*1988*	*1989*
	Urgent	*Non-urgent*	*Total*	*Urgent*	*Non-urgent*	*Total*	*Urgent*	*Non-urgent*	*Total*	*Total*[2]	*Total*[2]
Lancaster	155	1,902	2,057	118	1,957	2,075	19	2,269	2,288	2,281	2,813
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	270	3,073	3,343	442	3,625	4,067	511	3,816	4,327	3,232	3,218
Preston	11	4,131	4,142	69	4,501	4,570	29	4,462	4,491	4,774	4,840
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley	26	2,342	2,368	8	2,015	2,023	9	2,387	2,396	3,213	3,759
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	195	2,228	2,423	276	2,191	2,467	255	1,812	2,067	2,201	1,704
West Lancashire	14	1,743	1,757	28	1,892	1,920	16	2,431	2,447	2,336	2,778
Chorley and South Ribble	—	864	864	0	764	764	0	770	770	666	636
Bolton	25	2,643	2,668	40	2,788	2,828	118	3,013	3,131	2,590	2,930
Bury	—	969	969	6	729	735	0	731	731	825	373
North Manchester	77	2,812	2,889	168	2,454	2,622	82	2,331	2,413	3,031	2,331
Central Manchester	164	4,252	4,416	337	4,843	5,180	291	6,070	6,361	6,843	7,557
South Manchester	726	4,875	5,601	682	4,935	5,617	459	5,529	5,988	6,888	7,242
Oldham	348	4,140	4,488	321	4,058	4,379	447	4,475	4,922	4,249	4,903
Rochdale	57	2,708	2,765	122	2,911	3,033	118	2,815	2,933	2,821	3,280
Salford	179	3,868	4,047	120	3,708	3,828	219	4,517	4,736	2,627	4,187
Stockport	366	4,085	4,451	403	3,698	4,101	290	3,794	4,084	4,324	4,257
Tameside and Glossop	110	1,883	1,993	100	1,533	1,633	80	1,526	1,606	1,604	1,476
Trafford	8	965	973	25	1,476	1,501	5	1,528	1,533	1,467	1,459
Wigan	69	4,022	4,091	74	4,281	4,355	40	4,418	4,458	4,080	4,310
North Western	2,800	53,505	56,305	3,339	54,359	57,698	2,988	58,694	61,682	60,052	64,053

Source: SBH203 returns 1985 to 1987, KH 7 and KHO7a returns 1988 onwards.
[1] General surgery, Urology, T and O, ENT, Ophthalmology, Oral surgery, Restorative dentistry, Paediatric dentistry, Orthodontics, Neurosurgery, Plastic surgery, Cardiothoracic surgery, Paediatric surgery, Gynaecology, Radiotherapy.
[2] Less self deferred cases.

Hospital Beds

Mr. Callaghan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by district health authority in the north-west regional health authority the total available patient beds for each year since 1979.

Mr. Freeman: The available information is given in the table:

Average daily available beds[1], all sectors, NHS hospitals, by district health authority in North Western Region 1979 to 1988-89

Health authority	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*
Lancaster	2,645	2,601	2,508	2,512	2,406	2,352	2,217	2,106	1,821	1,798
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	1,564	1,576	1,664	1,733	1,732	1,737	1,756	1,730	1,630	1,763
Preston	[2]	[2]	[2]	2,318	2,239	2,196	2,173	2,060	2,079	1,902
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley	2,825	2,781	2,746	2,706	2,665	2,624	2,579	2,509	1,315	1,231
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	2,591	2,591	2,522	2,513	2,516	2,438	2,399	2,303	3,216	3,008
West Lancashire	886	862	854	851	851	867	812	790	735	661
Chorley and South Ribble	[2]	[2]	[2]	374	378	357	345	345	323	302
Bolton	1,361	1,315	1,328	1,303	1,294	1,285	1,246	1,251	1,254	1,227
Bury	716	740	786	801	812	822	810	816	788	775
North Manchester	2,041	2,038	2,026	1,982	1,950	1,831	1,752	1,692	1,648	1,521
Central Manchester	1,137	1,201	1,227	1,254	1,250	1,242	1,272	1,246	1,238	1,219
South Manchester	2,408	2,423	2,389	2,401	2,417	2,355	2,277	2,187	2,112	2,068
Oldham	1,045	1,028	1,004	1,003	1,029	1,019	1,026	1,004	993	980
Rochdale	953	904	875	879	869	827	824	843	765	758
Salford	3,098	3,089	3,017	3,008	2,972	2,876	2,688	2,666	2,506	2,372
Stockport	1,677	1,692	1,759	1,816	1,793	1,749	1,724	1,741	1,693	1,672
Tameside and Glossop	869	965	981	941	917	942	945	957	982	955
Trafford	836	864	869	837	827	814	775	747	755	718
Wigan	1,479	1,450	1,430	1,446	1,467	1,426	1,403	1,413	1,469	1,479
North Western Region	30,811	30,839	30,662	30,678	30,384	29,756	29,021	28,406	27,320	26,409

Source: SH3 returns, 1979-1986, KHO3 returns 1987-88 onwards.
[1] Wards open overnight only.
[2] Comparable figures not available due to National Health Service restructuring in 1982.

Breast Screening

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial resources have been made available for consultant surgeons at Arrowe park hospital participating in the assessment and treatment stages of the Wirral breast screening programme scheduled to start on 19 February; what assessment has been made of the adequacy of these resources; and if he will make a statement on the extent, coverage and date of operation of the breast screening programme in the Wirral.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department has allocated resources for the breast screening programme to regions. It is for each regional health authority to decide how funds are allocated to screening services within the region. The hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of the Mersey regional health authority.

Welfare Milk

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children in the east midlands are in receipt of the welfare milk token scheme; and what was the comparable figure for 1979.

Mr. Freeman: Information about the number of welfare milk beneficiaries by area is not available, but overall the Government are spending £80 million per annum on welfare milk which goes to some 800,000 beneficiaries.

Disablement Services Authority

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average waiting time for an artificial limb prior to the Disablement Services Authority being set up.

Mr. Freeman: The specific information requested is not available, but one of the reasons for setting up the DSA was to streamline the procedures and we are monitoring the situation.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has any plans to develop quality of service objectives in respect of the Disablement Services Authority.

Mr. Freeman: This is a matter for the Disablement Services Authority which includes the development of quality of service in its aims and objectives. Details of the work it has undertaken in this area can be found in its annual report for 1988-89, a copy of which is in the Library.

Community Care

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people have been released into the community under the community care programme;

(2) how many people released into the community under the community care programme have *(a)* committed suicide, *(b)* been arrested, *(c)* died as a result of an accident and *(d)* been seriously injured as a result of an accident.

Mr. Freeman: Figures are not collected centrally on the number of inpatients who have been discharged under the community care programme, nor the outcome of those people once in the community.

However, during 1986, the latest year for which reliable figures are available, 1,082 inpatients of mental illness hospitals and units in England were discharged (excluding deaths and tranfers to other hospitals) after a stay of five years or more. The comparable figure for mental handicap patients was 1,951.

Macfarlane Trust

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many haemophiliacs who have contracted AIDS through contaminated blood transfusions are expected to qualify for the £20,000 payments allocated through the Macfarlane (Special Payments) Trust; and what steps are being taken to ensure that all those who qualify apply.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The payments from the Macfarlane (Special Payments) Trust are available to haemophiliacs infected with HIV as the result of treatment with blood products in the United Kingdom, or the dependant or beneficiary of such a person who has died. We estimate that around 1,200 people may qualify. Some 1,150 cases are already known to the trust and through the haemophilia treatment centres it is trying to ensure that any other haemophiliacs who may be eligible know of the payments.

Disabled People

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if general practitioners will be expected to take disabled people on to their lists under the new arrangements for the National Health Service;

(2) whether there will be an appeals procedure for disabled people if a general practitioner refuses to accept a patient on to his list.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Any person may ask a doctor who has contracted to provide general medical services under the National Health Service to be accepted as a patient. Under the terms of their contract, doctors are not obliged to meet such a request. They are obliged to accept a patient when allocated by the local family practitioner committee. Any patient unable to find a suitable doctor should approach the family practitioner committee accordingly.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision will be made in his new arrangements for community care for disabled people to appeal against an assessment decision.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: As announced in the White Paper "Caring for People" all local social services authorities will be expected to set up and publicise procedures for receiving and responding to complaints from users of services, including disabled people. Any user, or carer, who is dissatisfied with an assessment decision will be able to make representations through these procedures.

We will be issuing guidelines to local authorities about these procedures, backed up with Secretary of State directions where appropriate.

Patients' Records

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average time being taken by family practitioner committees in transferring records from one general practitioner to another when patients change their doctor.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not held centrally. The time taken will vary with the circumstances and, in particular, will depend on whether or not the patient moves to a different family practitioner committee area and, if so, on how long is taken to register with a new doctor.

Doctors' Hours

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how long after its completion the Dowie report on doctors' hours was published; and what were the reasons for the time taken.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The interim report was sent to the Department in September 1989. We have been studying the report's findings and considering whether publication in advance of the full report, expected later this year, would be appropriate.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hours a week, on average, junior doctors now work.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Dowie report into junior doctors' hours quotes an average of 58 hours of work each week.

Information on junior doctors' hours of work is not available centrally. The latest available information shows that the average weekly number of contracted hours of duty of junior hospital doctors in England and Wales was 82 on 30 September 1988. A survey in 1985 showed that the average weekly number of hours actually worked as against on duty was 57.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library evidence collected by his Department's working parties into junior doctors' hours.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The reports from regional health authorities on the June 1988 initiative to reduce junior doctors' hours, and from those district health authorities which undertook pilot studies into a 72-hour week, are being placed in the Library.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department has estimated how many more consultants would be needed for the abolition of one in three shifts and a maximum working week for junior doctors of 72 hours.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The achievement of a 72-hour working week for junior doctors will require a variety of solutions which need to be agreed locally. These may include changes in training requirements, in the working practiees of both consultants and juniors, and a changed pattern of service delivery. It remains our long-term aim to reduce the average hours of duty to 72 per week.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what new evidence his Department has received about the hours now worked by junior doctors since it first received the Dowie report;

(2) why evidence from the Dowie report was not submitted to the pay review body.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Evidence is submitted in confidence to the doctors' and dentists' review body. The DDRB was informed that we wished first to analyse the reports from health authorities on two initiatives launched after the fieldwork for the Dowie report was completed.

The first, which started in June 1988, asked health authorities to continue to work towards the elimination of rotas more onerous than one in three for practitioners first on call in the hard-pressed specialties.

The second, begun in July 1989, asked a small number of authorities to conduct pilot studies into whether an average 72-hour week was possible within existing manpower constraints. Reports on both initiatives have been received.

We will be keeping the DDRB informed of developments in this area.

NHS Patients

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the numbers of parents diagnosed or treated in National Health Service hospitals for each year since 1979.

Mr. Freeman: Information about patients treated in National Health Service hospitals in England from 1979 to 1988-89 has been published in the Department of Health statistical bulletin 2/1/90. The bulletin provides tables showing the numbers of inpatient cases, day case admissions, outpatient attendances, ward attenders and accident and emergency cases treated. Copies of the bulletin have been placed in the Library.

Hospices

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he gives to regional and district health authorities on the distribution of Government funds to the voluntary hospice movement; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We shall shortly be notifying health authorities of the allocations they will receive for this purpose, and giving guidance on its distribution.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has given to the Five Towns Plus hospice organisation as to how to obtain contributions from Government funds to help maintain the Five Towns hospice; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The funding of individual projects is a matter for discussion between the health authorities and the organisations concerned.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what amount from Government funds has been allocated to help the voluntary hospice movement in the Wakefield and Pontefract areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Allocations will be made to regional health authorities. The funding of individual projects is a matter for discussion between the health authorities and the organisations concerned.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the contribution from Government funds to match that of voluntary giving to the hospice movement; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We intend to monitor health authorities' progress and plans in relation to this objective. No date has been specified.

Erythropoetin

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether erythropoetin has been licensed by the safety of drugs committee; what has been the length of time it has been under consideration by the Committee; what information he has on the length of time it has taken to approve the medicine in other European Economic Community countries; and what information he has on the reasons for the time required for approval in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 5 February 1990]:* No product licence for erythropoetin (EPO) has been granted in the United Kingdom. In general terms the time needed to obtain marketing authorisation in the United Kingdom for a medicinal product containing a new active substance (NAS) produced by biotechnology, such as EPO, will depend on a number of factors. Such an application must be made through the European Community's concertation procedure, introduced under directive 87/22/EEC. This involves the Community's committee for proprietary medicinal products (CPMP) in giving a non-binding opinion which must be taken into account by national regulatory authorities when making decisions for marketing in their own territories—for which they alone are responsible. In the light of advice from the CPMP and any national advisory committee, for example the Committee on Safety of Medicines in the UK, each authority must decide for itself whether any additional information is needed from the applicant company before reaching its own independent decision. The CPMP opinion is often written in rather general terms and hence important additional data may have to be supplied by the company before individual national licensing authorities can be reassured as to the safety, quality and efficacy of the product. Only when the reassurance has been provided can the licence be granted. On occasions further time may also be required before the application can be cleared if an applicant company decides to exercise its appeal rights. The Department does not hold information relating to the time taken by other regulatory authorities within the European Community to grant marketing authorisations.

AIDS

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his reply of 1 February, if he will now provide information on the employment prospects, insurance and mortgage status of people who acquired AIDS from blood transfusions under the National Health Service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 6 February 1990]:* In my reply of 18 January 1990 to the right hon. Member at column *405* I pointed out that haemophiliacs are a group of people who by virtue of their haemophilia are already disadvantaged in respect of their employment prospects and their ability to obtain mortgages and life insurance. We have no evidence to suggest that those people who have become infected with HIV via blood transfusion were similarly disadvantaged before the illness or accident leading to the need for transfusion.

Stroboscopic Lights

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what current advice his Department has concerning the use of the stroboscopic light sources in discotheques and other places of entertainments.

Mr. Nicholls: I have been asked to reply.

The current guidance from the Health and Safety Executive recommends a flicker rate of below five flickers per second.

Food Poisoning

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of recent trends and likely future trends in respect of the number of food poisoning cases in the United Kingdom and in identifying the causes of those trends.

Mr. Freeman: The principal micro-organisms that are identified as responsible for food poisoning in the United Kingdom are salmonella, Clostridium perfringens, Staphylococcus aureus and Bacillus cereus. Laboratory reports for 1989 on these organisms to the PHLS communicable disease surveillance centre are given in the table.

Reports of identifications by laboratories—1989 (provisional approximate figures)

	1989
Salmonella	26,000
Clostridium perfringens	300
Staphylococcus aureus	10
Bacillus cereus	20

In recent years, there has been an increase in food poisoning notifications, partly due to an increase in food poisoning but partly as a consequence of better monitoring and public awareness.

Since 1986 the biggest single cause for the increasing burden of food poisoning in this country can be ascribed to the rise in infections with salmonella enteritidis phage type 4, associated predominantly with poultry meat and eggs. The latest figures from the public health laboratory service for human isolations of this organism indicate, however, a levelling off in this particular problem for 1989. These figures show that in 1989 a total of about 13,000 isolates of salmonella enteritidis phage type 4 were recorded. This is around a 3 per cent. rise on the 1988 figure of about 12,500 isolates, but represents a significant change in the trends noted for 1988 and 1987 when the percentage increases in this organism were respectively 152 and 67 per cent.

Foodborne illness due to organisms such as Staphylococcus aureus, Clostridium perfringens and Bacillus cereus has not shown any particular trend over the years.

However, the PHLS communicable disease surveillance centre also records information on cases of gastro-enteritis (which may not necessarily be foodborne in all cases). These figures show that there has been a marked upward trend in illness due not only to salmonella but also to campylobacter. In 1988, about 29,000 reports of campylobacter were made. The provisional figure for 1989 is approximately 33,000. Campylobacter can be found in water (but not chlorinated public water supplies), unpasteurised milk and chicken (where a survey isolated the organism from over 40 per cent. of raw chicken carcases examined). The organism is usually responsible for sporadic cases of illness and rarely causes outbreaks. The widely held view is that much sporadic human campylobacter is probably attributable to cross contamination from poultry and to eating under-cooked chicken; but more information on the sources of contamination of food with this organism is needed before it will be possible to devise appropriate methods of control.

DEFENCE

General Dynamics

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contractual payments are made by the United Kingdom Government to General Dynamics for products or services related to the potential acquisition of main battle tanks.

Mr. Alan Clark: Details of all and any of our contractual arrangements with General Dynamics are commercial in confidence.

Kirkcudbright Firing Range

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for development of the Ministry of Defence firing range at Kirkcudbright; what costs are involved; what role SERCO currently plays in these processes and what plans he has for developing this; and what is the chain of responsibility for the operation and development of the range.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 1 February 1990]:* We have plans to modernise part of the Kirkcudbright firing range facility over the next few years. Essentially, modernisation will comprise a new range safety radar system and a facility in support of electromagnetic launcher technology. Key features will be the reliability and safety of the facility.

It is not our practice to reveal costs, since these are commercially sensitive.

SERCO currently provides 84 staff for the day-to-day running of the range and its activities, as the result of winning competitive contracts. It is this Government's policy that tasks should be carried out in the most cost-effective and efficient manner, and that contractors, selected by competition, should be used where it makes sense to do so.

The ranges are headed by a Lieutenant Colonel who is responsible to the director of the Royal Armament Research and Development Establishment (RARDE).

Research Contracts

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how long is the present contract with the department of animal husbandry at Bristol university.

Mr. Neubert: It is not our policy to provide details of individual research arrangements.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many research contracts or agreements the chemical defence establishment has placed in

universities and other institutions of higher education in each financial year since 1979; and what was their total financial value in each year since 1979;

(2) how many research contracts or agreements the chemical defence establishment is currently funding in universities and other institutions of higher education; what is their total value; how many universities and other institutions of higher education are currently receiving research contracts or agreements from the chemical defence establishment; and if he will give a full list of them.

Mr. Neubert: It is not our practice to provide historical data. There are 94 extant agreements to a total value of £11·8 million placed by CDE with 49 universities and other institutions of higher education but it is not departmental policy to provide details of these arrangements.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will obtain for his departmental library a recording of the Channel 4 programme, "Dispatches", 10 January, concerning military funding of research in universities and other institutions of higher education.

Mr. Neubert: A copy of this programme is held in the defence press office.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy on the level of funding of research in universities and other institutions of higher education; and what are the reasons behind this policy.

Mr. Neubert: The MOD has funds available for research in support of the defence research programme, including extramural research at higher education institutions. Such work is placed there when considered appropriate to do so and if value for money procurement policies are satisfied.

Chemical and Biological Weapons

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many contracts or agreements exist between his Department and universities and other institutions of higher education in the field of genetic engineering;

(2) how many contracts or agreements exist between his Department and universities and other institutions of higher education for research related to the production or application of monoclonal antibodies;

(3) how many projects in the field of aerobiology are currently funded by his Department; and whether there are any negotiations to fund further projects;

(4) what contracts and agreements exist between his Department and universities and other institutions of higher education for research related to nerve gases;

(5) what contracts or agreements currently exist between his Department and universities and other institutions of higher education concerning research into biological or chemical weapons;

(6) what research contracts and agreements exist between his Department and universities and other institutions of higher education for research related to anthrax;

(7) what research his Department is sponsoring into the viability and infectivity of Klebsiella pneumonia; and if he will make a statement;

(8) whether his Department monitors the potential for offensive use of research it supports in the area of aerobiology by foreign or third parties.

Mr. Neubert: As we have repeatedly made clear, the United Kingdom has no chemical or biological weapons and no plans to acquire any. All research undertaken by or commissioned by the MOD in the chemical and biological field is defensive in nature and is to provide information which assists in the provision of effective protective measures against the threat that chemical and biological weapons might be used against the United Kingdom armed forces.

This research includes a number of agreements with universities and institutes of higher education in a range of research areas such as genetic engineering and monoclonal antibodies. It is not our policy to go into details of specific research areas.

Classified Research

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many members of staff in universities and other institutions of higher education working on research contracts or agreements currently funded by his Department are required to have security clearance;

(2) how many research contracts or agreements which are currently being funded by his Department are classified;

(3) if researchers accepting funding from his Department are advised whether to discuss their work and its objectives with colleagues or the media;

(4) what is his Department's definition of classified research;

(5) what measures his Department takes to prevent the misuse of results of research funded by the Ministry of Defence by foreign or third parties;

(6) what proportion of the results published from projects funded by his Department outside its own establishments is classified;

(7) whether classified research in universities and other institutions of higher education is funded by his Department.

Mr. Neubert: The great majority of work commissioned by MOD with universities is unclassified. There are four extant contracts/agreements with universities and other institutions of higher education classified as restricted or above. The disclosure and publication of the results of classified research is subject to the provisions of the Official Secrets Act. For research which is not classified, while the MOD generally encourages publication of results, the academic institution is required to consult the MOD before any unrestricted disclosures, including any lecture, demonstration, publication or the submission of any thesis to an examining body. This would not preclude informal academic exchanges with immediate colleagues. Finally, it is not the Government's practice to give detailed information about security vetting of individuals.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many research contracts or agreements funded by his Department have been cancelled in the last five years; and for what reasons;

(2) how many research contracts or agreements his Department is currently funding in universities and other institutions of higher education; and what is their total value.

Mr. Neubert: The Ministry of Defence has currently 745 research agreements and 106 research contracts placed with a wide range of United Kingdom universities and other institutions of higher education to a total value of about £65 million. Some 20 agreements have been terminated early during the past five years, the great majority of which were due to administrative difficulties encountered by universities.

Captain Fred Holroyd

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps have been taken by the military authorities to question Mr. F. Holroyd about his knowledge of events at the Kincora boys' hostel.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Investigation of illegal activities at the Kincora boys' home is the responsibility of the RUC. The Royal Military Police assisted the RUC with their earlier inquiries by interviewing Mr. Holroyd on 22 May 1982.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date a non-adverse report was raised on Captain Fred Holroyd (retired), by his commanding officer as referred to in his reply to the Adjournment debate on 29 November 1989, *Official Report*, columns 812-20.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* The special confidential report on Captain Holroyd was signed by his commanding officer on 5 June 1975.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the nature of assistance given by the Royal Military Police into the allegations of Captain Fred Holroyd (retired), referred to in his reply to the Adjournment debate on 29 November 1989, *Official Report*, column 817.

Mr. Archie Hamilton *[holding answer 15 January 1990]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answers given to his earlier questions on this subject (*Official Report*, 28 March 1988, column *362*). It has not proved possible from currently available records to define in greater detail the precise nature and extent of the assistance given by the RMP to the RUC in support of its investigations.

EMPLOYMENT

Gangers

92. **Mr. Ashton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many accidents on farms have been reported to his Department involving the supply and use of unskilled, unregistered labourers by gangers.

Mr. Nicholls: This information is not available.

Employment Training

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of those referred by the employment service to ET complete their assessment with a training agent; what percentage of those who complete their assessment stay six days with a training manager; and what percentage of those originally referred by the employment service stay six days with a training manager.

Mr. Nicholls: It is estimated that 54 per cent. of those people referred by the employment service to training agents complete their assessment; 61 per cent. of people completing an assessment stay one week with a training manager; 33 per cent. of all those originally referred by the employment service stay one week or more with a training manager.

Sheltered Placement Scheme

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what level of ceiling grant the Government intend to give the sponsors of the sheltered placement scheme for the coming financial year.

Mr. Eggar: I am not yet ready to announce a decision on the grant ceiling for 1990-91. I am aware of the need to take a decision as soon as possible and I expect to make an announcement shortly.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps he intends taking to ensure that more disabled people can be placed in employment within the sheltered placement scheme.

Mr. Eggar: It remains the Department's policy to expand provision within the sheltered placement scheme as the resources available allow.

Ceiling Grant

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what the level of ceiling grant would have to be for the coming financial year for it to keep its value abreast of inflation including the making up of the shortfall in real terms resulting from this financial year's increase.

Mr. Eggar: The grant ceiling is adjusted to take account of changes in the average costs actually incurred by sponsors in providing places in both sheltered workshops and the sheltered placement scheme. It is not the intention of the grant to match specific movements in inflation, and in recent years average costs have risen at less than the rate of inflation. However, the effects of inflation are reflected in the information on costs on which the calculations are based.

Preventable Loss

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the extent of preventable loss arising from theft or misappropriation in his Department.

Mr. Eggar: The Employment Department group keeps under constant review measures to safeguard cash and assets from misappropriation and theft.

European Information Centres

Mr. Blair: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if his Department has any plans to fund the European information centres when European Commission funding is terminated in June 1990.

Mr. Eggar: No. A network of European information centres is being set up by the European Commission. The Commission provides an initial financial contribution on the understanding that the centres will be financially independent after three years. The first four centres in the United Kingdom were established in 1987; a further 16 were approved in October 1989 and will be operational by April this year. All the centres chosen by the Commission were already involved in related activities.

The centres provide information to businesses on European matters, particularly issues concerning the single European market. They receive all the relevant EC documentation, have direct computer-linked access to Brussels for answers to specific queries and are able to signpost inquirers to both the United Kingdom and EC single market specialists.

Disabled People

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what account is being taken in his Department's review of employment services for disabled people of demographic changes and their effect on developing equal opportunities in employment for disabled people.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 7 February 1990]:* This Department's internal review of services to people with disabilities is taking careful account of the likely effects of demographic changes on the employment of people with disabilities. The shortage of young people in the 1990s means that employers will have to make better use of their workers and seek new sources of recruitment, including people with disabilities.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what consideration his Department's internal review of employment services for disabled people is giving to a quota-levy system requiring employers to pay a levy according to the number of unfilled quota places.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 7 February 1990]:* The operation of quota-levy systems is among the subjects being carefully considered as part of this Department's internal review of services to people with disabilities.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what consideration his Department's review of employment services to disabled people is giving to the introduction of legislation to prevent unjustifiable discrimination on the grounds of disability.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 7 February 1990]:* Successive Governments have judged that education and persuasion of employers is the most effective approach to improving employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The role of legislation is being carefully considered as part of this Department's internal review of services to people with disabilities.

Local Offices, Doncaster and Mexborough

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current establishment at each grade at the unemployment benefit offices at *(a)* Doncaster and *(b)* Mexborough; how many deal directly with interviewing of new claimants; and what representations he has received concerning the lack of staff to deal with claimants.

Mr. Nicholls *[pursuant to his reply, 15 January 1990, c. 59-60]:* I regret that the information given in the table in my reply of 15 January was incorrect due to the omission of four executive officers from one column. The correct information is as follows:

A graded breakdown of the staff employed at Doncaster and Mexborough unemployment benefit offices is given at table 1.

New claimants are normally interviewed by an executive officer (new client adviser). In each of the Doncaster unemployment benefit offices four executive officers are directly involved with interviewing and counselling new claimants. In Mexborough unemployment benefit office three executive officers interview and counsel new clients.

Additionally in each office two clerical staff provide support services for the new client advisers, which includes making appointments for unemployed people to make their claims.

No formal representations have been made to local management about staffing levels in these offices.

Table 1
Graded breakdown of staff employed ot Doncaster and Mexborough unemployment benefit offices—January 1990

	Doncaster 'A'	*Doncaster 'B'*	*Doncaster 'C'*	*Mexborough*
Permanent				
HEO	1	1	1	1
EO	9	8	7	4
AO	25	25	26	17
AA	4	5	4	3
Messenger	—	1	—	—
Casual				
AO	—	—	—	1
AA	—	2	1	—
Total	39	42	39	26

Notes:
HEO = Higher Executive Officer
EO = Executive Officer
AO = Administrative Officer.
AA = Administrative Assistant.

TRANSPORT

British Rail

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent meetings he has had with British Rail; and what items were discussed.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend regularly meets the chairman of British Rail and his colleagues to discuss a variety of railway issues.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what amounts of *(a)* low-level, *(b)* intermediate-level and *(c)* high-level nuclear waste have been transported by train in each year since 1979.

Mr. Portillo: I understand the only movements of waste were of intermediate level and were as follows:

	Tonnes
1980	599
1981	58
1982	263

Less than 10 per cent. of these weights were actual waste, the remainder being packaging and shielding.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the current arrangements for dealing with accidents involving trains transporting nuclear material in London; and when they were last reviewed.

Mr. Portillo: There is a comprehensive emergency plan administered by CEGB/Nuclear Electric to deal with incidents involving irradiated nuclear fuel flasks in transit. This was last reviewed towards the end of 1989.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information his Department has about plans to increase the transport by train of nuclear waste through London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: I understand that there are no plans to transport nuclear waste through London before 2005

Cycle Proficiency Test

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many children in England and Wales have the opportunity to take a cycle proficiency test through their school; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Some 275,000 children took part in RoSPA's cycle proficiency training and testing scheme in 1989. This is administered locally by local authority road safety officers with the training taking place mainly in schools, by agreement with head teachers. RoSPA publishes and distributes the teacher materials and the Department supplies each child with a free copy of the "Highway Code for Young Road Users".

Driving Test Examiners

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many female driving test examiners there are in the United Kingdom, by region; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The information for Great Britain is as follows:

	Number
North Eastern	14
North Western	11
West Midland	10

	Number
Eastern	16
Western	9
South Eastern	11
Metropolitan	26
Scotland	6
Total	103

In addition two female examiners are instructors at the Department's driving examiner training establishment at Cardington.

Applicants for examiner posts are assessed on the basis of qualifications, relevant knowledge, experience and personal qualities. There has been a welcome recent rise in the number of women candidates coming forward, and 20 of the 47 interviewed for appointment last year were successful compared with 137 of the 283 male applicants.

Driving Test

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people have passed their driving tests for each of the last 10 years at *(a)* their first attempt, *(b)* their second attempt, *(c)* their third attempt and *(d)* more than fifth attempt; what percentage of each were female; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The number of L tests conducted in the years 1980-89, together with the percentage of candidates who passed, were as follows:

	Tests conducted			Pass rate (percentage)		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	All
1980	990,631	971,403	1,962,034	53·0	41·5	47·3
1981	1,032,454	998,871	2,031,325	52·9	42·1	47·6
1982	1,028,798	976,498	2,005,296	53·1	42·9	48·1
1983	930,977	961,338	1,892,315	53·8	43·7	48·7
1984	861,712	922,400	1,784,112	54·3	44·2	49·1
1985	863,403	978,388	1,841,791	54·2	43·7	48·6
1986	930,663	1,069,075	1,999,738	54·1	43·8	48·6
1987	909,732	1,071,284	1,981,016	55·6	46·1	49·7
1988	965,144	1,107,824	2,072,968	57·9	47·2	51·7
1989	914,456	1,080,956	1,995,412	58·0	47·5	52·3

Comprehensive information is not available on candidates' pass rates on each attempt. Surveys in 1980 and 1985 indicated that the pass rates for candidates taking their test for the first time, and taking it for the second or subsequent attempt, were as follows:

	First attempt			Subsequent attempts		
	Men	Women	All	Men	Women	All
1980	51	37	45	55	46	50
1985	51	39	45	56	49	52

Child Cyclists (Helmets)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has to make helmet-wearing for children, whilst riding a bicycle, compulsory; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Head injuries are a major cause of death and serious casualties in cycle accidents, so it makes sense for riders to have head protection. We encourage people to wear helmets but there are no present plans to make this obligatory.

Preventable Loss

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the extent of preventable loss arising from theft or misappropriation in his Department.

Mr. Atkins: Losses detected in 1988 amounted to no more than £2,000.

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will list the number of professionally qualified loss-prevention staff employed by his Department and the qualifications held by such staff, excluding qualifications obtained during police or military service.

Mr. Atkins: The prevention of loss in the Department is primarily the responsibility of management at all levels. Management's responsibility is buttressed by systems of checks and controls, and these are audited regularly by the Department's internal audit division, comprising 13 staff trained to the basic audit training standard. Six of these are members of the Institute of Internal Auditors. A further 11 staff are under training.

ScotRail (Investment)

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on British Rail's investment plans for the ScotRail network over the next three financial years.

Mr. Portillo: The table sets out BR's proposed infrastructure investment (capital and revenue) in Scotland over the next three years.

1989-90 prices

£ million

	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93
InterCity	7·1	3·1	1·6
Provincial	12·2	12·6	13·1
Freight	3·9	2·8	4·8
Parcels	0·1	0·2	0·2
Total	23·3	18·7	19·7

Rolling stock investment cannot be attributed to particular areas of Great Britain.

Foreign Ships

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the number and proportion of foreign vessles visiting British ports in each calendar year from 1979 to have been *(a)* inspected, *(b)* found to have serious defects, *(c)* other defects and *(d)* pollution defects; what is his target for inspections; the reasons for any deviation from this target; and what proportion of vessels is inspected in the United States of America, France and Holland.

Mr. McLoughlin: The port state control inspection figures for the years 1983 to 1989 are as follows: data for earlier years are not available.

	1983	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987-88*[2]	*1988-89*[2]
Ships visiting UK ports	6,445	6,463	6,579	[1]6,500	6,425	6,158
Ships inspected	2,557	2,529	2,532	2,788	2,188	1,830
Per cent. inspected	39·7	39·1	38·5	—	34·0	29·7

[1] Estimated.
[2] Financial year.

The Department's records do not differentiate between ships with serious defects and others. In 1988-89, of the 1,830 ships inspected 900 were found to have defects of which 87 were pollution related. Information for other years is not readily available.

Under the memorandum of understanding on port state control the target inspection rate is 25 per cent. of individual ships visiting a signatory's ports. The United Kingdom has always exceeded the target figure. Port state control inspection figures are circulated to signatories of the memorandum but on a confidential basis. All signatories aim to achieve the same 25 per cent. target.

No information is available for the United States of America.

United States Transportation Secretary

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next plans to meet the United States of America's Secretary of Transportation; and what matters he intends to discuss.

Mr. McLoughlin: A date for what we hope will be a wide-ranging meeting has yet to be settled.

Jubilee Line

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport over what period he expects the contribution to the extension of the Jubilee line by Messrs. Olympia and York of £400 million to be paid; what conditions have been attached to this payment; and what is its expected value likely to be in 1989 prices.

Mr. Portillo: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) on 6 February at column *566*.

Transport (London)

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what charges he expects to be made on the public expenditure reserve fund for transport investment in London, other than that already approved for the Jubilee line extension; and from what vote he expects capital expenditure to be dispersed for either the proposed main line crossrail and proposed Hackney to Chelsea tube line, respectively.

Mr. Portillo: The Jubilee line extension is the only public transport project in London for which provision has been made from the reserve. No decision has yet been taken on the funding arrangements for any other new line.

Disabled People

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans his Department has to improve transport facilities for the disabled.

Mr. Atkins: Our current programme of initiatives to promote mobility for people with disabilities is set out in our document "Transport and Disability—a Statement of Aims and Priorities". One major priority is to improve the accessibility of public transport including the development of wheelchair-accessible coaches and buses. We are also working with vehicle designers and manufacturers to influence car design and control modifications, to increase opportunities for personal mobility for even the most severely disabled people. We are also developing guidelines on design for pedestrian areas to help elderly and disabled people.

Driving Licences

Mr. Tredinnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he proposes to take in response to recent proposals to remove, from 1 June 1990, the entitlement to drive large non-commercial passenger carrying vehicles on an ordinary driving licence.

Mr. Atkins: I am aware of the responses to the recent consulation exercise on changes to the regulations governing the driving of cars and motorcycles. While few people dispute the principle that large buses should be driven only by someone who holds a PSV licence, the proposed timing for removing the entitlement to drive a large bus on an ordinary driving licence would have caused practical difficulties. I have therefore decided to defer the implementation of this measure for at least six months. A further announcement will be made about exactly when and how the entitlement is to be removed.

Vehicle Operator Licensing

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has reached a decision on future changes to passenger and goods vehicle operator licensing, following the recent review; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The review has now been completed. In the light of consultations, I have today announced decisions on a number of steps to improve the licensing system. Details of these are set out in a press notice, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Merseytravel

Mr. Heffer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will be in a position to respond to the case submitted by Merseytravel by 14 February.

Mr. Atkins: I hope so.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Appeals

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he has any plans to repeal or amend regulation 72, Social Security Adjudication Regulations 1986, S.I. 1986 2218; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Social Security (Miscellaneous Provisions) Amendment Regulations 1990, which will be laid before Parliament shortly, contain an amendment to regulation 72. The amendment provides that the amount of arrears of benefit on review made as a consequence of a reinterpretation of the law by a decision of a social security commissioner or the courts is paid from the date of that decision.

Social Fund

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will widen the scope of the social fund to enable loans to be made to those who have obtained employment but need funds to pay for suitable clothing and transport for the period before their first wages are paid.

Mr. Scott: We believe it is reasonable to expect good employers to help with the cost of necessary clothing and travel for their employees, for example through an advance of salary. Where a person does not have enough money to live on until his first pay day, a crisis loan can be considered.

Correspondence

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he is in a position to reply to both the letters from the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East dated 15 January and the question raised in column *183* of the *Official Report* on 30 January, on Mr. Melvin Wall's loss of entitlement to mobility allowance.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: My noble Friend Lord Henley replied to the hon. Member's letter concerning Mr. Wall today.

Students (Transitional Payments)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will reintroduce transitional payments for students in full-time further education who have been receiving income support under I/S regulation 132(c) and 2(d), so they may continue their studies to their completion beyond their 19th birthday without the present loss of benefit.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We are aware that a small number of young people are experiencing difficulties. Although financial assistance can be provided by local education authorities, we are keeping the benefit rules under review.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Anglo-Japanese Trade

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish in the *Official Report* the extent in cash terms of export trade from the United Kingdom to the empire of Japan and the extent in cash terms of import trade from the empire of Japan to the United Kingdom; and if he will publish figures for both for each year since 1979.

Mr. Redwood: There are at least 800 industrial and commercial organisations in the United Kingdom owned by commercial interests resident in Japan. I have placed a list, prepared by the Anglo-Japanese Economic Institute, in the Library of the House.

Balance of Trade

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list those European countries which have a trade surplus with the United Kingdom, whose trade deficit is a higher proportion of gross domestic product than the United Kingdom's.

Mr. Redwood: In 1988 Portugal, Greece and Spain had higher trade deficits as a percentage of GDP than the United Kingdom. Of these, Portugal was in surplus in trade with the United Kingdom.

Preventable Loss

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the extent of preventable loss arising from theft or misappropriation in his Department.

Mr. Forth: A central record is maintained of the amounts and details of such losses and an annual return is made to the Treasury.

Monopolies and Mergers Commission

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to abolish the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Mr. Redwood: No.

European Single Market

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will next meet the European Commission to discuss the implications of 1992 for British industry.

Mr. Redwood: I continue to keep in close contact with the EC Commission across a broad range of issues.

Post Office

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will list those Post Office sorting offices where the catering facilities are provided *(a)* by direct labour and *(b)* by independent contractors;

(2) if he will list those Post Office sorting offices with catering facilities.

Mr. Forth: The provision of catering facilities is a matter for the Post Office. I understand that there are

1,600 Post Office sorting offices, all of which have some form of catering facility. In many cases this is limited to facilities for staff to prepare food for themselves. I have placed a full list of sorting offices in the Library. Catering services, which in all cases are provided by the Post Office's in-house catering organisation, Quadrant, are provided in the following sorting offices:

Abingdon
Aldershot
Ashford (Kent) Head Office
Aylesbury
Banbury
Barnet Sub-office
Barnsley Head Office
Basildon
Basingstoke Head Office
Bath Head Office
Bedford Head Office
Benfleet
Bexhill-on-Sea
Bexleyheath
Blackburn
Blackpool
Bolton Head Office
Bournemouth o/w Letters
Bradford (West Yorkshire) Main Letter Office
Brentwood
Brighton Sub-office
Bristol
Bromley
Burnley Head Office
Camberley
Cambridge
Canterbury Sub-office
Cardiff
Carlisle
Chatham (Medway)
Chelmsford Head Office
Cheltenham
Chester Head Office
Chesterfield
Chichester Sub-office
Cleveland
Colchester
Coventry
Crawley
Crewe Head Office
Croydon
Dagenham
Darlington
Dartford
Derby
Doncaster Head Office
Dover Head Office
Dunstable
Durham Head Office
Eastbourne Head Office
Epsom Sub-office
Exeter Head Office
Farnham (Surrey)
Feltham
Folkestone
Gravesend
Great Yarmouth
Grimsby
Guildford Sub-office
Halifax
Harrogate
Harrow
Hartlepool
Hastings
Hayes (Middlesex)
Hemel Hempstead
High Wycombe
Hitchin
Horsham
Hounslow
Hove
Huddersfield
Hull
Huntingdon
Ilford
Ipswich
Keighley
Kettering
Kingston upon Thames
Lancaster
Leeds Head Office
Leicester Head Office
Letchworth
Lincoln Head Office
Liverpool Head Office

London:
Kentish Town NW5
Kilburn NW6
Mill Hill NW7
St. Johns Wood NW8
The Hyde NW9
Willesden NW10
Golders Green NW11
Camberwell SE5
Rotherhithe SE16
Kennington/Walworth SE17
Woolwich SE18
Brixton SW2
South Kensington SW7
Stockwell SW9
Battersea District Office
Putney SW15
Streatham SW16
Tooting SW17
Wandsworth SW18
Wimbledon SW19
Paddington District Office W2
Acton W3
Ealing W5
Hammersmith W6
Kensington W8
Notting Hill W11
Shepherds Bush W12
West Ealing District Office W13
West Kensington W14

Luton
Maidenhead
Maidstone Head Office
Manchester Head Office
Milton Keynes
Mitcham
Newbury
Newcastle upon Tyne
Newmarket
Newport (Gwent)
Northampton Head Office
Norwich
Nottingham
Oldham Head Office
Orpington
Oxford
Peterborough Head Office
Plymouth
Portsmouth
Potters Bar
Preston (Lancashire)
Reading
Redhill Head Office
Richmond (North Yorkshire)
Rickmansworth
Rochdale
Romford
Rotherham
Royston (Herts)
St. Albans
St. Helens
St. Leonards
Scarborough Head Office
Sevenoaks
Sheffield Head Office
Shrewsbury

Slough Head Office
Southall
Southampton
Southend on Sea
Southport
Stafford
Staines
Stevenage
Stockport
Stockton on Tees
Stoke on Trent Head Office
Sudbury (Suffolk)
Sunderland Head Office
Sutton (Surrey)
Swansea Head Office
Swindon
Thanet
Tonbridge
Tunbridge Wells
Twickenham Sub-office
Uxbridge
Welwyn Garden City
Wembley
Wakefield Head Office
Walsall
Waltham Cross (Lea Valley)
Warrington
Watford
Woking
Wolverhampton
Woodford Green
Worcester
Worthing
Aberdeen
Dundee Head Office
Edinburgh
Falkirk Sub-office
Glasgow
Greenock
Inverness
Paisley Sub-office
Perth
West Lothian
Belfast

Export Credits

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the projected future costs of export credit and financing support provided for project exports; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: ECGD charges premium to cover administration costs and expected future net losses. The historical results of these operations are published in ECGD's annual trading account.

The latest available projections of the cost of interest rate support for exports insured by ECGD are those published in the 1990 public expenditure White Paper for the next three years from 1990-91.

The forecast cost of interest rate support is £259 million in 1990-91, £90 million in 1991-92, and £10 million in 1992-93. These figures are calculated using certain assumptions about future interest rates which are standard throughout Government and actual expenditure will vary in line with fluctuations in these rates.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make it a requirement of the privatisation of the insurance services group of the Export Credits Guarantee Department that existing staff in that Department transferring to the private company be given the right of returning to the Civil Service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 7 February 1990]:* The terms will be decided in due course. It is premature to make a statement.

Consumer Guarantees

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the representations he has received for or against the Consumer Guarantees Bill.

Mr. Forth: There have been numerous representations both for and against various aspects of the proposal. Unless agreed otherwise with the parties concerned, these representations have been made in confidence and it would be inappropriate to list them.

Timeshare

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretry of State for Trade and Industry whether he has received any representations about business practices in the timeshare industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: I receive a steady flow of complaints about timeshare problems, mainly criticising the sales techniques of some companies. My hon. Friend will be aware that I asked the Director General of Fair Trading in June 1989 to conduct a review of the whole range of timeshare problems and to report in the early part of this year.

South Africa

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will review the facilities available to exporters seeking entry to the South African market, following the political developments in that country.

Mr. Ridley: Within the limits of our international obligations, the full range of DTI services is already available to United Kingdom exporters seeking entry to the South African market. We do not at present offer financial support for firms wishing to participate in trade missions to or trade fairs in South Africa. Recent announcements by President de Klerk are to be welcomed and we will consider what more can be done to help exporters in the light of future developments.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 9 February 1990

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Blue Coat School, Liverpool

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) when he expects to make an announcement on the proposal to turn the Blue Coat school, Liverpool, into a four-term entry school;

(2) when he received the submission to alter the size of the Blue Coat school, Liverpool; what was the last date for objection; and what is the average length of time it takes to process an application.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. Friend will come to a decision on this proposal as quickly as is compatible with a full and careful consideration of all the issues involved.

My right hon. Friend received the governors' submission on 20 July 1989. The period of statutory objection to the proposals ended on 18 September 1989. The current average length of time for the consideration of statutory proposals is about six months.

Nursery Education

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the 10 authorities which have the highest number of children in nursery education.

Mr. Alan Howarth: In January 1989 the 10 local education authorities which had the highest percentage of children under five in nursery education were as follows:

	Number of children under five in nursery schools and classes	*Per cent. of estimated 3 and 4-year-old population*
Hounslow	3,786	65
Walsall	4,148	58
Wolverhampton	3,860	58
Newham	4,086	55
Manchester	7,154	55
Cleveland	8,847	54
North Tyneside	2,505	53
Salford	3,140	52
South Tyneside	1,986	51
Liverpool	6,190	49

Teachers' Pay

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether the remit he has given to the interim advisory committee regarding the total cost of recommendations on school teachers' pay and allowances has been reflected in the education components of standard spending assessments for 1990-91; if he will make a statement on the distribution of the relevant provision between *(a)* London and south-east England, *(b)* all other regions of England and *(c)* Wales; what amount and proportion of relevant provision has been allocated to each of *(a)*, *(b)* and *(c)* above; and what percentage increase this represents in each case.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Education standard spending for England for 1990-91 allows in full for the remit given in September to the interim advisory committee, the English element of which was £563 million. Education standard spending, net of specific grants, is distributed between authorities on the basis of client numbers adjusted by factors which allow for local circumstances. These factors include an area cost adjustment which takes account of differential labour costs as between inner London, outer London, south-eastern counties and the rest of England. The area cost adjustment factors are set out in annex F of the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England). The basis of the standard spending assessment in Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Schools (Local Management)

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list those local education authorities whose schemes for local management of schools have been *(a)* approved, *(b)* rejected and *(c)* upon which no decision has been made.

Mrs. Rumbold: We have announced our approval decisions on all 97 local education authorities' LMS schemes which were submitted last autumn. The following local education authorities have either received formal approval for their schemes or are being consulted on modifications prior to approval for implementation in April 1990:

Avon
Barking and Dagenham
Barnet
Barnsley
Bedfordshire
Berkshire
Bexley
Birmingham
Bolton
Bradford
Brent
Bromley
Buckinghamshire
Bury
Calderdale
Cambridgeshire
Cheshire
Cleveland
Cornwall
Coventry
Cumbria
Derbyshire
Devon
Doncaster
Dorset
Dudley
Durham
Ealing
East Sussex
Enfield
Essex
Gateshead
Gloucestershire
Hampshire
Haringey
Harrow
Havering
Hillingdon
Hounslow
Humberside
Isle of Wight
Kent
Kingston
Kirklees

Knowsley
Lancashire
Leeds
Lincolnshire
Liverpool
Manchester
Merton
Newcastle
Norfolk
North Tyneside
North Yorkshire
Northamptonshire
Northumberland
Nottinghamshire
Oldham
Oxfordshire
Redbridge
Richmond
Rochdale
Rotherham
Sandwell
Salford
Sefton
Sheffield
Shropshire
Solihull
Somerset
South Tyneside
Staffordshire
St. Helens
Stockport
Suffolk
Sunderland
Surrey
Sutton
Tameside
Trafford
Wakefield
Walsall
Waltham Forest
Warwickshire
West Sussex
Westminster
Wigan
Wiltshire
Wirral
Wolverhampton

LEAs whose schemes cannot be approved in their present form are Croydon, Hereford and Worcester, Hertfordshire, the Isles of Scilly, Leicestershire and Newham.

Mummified Relics

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will publish a table showing *(a)* the universities which have mummified aboriginal or Maori relics in their collections and *(b)* the number of such relics in each collection.

Mr. Jackson: This information is not collected centrally.

Arts and Science Courses

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of undergraduates following first degree courses in the arts and science faculties at Scottish universities take a four-year course; and what is the comparable figure for England and Wales.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 22 January 1990]:* The Universities' Statistical Record shows that, for the academic year 1988-89, 77 per cent. of full-time and sandwich students pursuing first degrees in arts and science subjects at Scottish universities were on four-year courses. The comparable figure for England and Wales was 22 per cent.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Plastic Bullets

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many times plastic bullets were used in the first six months of 1989; what were the circumstances of each incident; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: I am writing to the hon. and learned Member with the details for the first six months of 1989, in which 235 plastic baton rounds were fired. I shall place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Red Book Prisoners

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the status of a red book prisoner in terms of parole and review procedures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: In Northern Ireland, top risk (commonly known as "red book") prisoners are those who are considered to have the greatest escape potential and who, if at large, would pose the greatest threat to society and the security forces.

There is no system of parole in Northern Ireland but there is provision for compassionate home leave, pre-release home leave and Christmas and summer home leave. All prisoners, including those in the top risk category, are eligible to apply for compassionate home leave in the event of the death or critical illness of a member of the immediate family; each case is considered on its merits. Applications from all fixed-term prisoners, including those in the top risk category, for pre-release home leave or Christmas home leave are also considered on their merits. Top risk prisoners were, however, excluded from the 1989 Christmas home leave scheme for indeterminate sentence prisoners who had served 13 years in custody because they had not made satisfactory progress towards release.

The cases of all indeterminate sentence prisoners are reviewed at regular stages throughout sentence. At each review all the relevant factors pertaining to the prisoner, including his security categorisation, are taken into account in deciding whether to recommend release or to set the date of the next review.

All top risk prisoners have their cases reviewed regularly to see if they can be downgraded to a lower security category.

Western Education and Library Service

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what increases in staff are presently proposed by the Western education and library board for or during the present or next financial year; what are the grades and salaries of such staff; and whether they are to be funded by an increase in the sums allocated by his Department or from the presently existing level of funds.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 23 January 1990]:* Staffing complements and structures are primarily a

matter for each education and library board to determine. Information about lower graded staff outside headquarters is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, the Western education and library board has provided the following information about its additional headquarters staffing proposals:

Grade	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*Salary scale £*
Adviser	—	5	23,679-25,389
Senior administration officer	—	2	16,743-18,225
Seconded teacher	—	1	Teachers salary plus allowance of £1,260 pa
Systems analyst	—	1	14,658-15,810
Administrative officer	1	—	14,658-15,810
Senior executive officer	—	1	11,667-13,824
Executive officer	1	—	8,967-11,301
Senior clerical officer	—	1	8,181-8,787
Clerical officer	—	1	4,308-8,007
Clerk-typist	1	—	4,308-8,007
	3	12	

The Department of Education has made additional funds available to education and library boards for a number of new initiatives. The above posts will be funded by the Western education and library board from these funds and from the board's enhanced block grant allocation. The Western board will also consider the appointment of further staff in 1990-91 but decisions have not yet been taken about the number of grades of such additional staff.

In addition, 10 field officers (teachers on short-term secondments) have been appointed to the Western board's advisory and support service in 1989-90; their salaries will continue to be paid directly by the Department.

ENERGY

Southern Electricity

Sir George Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he will announce the names of the chairman and members of the Southern Electricity consumers committee.

Mr. Baldry: The appointment of the chairman of the electricity consumers committee for the Southern region is a matter for the Director General of Electricity Supply in consultation with the Secretary of State and an announcement is expected shortly. The consumers committee members will be appointed by the director general in consultation with the chairman.

Licensed Mines

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretry of State for Energy when British Coal's annual report on developments in licensed mines will be made available.

Mr. Wakeham: The first of British Coal's annual reports on developments in licensed mines has been received, and copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

PRIME MINISTER

"British Briefing"

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister what correspondence she or her officials have had concerning the publication "British Briefing"; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: None, so far as I am aware.

Correspondence

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister what correspondence she or her officials have had with *(a)* Mr. David Hart and *(b)* Mr. Charles Powell; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have nothing further to add to the reply that I gave the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) on 21 December 1989 at column *365*.

"Codename Badger"

Mr. Allason: To ask the Prime Minister whether her authorisation was sought prior to the publication in America of "Codename Badger" by John Cottell.

The Prime Minister: No.

Mr. Colin Wallace

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list by name and post all former or current Crown servants referred to in the material passed to her by Mr. Colin Wallace; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: No.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list by name and post all those former or current Crown servants who were in any way responsible for supervising the activities of Mr. Colin Wallace whilst he served with Army Intelligence in Northern Ireland or at any other time; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: No.

Drugs

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: To ask the Prime Minister if she has any proposals to improve inter-departmental co-operation in the field of drugs; and if the Government will now ratify the 1988 United Nations convention against drugs.

The Prime Minister: Government policy for tackling drug misuse and trafficking is co-ordinated through the ministerial group on the misuse of drugs, chaired by the Minister of State, Home Office, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor).

Provisions have been introduced in the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Bill to enable us to ratify the 1988 United Nations convention against the illicit traffic in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

ENVIRONMENT

Domestic and Special Waste

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, by name and location, mineshafts currently in use as dumps for domestic waste and special waste.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 7 February 1990]*: My Department has records of six mineshafts in England and Wales being used to accept controlled waste. These are listed in the table. None of these facilities accepts domestic wastes, and only some may accept special waste. The local waste disposal authority can advise as to the current status of each facility:

ICI Ltd.
Holford Brine Cavities
Northwich
Cheshire

Severn Trent Water
Hawkwell Shaft
Nailbridge
Gloucestershire

ICI Ltd.
Brine Cavity
Stalmine
Hambleton
Lancashire

Effluent Disposal Ltd.
Empire Brickworks, Stubbers Green Road
Aldridge, Walsall
West Midlands

Frost and Sons (Moxley) Ltd.
Falcon Galvanising
Holyhead Road
Moxley
Walsall
West Midlands

J. B. and S. Lees Ltd.
Albion Road
West Bromwich
Sandwell
West Midlands

Rebates and Housing Benefit

Sir Peter Hordern: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the total cost of rent and rate rebate, and of housing benefit, in each of the last five years.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is shown in the table. The expenditure shown for rent and rebates is also included in the housing benefit total.

Housing Benefit Expenditure 1985-86 to 1989-90

£ million

	1985-86	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
Rent rebate	2,292	2,420	2,528	2,661	2,855
Rate rebate	1,479	1,635	1,714	1,373	1,483
Total housing benefit expenditure	4,609	5,009	5,289	5,074	5,592

Notes: Rates rebates for 1989-90 include community charge rebates in Scotland.
Source: Public Expenditure White Paper 1990.

Property Services Agency

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many job losses he expects to occur when the Property Services Agency and Crown Suppliers are privatised.

Mr. Chope: The sales of PSA and TCS should not cause job losses. Thereafter employment levels will depend on the success of the privatised organisations.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Fair Employment Bill

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Lord President of the Council on what date the House gave a Third Reading to the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Bill 1989.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: This information is available in the Journal of the House of Commons.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Housing Benefit

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the number of new claims for housing benefit received from young people in London for the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I regret that the information collected does not allow particular client groups to be identified.

Mentally Handicapped People

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many mentally handicapped people he estimates will benefit from the proposals outlined in "The Way Ahead: Benefits for Disabled People".

Mr. Scott: Our data sources do not enable us to isolate the number of mentally handicapped people who will gain from the changes to existing social security benefits detailed in "The Way Ahead: Benefits for Disabled People". The number of mentally handicapped people who will benefit from the introduction of the two new benefits, a disability allowance and a disability employment credit, will depend on the precise details of these benefits on which further work has yet to be done.

Income Support

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the latest figures for the number of income support claimants with deductions for *(a)* electricity debts, *(b)* gas debts, *(c)* water debts and *(d)* social fund loan repayments.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Figures for the number of income support claimants with deductions for electricity and gas debts are contained in table 10 of the "Department of Social Security Income Support Statistics Annual

Statistical Enquiry, May 1988", a copy of which has been placed in the Library. Figures are not collected for deductions for water debts. Deductions are not all for debt: some are for current consumption only.

In December 1989 there was a total of 391,000 people making social fund loan repayments for 344,000 budgeting loans and 47,000 crisis loans. These figures relate to applicants who were in receipt of income support when the loan was taken out. Some may since have ceased to be in receipt of income support.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the net cost or saving resulting from the introduction of a common waiting period of three months for attendance and mobility allowance in place of the present six months' waiting period for attendance allowance *(a)* for all claimants and *(b)* for those aged under 65 years.

Mr. Scott: It is estimated that, taking into account the full effect of the removal of the six-month waiting period for attendance allowance for people who are terminally ill, the net effect on expenditure would be *(a)* an increase of about £120 million a year and *(b)* an increase of about £10 million a year.

Bronchitis and Emphysema

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what funds he will commit to undertake research which would allow a reassessment of the decision of the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council not to distinguish between the development of chronic bronchitis or emphysema through smoking and that brought on by exposure to substances associated with the processing, smelting, working or production of steel.

Mr. Scott: It is not the practice of this Department to fund medical research into diseases which may be occupationally related.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will ask the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council to reassess its previous decisions relating to the acceptance of work-related causes for steel workers developing chronic bronchitis and emphysema.

Mr. Scott: The Industrial Injuries Advisory Council's report of May 1988 on bronchitis and emphysema (Cm. 379) concluded that it was not possible on the available evidence to recommend prescription of these diseases in their own right. The council intends to review this subject again when further evidence is available.

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost of abolishing the 2 per cent. rate of national insurance contribution below £46 a week in 1990-91.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: National insurance contributions are not payable on earnings that do not reach the lower earnings limit (£46 per week from April 1990). On the basis of assumptions contained in the report by the Government Actuary on the drafts of the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 1990 and the Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating) Order 1990 (Cm 948), the cost of abolishing the 2 per cent. rate of national insurance contributions in 1990-91 would be £890 million. This figure relates to Great Britain.

Earnings

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of average male earnings the upper earnings limit represents; and what percentage it represented in each year since 1978-79.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information is in the table:

	Average male earnings[1]	*Upper earnings limit for class 1 NICs*	*Percentage of average earnings*
	£	£	*Per cent.*
April 1978	89·10	120·00	134·7
April 1979	101·40	135·00	133·1
April 1980	124·50	165·00	132·5
April 1981	140·50	200·00	142·3
April 1982	154·50	220·00	142·4
April 1983	167·50	235·00	140·3
April 1984	178·80	250·00	139·8
April 1985	192·40	265·00	137·7
April 1986	207·50	285·00	137·3
April 1987	224·00	295·00	131·7
April 1988	245·80	305·00	124·1
April 1989	269·50	325·00	120·6

[1] Average earnings of all adult male workers.
Source: Social Security Statistics 1989.

HEALTH

Emergency Service

Mr. John Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the full cost of both police service and Army assistance will be charged to the National Health Service.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The reasonable cost of police and Army assistance in the current dispute will be met by those regions benefiting from the service, which will also of course have offsetting savings on salaries and fuel costs.

Eye Tests

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what amount of the additional revenue raised by the £10 charge for sight tests has been allocated to the National Health Service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: As from 1 April 1989, free NHS sight tests ceased to be generally available except to young people, those in respect of certain social security benefits or assessed as being on low incomes, and people with certain medical needs. The savings, estimated at £70 million in a full year, which have been generated from the reduced number of NHS sight tests to be paid for have been used to fund other areas of primary health care.

Hormone Replacement Therapy

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will commission an independent study of the health advantages of the wider use of hormone replacement therapy.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply that I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) on 18 January at column *403*.

The main agency through which the Government fund bio-medical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council (MRC). The MRC receives its grant in aid from the Department of Education and Science. The MRC has set up a sub-group of its physiological systems board to review the need for further research on osteoporosis. This group is examining the feasibility of mounting a multicentre prospective trial of screening methods to identify at risk women who are likely to benefit from hormone replacement therapy. The MRC is always willing to consider scientifically sound proposals for research which will be considered in competition with other applications.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what advice, and from whom, he has received about the side effects and long-term risks of hormone replacement therapy when the hormone is taken over a long period;

(2) what advice he has received about the effectiveness of hormone replacement therapy in preventing osteoporosis in women; and from whom;

(3) what information he has on the benefits and risks of hormone replacement therapy.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department obtains its advice and information on hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and osteoporosis from experts and advisers working in the field and from published work in the scientific press. It also receives advice from working groups set up by professional or other bodies such as the Royal College of Physicians working group on fractured neck of femur.

Recently the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists was given funds by the Department towards the funding of a study group of experts on HRT and osteoporosis.

HRT has a role to play in the prevention of osteoporosis and the treatment of menopausal symptoms; it is also possible that HRT may lead to a reduction in heart disease and strokes. However, since there may be risks, such as a possible increased risk of developing breast cancer, as well as benefits associated with its use, the individual patient's suitability for HRT is a matter for the clinical judgment of her doctor.

In the past HRT has been associated with an increased risk of cancer of the womb; however, it is believed that HRT containing combined oestrogen-progestogen substantially reduces this risk.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the current cost to the National Health Service of hormone replacement therapy; and what the cost would be if all women aged between 50 and 60 years took the treatment;

(2) what is the estimated number of women having hormone replacement therapy; and what percentage this is of the women at risk of osteoporosis.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information is not available in the form requested. Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) can be administered in a variety of forms. The current cost to the NHS in England and Wales of oral HRT prescriptions is around £4 million per annum. This figure does not include women using implants or stick-on patches or who receive HRT on private prescriptions.

The Department has recently agreed to fund an economic evaluation of HRT, which will look at its costs and benefits in relation to osteoporosis, cardiovascular disease and breast cancer.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been undertaken into a possible link between hormone replacement therapy and increased cancers.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State gave to the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) on 12 December 1989 at column *627*.

The Department of Health is about to commission a review of osteoporosis and related problems which will investigate the statistical association between hormone replacement therapy and cancer risk.

Clinical Research

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with medical research charities about the effect of the National Health Service reorganisation on clinical research carried out in National Health Service hospitals.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Officials have met representatives of the Association of Medical Research Charities and some individual charities and have explained the measures that we are taking to ensure the continuation of high quality research in the NHS.

Imperial Cancer Research Fund

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has had discussions with the Imperial Cancer Research Fund regarding subsidies from the fund to National Health Service hospitals to pay for patient care; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Officials have discussed this issue with representatives of the Imperial Cancer Research Fund.

Hospital Trusts

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will prepare guidance and provide funds for the new National Health Service hospital trusts to ensure that their participation in clinical research is not diminished by their new status;

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure that the necessary facilities for teaching and research will continue to be provided on a long-term basis for medical and scientific professors and readers holding honorary appointments in the hospitals which are interested in becoming National Health Service hospital trusts.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Guidance on applications for NHS trust status make it clear that plans for involvement in research should be clearly set out. Orders establishing trusts will specify research as a function of individual trusts where it already plays a major part. The National Health Service and Community Care Bill provides explicit powers for NHS trusts to engage in research and support research by others and for the existence of reserve powers to ensure continued involvement in research.

In addition to money provided through contracts between purchasers and providers, funds will be available through SIFT: a similar scheme is being developed for non-teaching locations to meet the excess service costs to the NHS of research by universities and others. These should provide that hospitals will not become uncompetitive as a result of their involvement in research.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with university authorities regarding the provision of research and teaching facilities for academic staff in the National Health Service hospitals that have expressed an interest in becoming National Health Service hospital trusts.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: University authorities have been represented at meetings with officials at which these issues have been discussed, notably in the steering group on undergraduate medical and dental education.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which of the teaching hospitals that have expressed an interest in becoming a National Health Service hospital trust currently have medical and scientific professors and readers holding honorary appointments; and what is the total number of such professors and readers.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: All teaching hospitals might be expected to have medical and scientific professors and readers holding honorary appointments working in them. Medical teaching and research now takes place in many locations outside the main university hospitals. Details of honorary appointments are not held centrally.

Patient Care

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the National Health Service retains its customary obligation to fund patient care when patients in National Health Service hospitals are participating in charitably funded research studies.

Mr. Freeman: There is a presumption that health authorities should meet the costs of care where the treatment involved forms part of the service which an authority would normally be expected to provide. The district health authority must, however, retain the final decision on how its funds can best be spent in the interests of its patients.

Bronchitis and Emphysema

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health at what cost and by which research institutions work has been undertaken into distinguishing between the contribution of tobacco smoke and exposure to substances arising from steel production to the development of chronic bronchitis and emphysema.

Mr. Freeman: The Department of Health has not commissioned any research into the specific areas mentioned by the hon. Member.

The Medical Research Council (MRC) is the main agency through which the Government fund bio-medical and clinical research in the United Kingdom. The MRC receives its grant in aid from the Department of Education and Science. I understand that the MRC has in the past conducted research into these diseases. The MRC is always willing to consider scientifically sound proposals for research which will be considered in competition with other applications.

Nursing Homes (Prescriptions)

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps he has taken to check prescriptions taken to dispensing chemists on behalf of elderly residents in private nursing homes are not misused;

(2) what steps he has taken to ensure surplus prescribed drugs in private nursing homes are not stockpiled for unauthorised use.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Registered Homes Act 1984 requires the registering district health authority to inspect private nursing homes at least twice each year to ensure that adequate arrangements exist for the recording, safekeeping, handling and disposal of drugs held. Prescribed medicines may be obtained only on the authorisation of a qualified and experienced pharmacist employed by the nursing home and countersigned by a doctor or dentist. It is for the dispensing chemist to satisfy himself as to the appropriateness of each prescription for drugs. Medicines dispensed to individual patients must be given to the patient on discharge or otherwise destroyed in the presence of a patient or relation.

NHS Price Indices

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish in the *Official Report* tables 13.3 and 13.21 of Cm. 1013 adjusted by the appropriate National Health Service price indices.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 5 February 1990]:* It is not possible to reproduce tables 13.3 and 13.21 of Cm. 1013 adjusted in the manner requested, for the following reasons:

i. no price indices exist for the NHS in the United Kingdom as a whole;

ii. no specific price indices are available for the following categories of expenditure in England:
- —central health and miscellaneous services;
- —departmental administration;
- —family practitioner services administration;
- —family practitioner services capital;

iii. as no estimate is made of NHS pay and price inflation before the end of the current financial year it is not possible to adjust figures for 1989-90 to 1992-93.

Details of the relevant pay and price deflators for HCHS current and capital and FPS current expenditure in England between 1984-85 and 1988-89 are shown in the table, together with an index for the NHS in England based on a weighted average of these indices:

NHS pay and price inflation 1984-85 to 1988-89

	HCHS Current	*HCHS Capital*	*FPS Current*	*NHS Total*
1988-89	100·0	100·0	100·0	100·0
1987-88	110·5	105·8	109·6	110·0
1986-87	119·5	111·2	117·2	118·7
1985-86	128·2	116·8	123·3	126·3
1984-85	134·8	123·6	129·4	132·9

NHS Doctors

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, by grade, the numbers of doctors working for the National Health Service, including consultants with part-time contracts, for each year since 1979.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 8 February 1990]:* The information is given in the table:

Hospital medical staff as at 30 September each year
England

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	Percentage increase 1979 to 1988
All staff	39,859	40,757	41,169	42,147	42,709	42,728	43,495	43,992	43,957	45,574	14
Consultant	11,891	12,134	12,397	12,603	12,892	13,185	13,458	13,785	13,992	14,429	21
Associate Specialist	935	967	939	954	939	906	849	809	792	779	−17
Senior Registrar	2,724	2,855	2,935	2,951	3,084	2,988	3,132	3,253	3,215	3,182	17
Registrar	5,457	5,552	5,857	5,771	5,821	5,755	5,749	5,849	5,873	6,146	13
Senior House Officer	8,880	9,197	9,453	9,514	9,627	9,589	9,792	9,690	9,457	9,960	12
House Officer	2,610	2,654	2,716	2,710	2,826	2,773	2,838	2,813	2,790	2,862	10
Other staff	110	116	121	82	49	142	41	79	93	62	−44
Hospital Practitioner	601	725	845	848	882	903	845	850	894	853	−42
Para 94 appointments	6,651	6,557	6,556	6,714	6,589	6,487	6,791	6,864	6,851	7,301	10

Includes permanent paid and honorary staff.
From 1987 Senior Hospital Medical Officers with allowance are included with 'Other staff'.

Community health service medical staff as at 30 September each year
England

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	Percentage increase 1979 to 1988
All staff	5,885	5,981	6,035	6,171	6,331	6,156	6,145	6,032	6,297	6,155	5

Includes permanent paid and honorary staff.

General Medical Practitioner as at 1 October each year
England

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	Percentage increase 1979 to 1988
All staff	23,062	23,674	24,359	24,835	25,341	25,788	26,190	26,529	27,023	27,420	19

Footnote: 1
Any staff holding appointments in these grades and additionally working as general medical practitioner (GMP) will also appear in the GMP table.

WALES

Community Health Councils

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will address an all-Wales conference of community health councils concerning his plans to reduce the number of community health councils in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: We are always prepared to consider requests to attend conferences, subject to parliamentary and other commitments. I have in fact agreed to address the annual conference of the Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales in Swansea in July.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will meet *(a)* Clwyd South CHC and *(b)* Clwyd North community health council to discuss his Department's plans to merge Clwyd South and Clwyd North community health councils.

Mr. Grist: The consultation period on the Government's proposals for CHCs in Wales runs until the end of February 1990. Most CHCs have yet to respond and I have no plans to meet CHCs on an individual basis at present.

Football Grounds (Safety)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has assessed the implications for international soccer matches played in Wales arising from the Government's policy for the safety of football grounds in the wake of the Taylor report.

Mr. Grist: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the statement made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department to the House on 29 January and to the schedule placed in the Library.

The Government accept, in principle, the recommendations of Lord Justice Taylor's final report. Consultations will take place with the appropriate representative bodies on the implementation, as necessary, of the recommendations.

Historic Monuments

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the total annual income and the income from grant in aid of Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments from 1984-85 to 1990-91.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The table shows actual income received by Cadw for 1984-85 to 1988-89, provisional estimates 1989-90 and planned income for 1990-91:

£000

	1984-85 outturn	1985-86 outturn	1986-87 outturn	1987-88 outturn	1988-89 outturn	1989-90 estimate	1990-91[1] estimate
Total Cadw receipts	949	1,361	1,517	1,797	2,291	2,170	2,870
Income received from Cadw's presentation activities (included in above total)	949	1,361	1,515	1,783	2,275	2,155	2,850

[1] Subject to parliamentary approval of the Supply Estimate.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the amount paid by Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments by category of grant in each year since 1984-85; what is the budget for 1989-90; and what is the estimate for 1990-91.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The information requested is to be found in the table:

Gross expenditure on grants by Cadw

£000

	1984-85 outturn	1985-86 outturn	1986-87 outturn	1987-88 outturn	1988-89 outturn	1989-90 estimate	1990-91[1] estimate
HBC grants	1,424	2,087	1,889	2,061	2,194	3,000	3,187
Ancient monuments grants:							
Grants to owners	44	135	204	131	202	165	250
Grants to trusts	413	398	450	522	605	635	715
RCAHM(W)	538	550	608	711	655	715	830

[1] The provision for 1990-91 is subject to parliamentary approval.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which bodies received grant aid from Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments annually from 1984-85 to 1989-90; and what were the amounts involved.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The only bodies Cadw specifically grant-aided are: Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHM (W)), the four archaeological trusts and the Civic Trust for Wales (CTW). The grant figures for each of the years requested are as follows:

£000

	1984-85 outturn	1985-86 outturn	1986-87 outturn	1987-88 outturn	1988-89 outturn	1989-90 forecast
RCAHM (W)	538	550	608	711	655	715
Archaeological trusts	413	398	450	522	605	635
CTW	—	—	—	—	25	25

Severn Crossing and Barrage

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will meet the South Wales standing conference on regional policy to discuss *(a)* the second Severn crossing and *(b)* outline plans for a Severn barrage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already agreed to meet the South Wales standing conference on regional policy to discuss the proposals for a second Severn crossing. This meeting will be arranged once the successful tenderer is known. It is open to the standing conference to request that the agenda be extended to include the Severn barrage.

River Dee Crossing

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will meet Clwyd county council to discuss plans for the proposed new River Dee crossing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The scheme has been conditionally accepted in the transport grant settlement for 1990-91. Its progress is a matter for the county council.

Coal Mines (Applications)

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many applications for *(a)* private opencast coal mines and *(b)* private underground coal mines have been received via British Coal or otherwise by the Welsh Office since 1 February 1989.

Mr. Peter Walker: None. The responsibility for the issuing of licenses for the extraction of coal either by opencast or deep mining methods, by private companies, rests solely with British Coal.

Landfill Sites

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the estimated average cost, per site, of remedial work required to safeguard landfill sites in Wales, including the costs associated with the investigation of geology and hydrogeology necessary as a precursor to such remedial work.

Mr. Grist: The estimation of costs is a matter for the operator of the site. As an approximate indicator Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has adopted an average sum of £250,000 when assessing the likely resource implications of landfill gas control.

Clwyd Language Centre

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the level of financial support earmarked by the Welsh Office for the Clwyd language centre, Canolfan Laith Clwyd, in the coming financial year.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Canolfan Laith Clwyd is one of many organisations that have applied for grant support next year. Whether they have been successful will be announced in due course.

Teachers' Pay

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what provision has been made for increases in school teachers' pay in the standard spending assessments for 1990-91; what percentage increase this represents; how this provision has been calculated; how this provision is related to the remit given to the interim advisory committee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: Under the local authority revenue settlement for 1990-91 provision for total standard spending (TSS) is 9·4 per cent. over the equivalent figure for 1989-90 and 7·1 per cent. over local authorities' 1989-90 budgets. The remit given to the IAC was allowed for in full and the effect of the IAC's proposals on the community charge for standard spending is thus minimal. Standard spending assessments for individual local authorities are based on TSS but are not hypothecated to particular services. Further information about the settlement is provided in the reports approved by the House on 24 January 1990.

Community Care

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what financial contribution he intends to make available to housing associations in Wales in order to enable them to make the contribution he expects from them towards implementation of the community care White Paper in respect of *(a)* elderly and very elderly people and *(b)* disabled people.

Mr. Grist: The Department makes funding available to Housing for Wales in support of housing associations within the Principality: for this purpose gross provision for 1990-91 will be raised by 40 per cent. over that for 1989-90. As to the future we have made it clear in draft planning guidance recently issued for consultation, that as a first step we expect housing associations to be consulted closely in the development of social care plans and to maintain and develop their crucial role—working within supporting guidance set out by Housing for Wales.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what financial contribution he intends to make available to local authorities in Wales in order to enable them to make the contribution he expects from them towards implementation of the community care White Paper in respect of *(a)* elderly and very elderly people and *(b)* disabled people.

Mr. Grist: The position in respect of funding the new framework for community care in Wales is fully set out in paragraphs 11.34 to 11.41 of the White Paper "Caring for People" Cm. 849. In addition, we are to make available in each of the financial years 1990-91 and 1991-92 some £330,000 which will be used towards the costs of demonstration projects in each of the Welsh counties the aim of which will be to help authorities establish effective assessment and case management arrangements.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will make it his policy that Government contributions to support people living in homes for the elderly in Wales shall be calculated on the same basis, irrespective of whether the home is run by a local authority, a voluntary or charitable body, or on a private commercial basis.

Mr. Grist: Our policies for the future funding of care in the community are fully set out in the White Paper "Caring for People: Community Care in the Next Decade and Beyond" Cm. 849.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidance he has offered to housing associations in Wales on the contribution he expects them to make towards the provision of suitable homes for *(a)* disabled people and *(b)* elderly and very elderly people as part of the implementation of community care policies outlined in his recent White Paper.

Mr. Grist: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to him on 8 February.

Inspector of Schools Report

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to receive Her Majesty's inspector of schools Wales annual report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: We have received the report and propose to publish it next week.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will make it his policy to convene a conference in Wales of local education authorities, parent-teachers associations and teacher unions to discuss Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools report of 5 February;

(2) what initiatives he will take consequent upon the publication on 5 February of Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools report.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The report of Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools which was published on 5 February related to England only.

Queensferry High School, Clwyd

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will meet the Clwyd local education authority to discuss the future of Queensferry high school.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: Should the LEA publish a statutory notice affecting the future of the school and there are statutory objections, the matter falls to my right hon. Friend for determination.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will visit Queensferry high school to meet *(a)* staff members and *(b)* the parent-teachers association.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave him on 7 February 1990.

Dyslexic Children

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he has issued any guidance to local education authorities concerning early diagnosis of dyslexic children;

(2) what arrangements have been made for the diagnosis of pre-school children who suffer from dyslexia;

(3) what steps he is taking to support the role of local health and local education authorities in the teaching of dyslexic children.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Education Act 1981 imposes duties on local education authorities to identify, assess and make appropriate provisions for children with special educational needs, including dyslexics. For children under five, the Act places a duty on health authorities to inform parents when they are of the view that a child has, or is likely to have, special educational needs and, after discussion, to bring that view to the attention of the LEA. Welsh Office circular 54/89 gives guidance to LEAs on special educational needs and stresses the importance of early identification of any difficulties. The national curriculum will apply to all children, including dyslexics, as far as is practicable.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what advice he is issuing to local education authorities concerning the training of teachers of dyslexic children;

(2) what proposals he has to increase the number of teachers trained to teach dyslexic children.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The new criteria for the training of teachers, set out in Welsh Office circular 59/89, have been designed to ensure that students, on completion of their course, should be able to identify pupils with special educational needs or with learning difficulties; and that they should understand the way in which the potential of such pupils can be developed.

There is provision within the local education authority training grants scheme for the training of existing teachers to enable them to offer advice to colleagues on meeting the special educational needs of children in ordinary schools. A draft Welsh Office circular will issue for consultation shortly, offering guidance on staffing for pupils with special educational needs generally.

CIVIL SERVICE

Representations (Nottinghamshire)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will list the representations and the subjects in each case which he has received from Nottinghamshire on matters within his responsibility up to 7 February.

Mr. Luce: I am not aware of any such representations.

DEFENCE

Community Charge

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidance he has issued to the armed services on the status as students for community charge purposes of members of Her Majesty's forces undergoing training; and if he will estimate numbers of *(a)* trainees at Her Majesty's forces establishments and *(b)* members of Her Majesty's forces attending courses at institutions of further and higher education who will be classified as students for poll tax purposes.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We have promulgated information about the classification as students of personnel on long training courses at RAF Halton, and asked other training establishments to seek such classification for other similar categories. As decisions on classification are taken by community charge registration officers on the basis of all the relevant facts, I cannot estimate how many members of Her Majesty's forces will eventually be classified as students.

Computer Security

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps his Department has taken and is taking to improve the security of its computer systems.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: For unclassified but sensitive systems Departments are expected to follow Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA) guidance covering all aspects of IT security, and the application of this has been tightened recently. CCTA advice is kept under continuous review and is based upon the analysis of security risks and requirements using structured methods such as the CCTA risk analysis and management methodology (CRAMM), which has also been made commercially available.

For classified systems more stringent conditions apply. MOD computer security staff continuously review the Department's computer security policy and its application to ensure that constant and adequate levels of protection are provided for those systems processing or holding classified material. In the interests of national security the nature and extent of the security countermeasures utilised to protect classified MOD computer systems cannot be revealed.

Preventable Loss

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the extent of preventable loss arising from theft or misappropriation in his Department.

Mr. Neubert: Causes of theft or misappropriation in the Ministry of Defence are centrally recorded and, where appropriate, published in the losses statement attached to the appropriation accounts. In the light of analysis of individual cases, systems and procedures are changed as necessary.

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will list the number of professionally qualified loss prevention staff employed by his Department and the qualifications held by such staff, excluding qualifications obtained during police or military service.

Mr. Neubert: Responsibility for the prevention of loss, as for all matters of regularity and propriety, including the development, introduction and operation of internal control systems, rests with line managers. There are no staff employed specifically on loss prevention.

Household Division

Sir Alan Glyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* the duties of the Household Division apart from ceremonial duties and *(b)* the areas in which units are serving and have served in recent years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Household Division comprises both cavalry and infantry regiments and undertakes a wide range of duties outside its ceremonial functions. The division has eight battalions of foot guards, all of which undertake regular infantry tasks both in the United Kingdom and around the world. Recently this has meant units serving as far afield as Cyprus, Belize, Berlin, Gibraltar and Northern Ireland. Units are presently deployed at various locations in the United Kingdom, West Germany and Berlin. The division's two regiments of cavalry alternate between tours of duty with the British Army of the Rhine and 5 Airborne Brigade at Windsor.

Submarines

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* nuclear-powered hunter killer and *(b)* Polaris submarines have been withdrawn from duties or recalled from patrol following the recent discovery of faults in Royal Navy nuclear submarine reactors.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have nothing to add to the answers that I gave the hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) on 5 February at column *460*.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many submarines and of which types, were withdrawn from Soviet naval service in 1989; and what was the comparable figure for 1988.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Over the past two years the Soviet Navy has embarked on a major force modernisation programme to rid its inventory of obsolete submarines. The rate at which units are being decommissioned and the numbers subsequently sold for scrapping in foreign shipyards has increased markedly during 1989. During that year the Soviets removed a total of at least 35 submarines from service compared with at least two in 1988. The vast majority of these units were the 1950s vintage WHISKEY class general purpose diesel submarines.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money has been spent so far on conceptual and design work on a new generation of hunter killer submarines for the Royal Navy.

Mr. Neubert: Concept studies were completed in 1985. Some £28 million at 1989-90 prices has been spent so far on feasibility studies for a new generation of hunter killer submarines for the Royal Navy.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, as part of his policy of devolving budget responsibilities and allocating costs to users, he will instruct hunter killer submarine units to charge the Polaris force for anti-submarine protection services rendered.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether a Royal Navy Polaris submarine has ever been detected by Soviet forces while on patrol.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Soviet Union has never to our knowledge detected one of our Polaris submarines on patrol.

Naval Aircraft

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all major accidents to naval aircraft in 1989, giving the type, tail number, location, date and cause of accident in each case.

Mr. Neubert: All accidents to Royal Navy aircraft during 1989 are currently under official investigation. As such, details of the causes cannot be given. However, the remaining information is as follows:

Aircraft type	*Tail No.*	*Location*	*Date*
Accidents to aircraft in flight			
Jetstream T2	XX489	Portland Harbour	8 May 1989
Lynx	XZ244	Kenya	14 May 1989
Sea King	XV699	Pont Henri, Llanelli	5 June 1989
Sea Fury FB11	TF956	Firth of Clyde	10 June 1989
Sea Harrier	ZA191	Lyme Bay	4 October 1989
Sea King	XZ582	Off Bermuda	27 October 1989
Sea Harrier	XZ451	Off Sardinia	1 December 1989
Accidents to aircraft on the ground/on board ship			
Sea King	XV676	Prestwick airport	31 May 1989
Sea Harrier	XZ440	Off Bermuda	30 October 1989

Naval Arms Control

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his policy in relation to naval arms control.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: NATO's current priorities in arms control were set out in "The Alliance's Comprehensive Concept" in May 1989. In the conventional field this called primarily for the establishment of a secure and stable balance of conventional forces in Europe at lower levels. Naval forces are, by the agreement of all parties, specifically excluded from the CFE negotiations.

Soviet Aircraft

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Royal Air Force aircraft operating from United Kingdom bases have ever intercepted a Soviet backfire aircraft.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not our practice to comment on operational matters.

Soviet Warships

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on how many port visits were made to non-Warsaw pact countries by Soviet warships in 1989; what proportion of these involved submarines; and what were the comparable figures for 1988.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We are aware of 95 port visits made by Soviet warships to non-Warsaw pact countries in 1989; nine of these visits were by submarines.

We recorded 125 port visits to non-Warsaw pact countries by Soviet warships in 1988, including 16 visits by submarines.

Soviet Tanks

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on the number of main battle tanks built by the Soviet Union in 1989; and what was the comparable figure for 1988.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We believe that the Soviet Union produced approximately 3,500 tanks in 1988. Preliminary estimates suggest that tank production in 1989 may have been reduced to about half that level.

Soviet Submarines

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on the number of new nuclear-powered submarines which entered Soviet naval service in 1989; and what was the comparable figure for 1988.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We believe that the USSR completed construction of five nuclear-powered submarines in 1988, and that a comparable level of output was maintained in 1989.

Sea Harriers

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the major accident rate per 10,000 flying hours for the Sea Harrier aircraft in 1989.

Mr. Neubert: Information for individual aircraft types is classified. However, the fixed-wing major accident rate for the Royal Navy, shortly to be published in the Statement on the Defence Estimates, is 1·52 per 10,000 hours.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement about trends in the level of unemployment in Greater London since 1985.

Mr. Nicholls: The information is available in the Library. In December 1989 the level of unemployment, seasonally adjusted, in the Greater London region was 201,300, a fall of 181,300, or 47·4 per cent. since December 1985.

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people in Derbyshire are currently unemployed; and by what percentage this figure has changed in the last year.

Mr. Nicholls: The information is available in the Library. In December 1989 there were 23,537 unemployed claimants in Derbyshire. This figure represents a fall of 9,962 or 29·7 per cent.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the current rate of unemployment in the United Kingdom and list those member states of the European Community whose rate of unemployment is higher.

Mr. Nicholls: In December 1989, the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in the United Kingdom was 5·8 per cent. On the OECD international definition the unemployment rate is higher in Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland, Spain, Greece, Italy and the Netherlands.

Small Businesses

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many measures he has introduced to help small businesses during the course of this Parliament.

Mr. Eggar: My Department has made major improvements in the provision of training for small businesses with the introduction last April of business growth training (BGT). For small firms, BGT offers help for owner managers in producing better business and training plans; training for starting their own businesses; and training to improve the business skills of owner managers and to help the more ambitious achieve their plans for growth. This year BGT will offer 90,000 such opportunities to small firms. The Training Agency also sponsored the launch last month of the small business programme, and open learning initiative backed by the Open university and Cranfield School of Management.

The groundwork has been laid for the new network of training and enterprise councils which will take over responsibility from the Training Agency for planning and delivering training for, and to support the development of, small businesses. They will be responsible both for encouraging more firms to invest in training and for enterprise activities designed to strengthen local economic growth.

My Department has continued with its campaign to make Government procurement more accessible to small firms by simplifying purchasing practices and by improving their awareness of the benefits for small suppliers. We have updated the booklet "Tendering for Government Contracts" and published our advice to purchasing officers in "Think Big, Buy Small". Last December I appointed a consultant to work closely with the central unit of purchasing to further improve purchasing practices and to strengthen the monitoring of small firms involvement.

In 1988 the Government published the booklet "Prompt Payment Please" as part of an initiative to encourage good payment practice in both large and small firms and to foster closer co-operation between buyers and suppliers. The booklet gives guidance to small firms on credit management and correct invoicing and to large firms on their responsibility to suppliers, particularly small firms. It was prepared in conjunction with the CBI, the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, the Institute of Directors and the Institute of Purchasing and Supply and has met with a positive response from both the public and private sectors.

The local enterprise agency project scheme was introduced in April 1988 as part of the Action for Cities initiative. Grants have been made available to support project-based activity in approved enterprise agencies in any of the 57 urban programme authority areas. To date £729,893 has been given in support of 102 projects, with matched cash contributions of £914,734 from the private sector.

Following a review, the loan guarantee scheme was improved in January 1988 by the introduction of a simplified application procedure for loans up to £15,000. In April 1989 the loan limit was increased from £75,000 to £100,000. These changes have led to a doubling of

applications for usage of the scheme, which are now running at 260 per month. In addition, in June 1988 the proportion guaranteed was increased from 70 per cent. to 85 per cent. for businesses in the 16 inner-city task force areas. In 1988-89, some 2,291 loans were guaranteed to the value of £64·76 million, compared to 1,234 loans totalling £46·23 million in the previous year.

Earnings

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table showing average gross weekly earnings for full-time male employees on adult rates in Great Britain for every year from 1979 to the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested is published in table 15 of part A of the 1989 new earnings survey report. A copy of the report is in the Library.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the average gross hourly earnings in Great Britain for full-time manual workers, full-time non-manual workers, part-time manual workers and part-time non-manual workers, at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Nicholls: The latest available information, for April 1989, is provided in the following table:

Average gross hourly earnings (excluding overtime) of employees on adult rates

	£
Full-time manual employees	4·44
Full-time non-manual employees	6·83
Part-time manual employees	2·97
Part-time non-manual employees	4·23

Bronchitis and Emphysema

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the name of and amount of money invested in each research project into the effects of work in or around steel furnaces on the development of chronic bronchitis, emphysema or other related disorders.

Mr. Nicholls: The Health and Safety Executive has not directly funded any research into the effects of work in or around steel furnaces on the development of chronic bronchitis, emphysema or other disorders. The European Coal and Steel Community is now conducting its fifth programme of medical research into occupational ill-health. The Health and Safety Executive has been consulted about the contents of this research and is closely following the programme's progress.

SCOTLAND

Training

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate what proportion of their turnover firms in the private sector in Scotland spend on training.

Mr. Rifkind: It is not feasible to produce the information requested because many companies located in Scotland operate on a national or international basis and their Scottish training costs cannot be separately identified.

In connection with its major study "Training in Britain" the Training Agency commissioned an employers' activities study. The public and private sector employers in Scotland that responded to that study jointly spent £665 million on training in 1986-87.

"Training in Britain" estimated that net training expenditure by British employers in 1986-87 was of the order of £18 billion; but was not able to relate this directly to turnover.

Bed and Breakfast

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the latest figures for the number of people living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are no figures available for the total number of people living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. It is estimated, however, that the number of households placed in such accommodation by local authorities under the provisions of part II of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987 was 295 at 30 September 1989.

Student Teachers

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what additional grant or bursary payments are made available to student teachers of mathematics, computing and design and technology in Scotland; and what rules and regulations apply to the receipt of such payments.

Mr. Lang: No such payments are made in Scotland.

North East River Purification Board

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) on how many occasions the Minister has met representatives of the North East River Purification Board in the last nine months; what subjects were discussed; and on what dates the meetings took place;

(2) if he has received any correspondence from the North East River Purification Board concerning matters relating to the duties and structures of the board for which he is responsible; and whether he has received any representations on such matters.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Secretary of State has not met representatives of the board in the past nine months. No representations have been received about the board's duties and structures; I have received a letter from the hon. Member about the responsibilities of the Secretary of State in this respect, to which I am replying. The clerk to the board wrote to the Department last October intimating the board's intention to restructure its management organisation. There is, of course, day-to-day official correspondence with the board on matters of mutual interest.

Prisoners

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many complaints he has received from prisoners or from organisations concerned with prisons that hon. Members have not passed on prisoners' complaints to the parliamentary ombudsman.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We have no record of receiving such a complaint.

House Purchase

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will publish a table showing the average income of first-time house buyers and average prices of houses in Scotland in 1989-90;

(2) what is the average new mortgage in 1989-90 in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is available for the first half of 1989-90 only. Details are set out in the table:

	First-time housebuyers £	*All housebuyers* £
Average income	12,461	—
Average price of all dwellings	23,152	35,847
Average new mortgage (advances)	—	25,893

Source: DOE 5 per cent. sample survey of building society mortgages.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the average outstanding mortgage in 1989-90 in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This information is not held centrally.

Skye (Transport)

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the question of improved transport links to Skye.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My noble Friend the Minister of State is today announcing that three consortia have been selected to tender for the provision of a privately financed bridge to Skye. Subject to obtaining the necessary powers and approvals, it is hoped that the fixed link will be open to traffic by the mid-1990s. For the interim period however, given the rising popularity of the Skye crossing, approval has also been given today for the replacement of the existing ferries by two new 36-car capacity vessels. Tenders to build will now be invited by Caledonian MacBrayne and it is expected that the vessels will enter service during 1991.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Maintenance Funds

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many applications for maintenance funds under the Finance Act 1982 have taken more than one year to process; and how many have taken more than two years.

Mr. Lilley: Of the applications for the establishment of a heritage maintenance fund which have been accepted, five have taken less than one year to process, four between one and two years and 47 more than two years.

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many applications for maintenance funds under the Finance Act 1982 are currently under consideration.

Mr. Lilley: A total of 58 applications for the establishment of heritage maintenance funds are currently under consideration.

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many applications to establish maintenance funds have been made in each of the last two years.

Mr. Lilley: The total number of applications for the establishment of heritage maintenance funds received in the calendar years 1988 and 1989 was 13 and nine respectively.

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cases have occurred where permission has been given for the establishment of a maintenance fund under the Finance Act 1982 but where the fund has not thereafter been established with an endowment.

Mr. Lilley: The number of cases where a maintenance fund has not been established despite approval having been granted by the Inland Revenue or the Treasury is five.

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many maintenance funds for heritage property have been established since the Finance Act 1982; and how many have an endowment of less than £20,000.

Mr. Lilley: A total number of 56 heritage maintenance funds have been established since the passage of the Finance Act 1982; of these four have an endowment which on establishment was less than £20,000.

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many maintenance funds have been established under the Finance Act 1982 with more than one sector.

Mr. Lilley: Of the total of 56 maintenance funds established since the passage of the Finance Act 1982, 53 support heritage entities which include property designated under more than one of the categories contained in section 31(1) of the Inheritance Tax Act.

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the value of maintenance funds for heritage property established since the Finance Act 1982.

Mr. Lilley: It is not possible to provide a figure for the current value of property held by heritage maintenance funds.

Tobacco

Mr. Amos: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received about the taxation of tobacco products.

Mr. Ryder: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has received a large number of representations concerning the taxation of tobacco products.

Interest Rates and Inflation

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research he has undertaken on the relationship between interest rates and inflation rates in member states of the European Community.

Mr. Ryder: The experience of member states of the European Community confirms that an increase in interest rates is the appropriate response to inflationary pressures.

Mortgage Interest Relief

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals are currently receiving mortgage interest tax relief; and what is the current cost to the Exchequer.

Mr. Lilley: It is estimated that 9·3 million tax units will have received mortgage interest relief in 1989-90, at a cost of £7 billion.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Electronic Tagging

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many defendants have been electronically tagged since the scheme became operational; and how many of these defendants by each scheme have breached the conditions of their bail;

(2) how much each electronic tag pilot cost to date;

(3) when he will be publishing his research findings on the pilot electronic tag schemes;

(4) whether there will be any further trials of the electronic tag as an alternative to remand in custody; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The number of defendants electronically monitored and the number of breaches as at 30 January is set out in the table. Electronic monitoring cannot prevent breaches of bail, which are also committed by defendants on bail, subject to other conditions, but it does enable them to be detected.

Trial area	*Total monitored*	*Breaches*[1]
Nottingham	17	9
North Tyneside	13	8
Tower Bridge	16	7
Total	46	24

[1] Includes defendants who have breached conditions of bail, been arrested for further offences or absconded.

The cost of the contracts (including VAT) for each trial is as follows: Nottingham £145,529, North Tyneside £158,808, Tower Bridge £260,369.

We expect to make available later this year an analysis of the outcome of the current trials.

So far as further trials of electronic monitoring are concerned, I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave on 10 January to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Knowles) at column *626*.

Charities

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will include the General Synod's miscellaneous paper 317 on new religious movements as evidence to the consultation process on his White Paper, "Charities—a Framework for the Future."

Mr. Waddington: I shall certainly do so.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Food Safety

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will list in the *Official Report*, those food research projects which the Agriculture and Food Research Council will cease to fund as a result of the planned closure of the Bristol laboratory of the Institute of Food Research; and if he will make a statement on the reasons for such rationalisation of projects.

Mr. Curry: The food research projects listed are those being carried out at IFR Bristol which have been identified as near market, that is, suitable for industrial support. Their funding by my Department is being phased out in 1989-90 during 1990-91.

1. Effects of poultry breeding, husbandry, handling and processing on carcase composition and quality.
2. Effects of breeding, husbandry, plant operations on processing quality turkey meat.
3. Effects of frozen storage on quality and processing (meat)
4. Carcase characteristics that determine value.
5. Define processing conditions for optimum and consistent quality in meat products.
6. Factors controlling meat restructuring processes.
7. Protein solubilisation and adhesion of reformed meats.
8. Heat and mass transfer in meat refrigeration.
9. Temperature and mass change in meat cooking.
10. Electrical stimulation, hot boning and accelerated ageing.
11. Electrical stimulation, hot boning and processing properties of beef, pork and poultry.
12. Meat process engineering.
13. Robotics in meat handling and processing.
14. Quality control, robotic vision and meat grading by video image analysis and fibre optics.
15. Industrial developments and technology transfer.
16. Carcase composition and meat quality in cattle.
17. Carcase composition and meat quality in sheep.
18. Techniques for assessment of carcase composition.
19. Effects of pre-slaughter handling practices on value of carcase and fresh meat.
20. Packaging techniques for improved storage and display.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will specify the measures he is taking to ensure that public interest research and development on the safety and quality of foods, particularly meat and meat products, will not be diminished as a result of the closure of the Bristol laboratory of the Institute of Food Research in December 1990.

Mr. Curry: Public interest research and development on the safety of food is under way at the Norwich and Reading laboratories of the Institute of Food Research and will be increased following the reorganisation of the institute. In addition, MAFF is commissioning relevant work at Food Research Association and university departments. Food safety research of relevance to the meat industry is also being undertaken by the Ministry's own central veterinary laboratory and by the public health laboratory service.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what consultations he has had, or proposes to have, with representations of consumer interests, the food manufacturing industry, the food retailing industry, and farmers, over the arrangements he is making to ensure that public interest research

and development into the safety and quality of food, particularly meat and meat products, will be retained after the closure of the Bristol laboratory of the Institute of Food Research.

Mr. Curry: The research consultative committee on food safety and applied nutrition which consists of representatives from consumer interests and the food manufacturing and the food retailing industries, recently reported to the Priorities Board on the priorities for public interest research in the safety of food, including meat, and discussions are under way with a wide range of contractors to implement these recommendations. This followed consultations with outside organisations, including the food manufacturing and the food retailing industries, on the priorities for food microbiology research in 1988-89. As a consequence, the Ministry commissioned a major strategic initiative in the area of food microbiology research and development at various institutes throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he anticipates that there will be any diminution of the quantity or quality of United Kingdom-based research into *(a)* food irradiation, *(b)* micro-wave treatments, *(c)* exclusion of salmonella from chickens, and *(d)* the growth of listeria in foods, as a result of the closure of the Bristol laboratory of the Institute of Food Research.

Mr. Curry: No. Research on these issues will continue to be carried out as necessary at the IFR's other sites at Norwich and Reading and at other research institutions.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what United Kingdom resources capable of monitoring the safety of the food processes of *(a)* cook-chill and *(b)* ready meal production on a scale appropriate to industrial conditions will remain following the closure of the Bristol laboratory of the Institute of Food Research.

Mr. Curry: Facilities for carrying out research and monitoring current conditions on the safety of cook-chill and other ready meal products exist at Leatherhead Food Research Association, Campden Food and Drink Research Association, Huddersfield polytechnic, Sheffield polytechnic and the Dorset Institute of Higher Education. The Ministry is funding work at some of these establishments in the fields in question and recognises the existent expertise.

Radiation Contamination

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will indicate what level of radiation contamination was present in soft fruit imported to Britain in each year from 1986 onwards;

(2) if he will make it his policy to monitor future imports of soft fruit to Britain for radiation contamination.

Mr. Freeman: I have been asked to reply.

Central records on the monitoring of soft fruit food imports by port health authorities for radiation contamination following the Chernobyl nuclear accident show that since 1986 only consignments of dried prunes from Romania have exceeded maximum permitted levels. All consignments concerned have been refused entry into the United Kingdom. United Kingdom monitoring has not picked up any excess readings over the last two years.

Port health authorities are continuing to monitor food imports from outside the European Community in accordance with the latest European Council regulation (EEC No. 4003/89).

Therapeutic Medicants

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what tests have been carried out to establish whether therapeutic medicants used in animal feedingstuffs show up in the flesh and offal of animals destined for human consumption; what are the results of these tests; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: My Department carries out extensive monitoring of residues of veterinary medicines, including therapeutic substances administered in animal feed; 40,000 samples are taken annually at randomly selected slaughterhouses and farms and are subject to screening tests and confirmatory analysis where residues are suspected. In 1989, 97 per cent. of samples analysed for anti-microbial substances passed these tests. In the remaining cases follow-up action was taken with the farms of origin.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what research he has commissioned on the spread of bovine spongiform encephalopathy to mice; what figures are available on the incidence of bovine spongiform encephalopathy among mice; and what information he has on the possibility of communication of bovine spongiform encephalopathy from mice to humans;

(2) what restrictions have been placed on the export of British mice as a result of the spread of bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Mr. Maclean: Research has shown that bovine spongiform encephalopathy can be transmitted to mice in experimental conditions by intra-cerebral inoculation of BSE brain tissue and by feeding large quantities of infective material. Both are unnatural methods of infection which cannot be mimicked in field conditions. Questions about its incidence, risk and control do not therefore arise.

Free Foodstuffs (EC)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list in the *Official Report* the types of food, the quantities ordered and the locations of the distribution of all free foodstuffs received from Economic Community states for free distribution to pensioners to the United Kingdom over the past six months.

Mr. Curry *[pursuant to his reply, 15 January 1990, c. 134]:* I have placed in the Library of the House details of distribution centres for butter and beef under the EC surplus food scheme which have been notified to us over the past six months.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 166**

SESSION 1989–90

29th January—19th February 1990

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Mr. Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading Speaker's rulings and statements.

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Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R=first reading, 2R=second reading, Money res=money resolution, Com=Committee stage, Rep=Report stage, 3R=third reading, amendt/amendts=amendment/amendments, *=matter taken formally, without debate.

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